

Now Yosef could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out, “Remove everyone from before me!” (45:1)

Yosef was taking an enormous chance with his life. He was one person – not characteristically physically strong. Standing opposite him were his ten brothers, each of whose individual strength was without peer. Indeed, if any one of them would have lifted a finger against Yosef – he would have been smitten. All ten together could easily have taken down Egypt. Yet, Yosef sought no protection, asking that no one remain in the room with him at this moment of truth, the moment in which he would reveal himself to his brothers. In his *Tiferes Yehonasan*, Horav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, zl, takes the question further. The brothers sought to do away with Yosef because they saw that Yaravam ben Nevat would descend from him. Now, they certainly had reason to buttress their earlier fears. Yosef was the viceroy of Egypt (from what little they saw), and he was married to Osnas, the daughter of a pagan priest. Bedecked in the garb of Egyptian royalty, with an Egyptian name and Egyptian wife, they had every reason to believe that Yosef would produce Yaravam. Why did he take the chance of being alone with them?

He did not want to embarrass his brothers in front of the Egyptians. Even in the decadent society that was the mainstay of Egyptian culture, it was considered very wrong to sell a brother into captivity – and certainly to want to kill him! To reveal the truth to the Egyptians would be most damaging and humiliating to Yosef’s brothers. Thus, he took his chances. If they killed him – he was prepared to die, rather than publicly shame his brothers.

It is difficult to know what goes through a person’s mind when he is overwhelmed with debt, with no way out. People will do just about anything, regardless of its effect on other innocent people, just to ward off the debtors who are breathing down their necks. The saintly Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, was once called to court concerning a loan upon which he had signed as a guarantor. The Tzaddik of Yerushalayim (as he was reverently called) did not have an extra penny to his name. It was inconceivable for him to be asked to sign on a loan which he certainly could not pay back. Yet, the court had before it a contract which indicated that he had affixed his signature in support of the loan. Now, if the borrower did not have the funds for repayment, *Rav Aryeh* must pay.

Rav Aryeh entered the courtroom to find the crooked borrower hiding himself in a corner, ashamed to confront *Rav Aryeh*. The judge asked *Rav Aryeh*, “Is this your signature?” The signature was clearly a forgery, but *Rav Aryeh* would never embarrass the borrower in court. He instead replied, “Yes, it is mine.” As the result of his “signature,” *Rav Aryeh* was ordered to pay back the loan which he had “guaranteed.” There was one problem – *Rav Aryeh* had no money. He made a payment plan in which, over a number of years, every month 28 lira was paid to the lender, all because *Rav Aryeh* refused to embarrass a man who had forged his signature.

Great story – but does one have to refrain from embarrassing a thief? By forging *Rav Aryeh*’s

signature, the borrower had committed an act of larceny. Are we adjured to be sensitive to his feelings? Apparently, the answer is yes.