

## **“And Timnah was a concubine of Elifaz, son of Eisav, and she bore Amalek to Elifaz.” (36:12)**

We have before us Amalek's roots. The archenemy of the Jewish people, the one who stands for evil – Amalek – is Eisav's grandson. Amalek, a nation whose cruelty knew no bound and whose viciousness was unparalleled, was the son of Elifaz and his concubine, Timnah. Who was Timnah? *Chazal* tell us that Timnah descended from royalty. She was the sister of Lotan, one of the chiefs of Seir. Yet, she was so anxious to marry a descendant of Avraham that she said to Elifaz, “If I am unworthy to become your wife, let me at least be your concubine!” *Chazal* go further in describing her character. She had originally approached Avraham to accept her as a convert. Her base character was something she could not conceal from Avraham. He therefore, rejected her. She went on to marry Elifaz and to give birth to his son, Amalek.

Why did she become the mother of Amalek? Apparently, something was wrong if a woman who had such “noble” intentions was rejected by Avraham, yet she eventually married his great-grandson. *Horav Chaim Shmuelewitz, z.l.*, explains that Avraham truly had just cause for dismissing Timnah, but it was nonetheless an act of total rejection. She begged for acceptance, and Avraham *Avinu* saw *b'Ruach haKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, that her character was deficient and, therefore, not worthy of induction into *Klal Yisrael*. He slammed the door in her face. While it was surely with good reason, it does not ameliorate the hurt and shame that accompanies total rejection. The end result of this rejection has been plaguing our People for thousands of years.

What an incredible statement; what a powerful perspective. This is the manner in which *Rav Chaim* perceived a subject, with depth and brilliant perception. He was able to pierce through the periphery surrounding a subject and arrive at its core. He was sensitive to people's emotions and perceived how they were affected by the actions of others in any way. He was known to take great pains not to impose on the feelings of others. He understood rejection and the overwhelming effect it could have on others. The following story, recounted often by *Rav Chaim* demonstrates this idea.

During the Six-Day War, bombs were falling in many places in Yerushalayim. When the war broke out, many people crowded into the *Mirrer Yeshiva* dining room, which also served as the neighborhood bomb shelter. Among those who took refuge there was a lonely *agunah*, a woman whose husband had abandoned her some years earlier. She was a bitter, tormented person who lived alone and eked out her meager livelihood as a laundress.

They were all in the dining room as the shells were whistling overhead, striking dangerously close to the *yeshivah*. Suddenly, there was a direct hit; an explosion shook the building. People thought that for sure this was the end. They began to entreat Hashem crying out, “*Shema Yisrael!*”

At that moment, the *agunah's* voice rang loudly above the others. She cried, “Hashem *Yisborach*, my husband abandoned me for twenty years. I have suffered so much during this time – all as a

result of him. Yet, I forgive him! You, too, *Ribono Shel Olam*, forgive *Klal Yisrael* for our sins!"

When *Rav Chaim* would relate the tragic plight of this broken- hearted woman, he would pause and cry. Then he would add – "It was her prayer that saved us!" It was the pain and anguish of a woman rejected and scorned that served as a *zechus*, merit, for all those in the building.

*Rav Chaim* explained that the humiliation of rejection, the knowledge that one is not wanted by their fellow man, is the worst pain and hurt that a person can undergo. He would emphasize this while relating the story of the *agunah*. Her tribulation lay neither in her meager earnings as a laundress nor in her responsibility of raising her children alone – without the hope of ever having a partner. Her pain lay in the overwhelming awareness that she had been rejected – totally – by the very person who had chosen her to be his life's partner. It was an awareness that would haunt her throughout her life, a knowledge with which she was condemned to live to the day she died. It was this evaluation of her circumstances that magnified her act of forgiveness. Her *zechus* was now understandable.

While it is sometimes difficult to say "yes" when a parent asks for a second chance, or a student begs for forgiveness, or a child says he is sorry for the "umpteenth" time, remember that the "no" alternative carries with it awesome ramifications. Perhaps, we should think twice before choosing this alternative.