

Why do something rather than nothing?

Aryeh Cohen

1. **ויקרא יט:טז** [לא תלך רכיל בעמִיךָ] לא תעמד על דם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יי".
 - a. [You shall not go around in deceit among your nation;] you shall not conspire against the blood of your neighbor. (LXX)
 - b. [You shall not go about slandering your kin.] You shall not stand over the blood of your fellow. (Alter)

2. **בבלי סנהדרין עג ע"א**: מניין לרואה את חבירו שהוא טובע בנהר או חיה גוררתו או לסטין באין עליו שהוא חייב להצילו ת"ל **לא תעמוד על דם רעך**
 - a. Sanhedrin 73a: From where do we know that one who sees their fellow drowning in the river, or being dragged off by a wild animal, or attacked by highwaymen, that one must save them? Scripture says: You shall not stand over the blood of your fellow.

3. **רמב"ם משנה תורה הל' רוצח ושמירת נפש פרק א:יד**
 כל היכול להציל ולא הציל עובר על **לא תעמוד על דם רעך**. וכן הרואה את חבירו טובע בים. או ליסטים באים עליו. או חיה רעה באה עליו. ויכול להצילו הוא בעצמו. או ששכר אחרים להצילו ולא הציל. או ששמע עובדי כוכבים או מוסרים מחשבים עליו רעה או טומנין לו פח ולא גלה און חבירו והודיעו. או שידע בעובד כוכבים או באונס שהוא בא על חבירו ויכול לפייסו בגלל חבירו להסיר מה שבלבו ולא פייסו וכל כיוצא בדברים אלו. העושה אותם עובר על **לא תעמוד על דם רעך**:
 - a. Anyone who can save and does not save transgresses 'do not stand by the blood of your neighbour'. So too one who sees his friend drowning in the sea, bandits attacking him or a bad animal attacking him and he is able himself to save him or he could hire others to save him but he does not; one who hears idol worshippers or informers plotting harm for him or laying a trap for him and he doesn't tell his friend and inform him; or if he knows that an idol worshipper or a thug are on their way to his friend and he could appease them on behalf of his friend to change their intention and he doesn't appease him; and so too any similar case; One who does any of these transgresses 'do not stand idly by your neighbour's blood'.

4. **רמב"ם משנה תורה הל' רוצח ושמירת נפש פרק א:טו**
 הרואה רודף אחר חבירו להרגו או אחר ערוה לבועלה ויכול להציל ולא הציל. הרי זה ביטל מצות עשה שהיא וקצותה את כפה. ועבר על שני לאוין על **לא תחוס עינך ועל לא תעמוד על דם רעך**:
 - a. The one who sees a pursuer going after his friend to kill him or after a woman to rape her and is able to save [the pursued] and does not, this one has cancelled a positive commandment: "and cut off her hand" (Deut. 25:12) and has transgressed two negative commandments: "do not turn away your eyes" (Deut. 25:12) and "do not stand idly by your neighbor's blood" (Lev. 19:16).

5. **שמות ב: יא** וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מַכֵּה אִישׁ-עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו:

- a. **Exodus 2:11** It happened in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brothers, and saw their burdens. He saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his brothers.
- b. **רש"י וירא בסבלתם** - נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מצר עליהם.
- c. **AND HE SAW THEIR BURDENS** – he set his eyes and mind to share in their distress. (Exodus Rabbah 1:27)

6. **ר' שמחה זיסל זיוו (1829-1898), חכמה ומוסר**
כי בלתי אפשר לבוא להרגיש בצער זולתו, ולישא בעול עם זולתו, רק ע"י ציורים רבים, שכל מה שקרה לזולתו ממיני הצער או ממיני היסורים והמכאובים. כאלו קרה לו ח"ו. ...
והנה מצינו במרע"ה בפרשה שמות "ויגדל משה וגו, וירא בסבלותם" ופרש"י "נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם, "פי' הרגיל עצמו בציור כאלו קרה לו זאת, ולכן הלך לראות. כידוע, כי כח הציור בא מהתקרבות החוש כמו רגש חום האש וכדומה, וכ"כ הרגיל עצמו בציורים, עד שהרגיש בצערם כמו שהוא עצמו ה' בצער הזה. וממילא נשא בעול עמהם יותר מצערו הוא כי הם הרבים ובפרט כלל ישראל, "ובכל צרתם ונו' צר", ומזה נסתעף שאמר "למה הרעתה לעם הזה".

- a. We learn from this an essential insight regarding the education of a person: namely, that it is impossible to come to feel the suffering of the other, to carry another's burden, except by creating an internal perception so that the trouble, the pain, the suffering of the other (God forbid!) were one's own pain. ...
[For example,] we find concerning our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace, in Parashat Shemot: "And when Moses had grown . . ." and "he saw their burdens" (Exodus 2: 11). Rashi interprets: "He gave his eyes and heart to be grieved for them" – meaning that he imagined himself (formed in his mind) a mental image. This is even implied by the Torah's choice of language. "He saw" indicates the strength of the mental image as one who imagines a fire and can "feel" the warmth within oneself. In this manner Moses accustomed himself (concentrated on) this mental image, until he could feel their pain as though it were his own. And he immediately bears their burden and feels their burden to outweigh any personal burden he might have had, since theirs is the burden of the many – especially when we talk of the burden of the people Israel: "And all their pain is My pain" (Isaiah 63: 9) so that he [Moses] can then speak on behalf of the people, "Why have You dealt ill with this people?" (Exodus 5: 22). (trans. Ira F. Stone. *A Responsible Life: The Spiritual Path of Mussar*)

7. Martin Luther King. April 3, 1968. Memphis.

“Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. One day a man came to Jesus; and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters in life. ...And he talked about a certain man, who fell among thieves. You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side. They didn't stop to help him. And finally a man of another race came by. He got down from his beast, decided not to be compassionate by proxy. But with him, administered first aid, and helped the man in need. Jesus ended up saying, this was the good man, because he had the capacity to project the "I" into the "thou," and to be concerned about his brother.

“And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?".”

8. **ברכות סא ע"א** ת"ר: פעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שלא יעסקו בתורה וכל העוסק בתורה ידקר בחרב בא פפוס בן יהודה מצאו לר' עקיב' שיושב דורש מקהיל קהלות ברבים וספר תורה בחיקו

- a. **Sanhedrin 61a:** Our Rabbis taught: Once the evil kingdom decreed that [Jews] should not study Torah, and that all who study Torah would be stabbed with a sword. Pappus Ben Yehudah came and found R. Aqiva who was sitting, and teaching, and gathering crowds in public [*ba-rabim*] and a Torah scroll was in his lap.