

“And they shall measure toward the cities that are around the corpse.” (21:2)

If a corpse is found in the open country and the identity of the murderer is unknown, the elders of the town nearest the corpse perform the ritual of eglah arufah, the axed heifer. There is a dispute in the Talmud in regard to a circumstance in which the decapitated head of the corpse is found a distance from the rest of the body. From where do we measure: from the head or from the body? In addressing the second Kenessiah Gedolah in Vienna in 1929 the Sokolover Rebbe, z.l., asked, “When the deceased is a spiritual casualty, when we did nothing to stem the spread of the plague of heresy, who is to be considered responsible? Should it be the ‘head’, the spiritual leaders of the community, who did not take the threat to the spiritual fiber of the community seriously, who did little to teach the people to fortify them against the disease of heresy? Perhaps, it should be the body, the general public who did not do enough to strengthen the spiritual foundation of their community.”

Is it much different in contemporary times? A young man or young woman, at times even an entire family, fall through the cracks and are lost to their People. Whose fault is it? Is it the spiritual leadership who should have taken a greater interest, or is it the community who are too involved with themselves to worry about the individual who just does not fit in? Unfortunately, while we are arguing regarding where to place the onus of guilt, more souls are being lost.