

PIRKEI AVOT 2-7

Translation:

He also saw a skull floating in the water. He said to it: Because you drowned others, you were drowned. And those who drowned you will eventually drown.

Maimonides

Meaning to say, you were killed because you killed someone else, and that the one who killed you is destined to be killed. The intention by means of this statement is that evil acts will be returned upon the heads of

those who do them, as it was said, "His own iniquities will ensnare the wicked ..." (Pv 5:22); and it was said, "He dug a pit, hollowed it, [and fell into the ditch he made]" (Ps

7:16). The sages said: By the standard with which a man measures, with it they measure him (Sotah 8b). This is a matter that is apparent to the inner eye in every time, in every period, and in every place—that everyone who will do evil and devise forms of wrongdoing and vices, he himself will be injured by those evil deeds themselves which he devised, for he taught the art which will do harm to him and to someone else. Thus, whoever teaches virtue which brings into being any manner of good act, he will attain the benefit of that act, for he taught the matter which will do good to him and to someone else. The words of Scripture pertaining to this are excellent, he said, "The work of a man will He requite unto him, [and according to the way of a man will He cause him to find]" (Job 34:11)

Rav Chaim of Volozhin

(As Read by Chanoch Levi in "Ruach Chaim")
Because you drowned others, you were drowned, etc. No man suffers monetary loss or physical harm unless it is decreed in Heaven. The thief and murderer, then, may claim exemption from punishment by saying that they are doing nothing more than carrying out Hashem's will. This is a specious argument. "Bad things come from bad people" (Makkos 10b). For although the victim definitely had to suffer, nobody asked the criminal to volunteer his services. "Make a fence for your roof so that you will not place blood in

your home if the faller falls from it" (Devanm 22:8). He is a "faller," doomed to fall, but if he falls from your roof there is blood in your home. Even if the drowning victim died because of his

אָף הוּא רָאָה גְּלֻגְלֵת אַחַת
שְׂצָפָה עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם. אָמַר
(לָהּ), עַל דְּאֵטְפֶתָּ, אֶטְפוּךָ.
וְסוּף מְטִיפֶיךָ יְטוּפוּן:

own sins, those who drowned him will also be punished. Alternatively, the Mishnah is addressing the Talmud's comment that a person born under the red star (Mars) will spill blood (Shabbos 156a). The murderer might argue that it was predestined that he must kill and, therefore, he should not be punished. We refute this by saying that the victim could only be killed if he deserved death; if everyone was virtuous no one would be killed. What then would this man do with his bloodthirsty nature? Obviously, there are permissible ways to satisfy this craving. As the Talmud explains, he could become a surgeon or a butcher (ibid.). Because you drowned others, you were drowned. The drowning victim could only be killed if he had deserved it; it was not predestined. This forces us to conclude that his attackers were not coerced by their nature to drown him. Therefore, they are culpable for their actions and will also drown.