

"And they shall speak and say: 'Our hands have not shed this blood.'" (21:7)

The *eglah arufah* ceremony is shrouded in mystery. When the body of a murder victim is found between two cities, the elders of the city closest to the body must perform the ritual of *eglah arufah*. The commentaries cite various reasons for this rite. During the ceremony the elders must say, "*Our hands have not shed this blood.*" *Rashi* comments that obviously no one suspects that they had anything to do with this violent crime. Their declaration only reinforces the fact that they did not permit the victim to leave the city without accompaniment or without food.

Rashi apparently equates a lack of sensitivity regarding a guest's needs to murder. This seems to be a disproportionate equation. Why should the elders carry upon themselves an onus of guilt, even in the slightest degree, if all they did was to neglect to escort this guest from the community? True, *chesed*, kindness, is a noble and essential character trait. It is the quality which distinguishes *Klal Yisrael*. Is it appropriate, however, to perceive a lack of *chesed* as tantamount to murder?

Horav Henach Leibowitz, Shlita, asserts that giving moral support, showing *chesed*, and displaying concern for a person's welfare is as important as feeding and attending to his physical needs. Lending a person emotional support is equivalent to sustaining him physically. Many people succumb to a depressive state simply because no one had been there for them when they needed help. It is amazing how a simple "Hello," or "How are you?" can transform a person's day. There are people who are literally "starving" for a little recognition and kindness.

This writer had a very dear friend, *Horav Chaim Tzvi Katz, z.l.*, who made every effort to greet all people *b'sever panim yafos*, with a smile that exuded warmth and caring. Indeed, among his many accomplishments, his sensitivity towards his fellow man, his sharing in the joy or plight of everyone, was emphasized as his hallmark.

Had the elders not escorted their guest, it would have literally been a "life and death" issue. Lending a helping hand, and showing concern instill within a person courage and self-confidence. This "little bit" can make a great difference to so many people. The ability to perform *chesed*, the opportunity to help others, is something which we must grasp every chance we get. Hashem has implanted within us a power to sustain others with a smile, to support with a kind word, and to encourage with a simple pat on the back. To take advantage of this opportunity is more than common courtesy; it is our moral responsibility!