

Indeed, we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed. (42:21)

People hardly want to accept the blame for their failings in life, for missed opportunities, misadventures and bad decisions. It is so much more convenient to lay the blame at someone else's doorstep. It is our parents, spouse, children, principal, friends, teacher, doctor, etc. everyone but ourselves. Veritably, no one can prevent an individual from achieving his goal, other than himself. It is easier, however, to rationalize and find an excuse than to take responsibility. The one who blames others is himself a loser. Successful people take their obligations seriously and accept responsibility for their failures. Then they dig in and start over again. When Yosef's brothers took notice of their trying circumstances in Egypt, they realized that Hashem was conveying a message to them: "You did something wrong, and now the time has come to answer for it." They did not blame anyone but themselves. *Aval asheimim anachnu*, "Indeed, we are guilty." In his *Haamek Davar*, the *Netziv*, *zl*, explains: *HeRue l'daas she'heim ikar ha'mesavvim tzarah zu*, "They demonstrated that they were the ones responsible for this trouble."

Chazal say (*Makkos* 10b) *B'derech she'adam rotzeh leilech molichin oso*; "In the way that man wishes to go, in that way they lead him." A person decides which path of life he is inclined to take. The angels that are created by man's deeds will "accompany" him on this path. Thus, he catalyzes the ramifications resulting from his decision. He has no one to blame but himself.

In *Nifle'osecha Asichah*, *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein*, *Shlita*, relates a frightening story which was publicized in the media. I say "frightening," because it is a story that could happen to anyone. It all depends upon the decisions we make in life. Jack (his name) was the consummate businessman. If he had a meeting, its importance notwithstanding, it took priority, and timeliness was essential. He expected that anyone attending a meeting be present on time, regardless of the personal inconvenience. A schedule was to be honored and adhered to. Just as Jack demanded of others, he was equally demanding of himself. It was, thus, understandable that when representatives of a large overseas corporation sought to meet with him, he took this meeting seriously. They sought someone who could navigate American bureaucracy, so that they could look forward to building their company in the States. This meeting was very important to Jack, because it could very well determine his future trajectory.

The meeting was called for 9:00 a.m. Not wanting to take chances, he left his home at 7:00 a.m. in the hope to avoid traffic and arrive early. He planned to stop at a diner and order a cup of coffee. Unfortunately, we all have those days when nothing seems to go right. That day was Jack's day for taking the wrong car, which had no gas, to getting stuck in a traffic jam, to being forced to take a detour in the road due to a broken water main. He was no longer going to be early. He would be lucky to arrive in time for the meeting. The clock was ticking, and 9:00 a.m. loomed larger than ever. At the last detour, his frustration got the better of him. As he was about to go into meltdown

mode, he reminded himself of a seldom used shortcut. It was far off the beaten path, but it would allow him to save the day and arrive at his meeting on time.

Jack quickly turned around and went through a series of turns uphill and downhill until he was on the open road again. He had lost so much time. He would have to make it up. Suddenly, he saw people standing on the side of the road. They waved him down: "Please, we have a boy that is the victim of a hit and run driver. The nearest ambulance is thirty minutes out." The boy was unconscious; he needed a ride to the hospital. Jack said, "Listen, there are other drivers on the road. Any minute another driver will pull up. I am late for the most important meeting of my career. I cannot go to the hospital. I am so sorry, but I must go!"

Jack left, and, as soon as he was walking into the elevator of the office building at 8:55, his wife called: "Jack! Jack! Something terrible has happened. Come home immediately!" "What? What happened that is so important that it cannot wait until after the meeting?" "Our son! Our dear son was riding his bike to school, and he was hit by a hit and run driver! He died at the scene! Do you know what else? A businessman was stopped, and they pleaded with him to transport our son to the hospital, and the cruel man said, 'I am late for an appointment.' He could have saved our child, but his appointment was more important than our child!" *Jack fainted.*

We make the bed in which we sleep. We make choices. We decide on our priorities. At whose expense? Even if Jack would have won the coveted account – at what price?