



Perfect Protection

The end of our parashah deals with the laws of eglah arufah. If a corpse is found and the murderer is unknown, the elders of the closest city must take a calf and decapitate it in a valley, declaring that they are innocent of shedding this blood.

The Ibn Ezra explains that Hashem orchestrates this circumstance; the body should be found specifically near this city since the residents need expiation for similar sins that were committed in their midst. The Abarbanel adds that these sins may have been unknown to them, rendering it necessary to invoke the tefilah of the Kohanim to atone for them.

Rashi (Devarim 27:7) explains that although no one would think that the elders are murderers, they still must proclaim that they did not see this person leave their city and send him off without food and escort. The Maharal adds that when one accompanies another, he is treating him with kavod, giving him a sense that he possesses inherent value. The converse is also true. When we allow a person to travel alone, we give him the impression that he is not inherently worthy. Psychologically, this can diminish his sense of self, how precious he is to the world. In such a case, with this

reduced spirit, he may not have the inner strength to ward off any threat or attempt to cause him harm.

Maharal further explains that when one is sent off by himself, he is viewed as an individual without the zechut and protection of a community. When one is attended by members of a community, he becomes attached to them and thereby gains their merit for protection. In a similar vein, Rav Scheinerman in Ohel Moshe adds that this is one of the reasons a bride and groom are escorted to the chuppah by their parents. The couple's past and future becomes fused with a greater whole.

Rabbi Naiman z"l, in Darchei Mussar understands this Rashi from a different perspective. When a beit din cares for guests by providing their basic needs of food and escort, it impacts the entire city. When there is an outpouring of love from the top, the rest of the community is influenced, inspiring them to act with benevolence and goodwill. Therefore, a person who would potentially be low enough to murder would be affected by the increased good spirit of the city and would not commit such an act. The elders' declaration is a testimony that they have led their people with kindness and engendered a mindset of generosity, precluding any violence in their midst.

Each of us must recognize our mutual responsibility and the power our behavior triggers in those who live in our sphere. ■