

“But if the woman had not become defiled, and she is pure, then she shall be proven innocent and she shall bear seed.” (5:28)

Rabbi Akiva, cited in the *Talmud Sotah* 26a says, “Then she shall be proven innocent and she shall bear seed,” what does this mean? It refers to a circumstance in which a woman who previously had been unable to conceive, who had been wrongly accused of infidelity, will now be blessed with conception. Rabbi Yishmael questioned this, suggesting that every barren woman, therefore, will seclude herself. After being wrongly accused, she will be blessed with a child. A virtuous woman, who nonetheless remains loyal to her husband and avoids all suspicion, however, will continue to be barren! Is this fair? Thus, he interprets the *pasuk* to mean that if she previously had borne children in pain, she will now bear with ease; if she formerly had given birth to girls, she will henceforth give birth to boys; if previously her children had been short, they will now be tall; if formerly her children had been dark, she will now have fair children. In short, the woman who had wrongly been suspected of infidelity by her husband – such that this suspicion is broadcast throughout the community and she has undergone a process of public humiliation whereby her innocence is unequivocally proven – is rewarded. Indeed, she is a recipient of a miraculous reward from Hashem for her ordeal.

Humiliation is a terrible experience to undergo. Hashem recognizes the ordeal of one who suffers embarrassment, and He repays the victim in accordance with the extent of his personal suffering. *Nachalas Tzvi* cites a story that *Horav Yaakov Kamenetzky, z.l.*, related concerning *Horav Yechiel Michel Heller, z.l.* *Horav Heller* would sign his name, “*he’aluv*, the lowly, Yechiel Michel ben Aharon.” Why did he preface his name with such a shameful title?

It seems that *Rav Yechiel Michel*’s grandfather was a very wealthy man. Whenever he left on a business trip, he would leave his business in the care of his daughter. Rumors began to slowly spread regarding her virtue. Indeed, it did not take long before her innocent name was besmirched. When she reached marriageable age, her parents could not find any prospective suitors for her. Everyone was “turned off” by her reputation. As she aged, her father decided that he must lower her standards and seek a simple young man from a common home. There was a young man in the community who fit the bill. His name was “*Aharon Shmeisser*,” because he worked as an assistant to one of the wagon drivers, whereby he would “*shmeiss*,” hit, the horses to get them to move. Understandably, this position did not require great acumen, and this young man “qualified” for the job.

Broken-hearted, the father attempted to convince his daughter to accept such a *shidduch*, match – if the young man would agree. It was not easy, but she finally acceded to her father’s request. At first, the young man was not interested in the *shidduch*. Indeed, even his mind was poisoned by the vicious slander. However, after some convincing, he agreed to marry this “young” woman.

As she stood beneath the *chupah*, the *kallah* looked Heavenward. In a proud, but broken voice she quietly said, "*Ribono Shel Olam*, You know the truth, that all of the rumors that were said about me were not true. They were nothing more than the work of evil people who envied my father's wealth. I am *tahor*, pure and chaste. Therefore, *Ribono Shel Olam*, I ask of You a special favor. Since I compromised and accepted this *shidduch*, in this merit, I implore that You grant me sons who will be righteous *Torah* scholars."

Rav Yechiel Michel's mother merited to have four sons whose *Torah* scholarship and virtue illuminated *Klal Yisrael*, all because of the humiliation she sustained. Hashem concerns Himself with the emotions and feelings of a human being. Should we not do the same?