

A PARTY TO THE PROBLEM

by Rabbi Label Lam

If you build a new house, you shall make a fence for your roof, so that you will not place blood in your house if a fallen one falls from it. (Devarim 22:8)

If a fallen one falls from it: This one deserves to fall, and even still you should not be the contributing cause to his death, because The Holy One Blessed Be He brings about good things through those who are meritorious and bad things through unworthy agents. (Rashi)

There may be a little wiggle room here and an invitation for someone who wants to excuse himself from responsibility. Rashi admits it, "The person who was killed may have deserved it!" A criminally negligent individual could pass the hot potato and play the ultimate blame game. He may be tempted to claim that was merely an agent of The Almighty.

This had been tried early on in human history. When HASHEM asked Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain gave his classically feeble excuse, "Am I my brother's keeper?" What was he thinking? The Midrash explains that Cain was hoping to excuse his murderous actions by claiming that The Almighty is the final arbiter of "who shall live" and "who shall die". He was as if saying to HASHEM, "You are the keeper of humanity! I could not have killed him unless You wanted him dead!" Chutzpah of all chutzpas he is accusing The Almighty of having committed the crime. This is not so far-fetched to the thinking of many. Who is on trial here, G-d or man? The Torah's task is to teach and advise us about how to maximize our gift of free-will.

The Almighty's motive may be a point of curiosity but it is ultimately not our business. "The hidden things are for HASHEM our G-d and the revealed matters for are us and our children to carry on forever." (Devarim 29:28) What Cain was attempting to do was to offer a philosophical answer to a practical question. The Torah is interested in and we are finally responsible for practical matters. We pull out the "bashert" card only after the fact, but before hand we try with all our might to do what's right and to avoid avoidable problems.

An absurd example of a philosophical answer to a practical question is the comical case of the man who enters his house and when he opens the closet he finds a stranger standing there. He shouts out in an alarmed tone, "What are you doing here?" The intruder answers blithely, "Everybody's got to be some place!" That excuse will not stop the homeowner from calling the police. Of course everybody's got to be some place but why have put your self here?

Similarly Pharaoh could not be excused for having punished the Jewish People though The Almighty had forecasted the difficulties of a long and brutal exile many years in advance and neither could Haman claim he was an only an instrument for frightening the Jews into Teshuvah! Why had Pharaoh and Haman answered the ad? Were their intentions or their deeds noble? No! Why then had they agreed to be grand inquisitors and executioners? Even if we understand that in the end "everything the Merciful One does he does for good" and this too is the will of HASHEM, our job is to be part of the solution and not a party to the problem. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.