

They shall speak up and say, “Our hands have not spilled this blood, and our eyes did not see.” (21:7)

Obviously, no one suspects the elders of participating in the murder of the individual whose corpse was found in the field. *Rashi* explains that they mean to say that they were unaware of this traveler and had no part in allowing him to go on his way, lonely, without food or escort. We derive from this statement that had they been aware of his presence and need, they would have been guilty of neglecting another Jew, so that there would be blood on their hands. This is the extent of responsibility demanded of a leader. **Maharal m’Prague** observes that the declaration implies that the murder might not have occurred had the victim been escorted as required. While there is no *mitzvah* to accompany a visitor to the next city, when a host takes the trouble to escort a stranger part of the way, he demonstrates his unanimity with a fellow Jew. When Jews display their comradeship with one another, when there is caring and concern within the Jewish community, Hashem responds with an extra measure of protection. In other words, when we care – Hashem cares.

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, adds a practical insight to the idea of escorting the traveler and how it could have prevented him from becoming a victim of murder. When an individual comes to a community and is received by its leadership in an honorable manner, it leaves an impression. The guest feels relevant, appreciated, respected. This feeling of good-will engenders within him a sense of nobility, a feeling of strength and self-confidence. On the other hand, if a person is ignored when he comes to visit, because he is not “important enough” for the leadership to give him the time of day, he will feel unwanted, dejected, irrelevant. This will only make him harbor greater feelings of self-neglect and a lack of self-confidence.

Now, let us see how these disparate feelings play out as the fellow leaves town, when he is traveling on a lonely road and held up by a thief bent on getting what he wants, regardless of what he must do to obtain it. The traveler who feels good about himself will put up a fight, or he will run. One thing is for certain, he will not lay down and wait for the bullet. The individual who is already depressed, who was shown by the community that “no one really cares about you” will give up and quite probably wait for the thief to do something to him. He does not care about himself, because, sadly, no one seems to care about him.

The *Lubliner Rav* quotes a well-known *Yiddish* maxim, “*Gelt farloiren – garnisht farloiren; Courage farloiren – ales farloiren*” “Money lost – nothing is lost (one can always either accrue more money, or live without it). Courage lost – everything is lost.” One cannot live without self-confidence, tenacity, and a will to survive.

The elders are acutely aware that every person wants to feel relevant. To visit a community, *shul*, school, club and be ignored, because the powers that be have not deemed him to be important enough for their time, to be shunned into non-existence, can be a devastating experience. This is

especially true when one sees who it is that is considered important. Some people have been able to elevate their ability to sycophant to “art” level. Others would rather be ignored than bend. It is the member of the third group, the one who does not know how to sycophant, yet is unable to stand up for himself – but does seek relevance of some sort – about whom we should be concerned. He falls between the cracks, lives an angry, dysfunctional life, and sadly transmits his feelings of ineptitude and lack of self-worth to his children. No one wants to have blood on his hands, but, unless he thinks of those around us, he will.

The true measure of greatness is how much of a role does another Jew’s feelings play in one’s life. The greater the scholar, the more noble his position in Torah and leadership, the greater will be his personal humility and concern for the welfare and feelings of all Jews. There is no dearth of stories which portray this refinement of character. I was especially moved by the following story, because I know how easily in the course of writing one can forget a name, or ignore a source.

Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl, was a giant among giants of Torah. The senior *Rosh Yeshivah* in *Eretz Yisrael* at the time, he was the uncle of the three *Roshei Yeshivah* of Chevron: *Horav Moshe Chevroni*; *Horav Aharon Kohen*; *Horav Yechezkel Sarna*. When *Rav Isser Zalmen* passed away, *Horav Moshe Chevroni* gave a riveting eulogy. Among his many observations, he related the following story: During the British occupation, a secret war was going on between the *Haganah* and the British army. The British placed a curfew on the city, prohibiting its residents from being outside from six in the evening until six in the morning. It was two o’clock in the morning and *Rav Chevroni* was learning, when he heard urgent knocking at his door. Frightened that it was the British, but knowing what it would mean not to open the door, he answered only to discover that his venerable uncle, *Rav Isser Zalmen*, was there.

“Why is the uncle here in the middle of the night?” he asked. “It is dangerous to go out after curfew.”

“I was sitting at home learning when I came across a *Rambam* which perturbed me. I just could not go on until my question on the *Rambam* was resolved. I knew that you would still be awake, learning, so I came here.” *Rav Moshe* stood in awe at the *ahavas*, love, of Torah exemplified by *Rav Isser Zalmen*. They sat down to discuss the *Rambam*, during which time *Rav Moshe* rendered a brilliant answer. *Rav Isser Zalmen* was excited and prepared to leave.

“Uncle, sleep here tonight. It is dangerous to go out.” *Rav Moshe* begged. “No, I must write down the answer.” *Rav Isser Zalmen* said. “But the uncle can write it here. Why go home?” “I must write it down in my notebook,” he said as he left.

Rav Moshe underscored *Rav Isser Zalmen*’s love of Torah, explaining that this was the reason for his extraordinary success as a Torah leader. (The fact that *Rav Isser Zalmen* had an unusual mind and was consummately diligent should not be ignored.)

When *Rav Moshe* visited his aunt during the *Shivah*, seven-day mourning period, she told him the “rest of the story,” “My late husband was everything that you said he was, but there is an addendum to this story which reveals his true greatness. *Rav Isser Zalmen* yearned to see his *chiddushim*, novellae (*Even Ha’Azel*), in print. I wanted it even more than he did. Due to the war and other issues, the printer worked by a strict schedule, and the earliest date for the printing of the *Even Ha’Azel* was set for five years from now. We were broken-hearted. Who knew what would be in five years?

“The day that *Rav Isser Zalmen* visited, we received a notice from the printer that he had a cancellation. A spot had opened up for the next morning. If we did not avail ourselves of this opportunity, it would be five more years before the *Even Ha’Azel* would see the light of day.

“*Rav Isser Zalmen* blunted the good news when he interjected that he was not ready to go to print. I asked him why. He said, ‘I have in my *sefer* a *chiddush* from *Rav Aharon Kohen* and *Rav Yechezkel Sarna*. I have nothing from *Rav Moshe Chevroni*. For me to put my *sefer* out without including a *chiddush* of his would be a terrible slight to him. I would rather wait five years!’

“Do you think that *Rav Moshe* would be offended? He is so humble.’

“Nonetheless, I will not print my *sefer* without including a *chiddush* from each of my nephews.’

Now you know why *Rav Isser Zalmen* came to your house in the middle of the night. He sought your answer to his question on the *Rambam*. This is why he went home immediately after obtaining your answer. He erased his answer and inserted yours. Yes, my husband was a great *masmid*, diligent in his devotion to Torah. His love for the Torah was consummate. He was also a caring individual who placed the feelings of another Jew before and above everything.”