

It came to pass, after these events, that his master's wife cast her eyes on Yosef. (39:7)

Two women who went out on a limb, so to speak, were actually *moseir nefesh*, willing to sacrifice themselves, for a role in the eternity of the Jewish People: Tamar and the wife of Potifar. They both resorted to methods that were unseemly: Tamar dressed herself as a woman of ill repute in an attempt to entice Yehudah; the wife of Potifar practically forced herself on Yosef in an attempt to convince him to consort with her. Tamar went down in history as a righteous woman who acted *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, while Potifar's wife, although originally acting *l'shem Shomayim*, did not maintain this standard. Thus, she is considered to be wicked.

Let us examine the apparent differences between the two women. First, Tamar neither forced herself on Yehudah, nor was she married to anyone. It was not a malicious act of infidelity. It was perhaps unseemly, but one cannot term it as blatantly evil. Potifar's wife, however, forced herself on Yosef. When he did not fall prey to her allure, refusing to commit an act of disloyalty with her, she lost her temper and slandered him. She figured if she could not have him, then nobody else would either.

When we think about it, Potifar's wife really was devoted to her cause. *Chazal* teach that Potifar was sterile and could not have children. Thus, if she were to cohabit with Yosef and conceive, she would have to share this bit of news with everyone – especially her husband, who would know for certain that his wife had cheated on him. Potifar would not take kindly to his wife's illicit affair and would probably have her executed. Yet, despite the shame and even fear of death, she was willing to do anything in order to have Yosef's child. When she was spurned, she showed her true colors and the *l'shem Shomayim* went out the window.

What happened? How does someone who was willing to endure humiliation, to suffer execution, change her stripes so quickly? If she was a believer and, unquestionably, at first she was, what made her change? I think the answer lies in one word: rejection. Potifar's wife could handle it all – humiliation, fear of death, suffering. She could not, however, deal with the thought of being rejected. Being told “no” – confronting the knowledge that one is not good enough, not acceptable, just does not make the grade: “We are looking for someone ‘younger’ or ‘older’.” All of these snide comments are put downs that can destroy a person. Fear of rejection is very real, and it takes its toll on many. We must always remember, especially upon undertaking an endeavor: that a person who cannot handle rejection has no business getting involved at the onset. Rejection is part of growth, and one who is unable to deal with it will not be able to handle the hurdles of life. Potifar's wife fell apart when she was rejected, thereby indicating that she was not ready to be the mother of Yosef's child.

Rav Chaim taught that the humiliation of rejection is the worst pain and hurt that a person can experience. The awareness that one is not wanted by his fellow man can be devastating. The *Rosh*

Yeshivah emphasized this idea time and again. A classic story demonstrates the *Rosh Yeshivah's* sense of caring for others. There was an *agunah*, abandoned wife whose recalcitrant husband refused to give her a *get*, bill of divorce. (Thus, she had no husband to speak of, and she could not remarry.) Her plight in life lay not in her meager earnings as a laundress; or even in her responsibility of raising her children all by herself; or even in having to give up hope of ever finding happiness with another partner in life. Rather, it was in the overpowering awareness of having been rejected by the one person who had originally chosen her to be his partner in life. She was one bitter and tormented person. Indeed, it was her miserable plight that granted her an incredible *z'chus*, merit, which was used to save hundreds of fellow Jews.

During the Six-Day War, hundreds of people had crowded into the *Mirrer Yeshivah* dining room, which served as a neighborhood bomb shelter. The shells were whistling overhead, striking dangerously close to the *yeshivah*. Everyone huddled in fear for their lives. Finally, there was a direct hit; the building shook, and the silence filled with fear. The people thought it was the end, and they all began to say *Shema Yisrael*. At that moment, the *agunah's* voice was heard above them all. She cried out to Hashem, "My husband abandoned me twenty years ago. I have suffered so much – yet, I forgive him! You, too, *Ribbono Shel Olam*, forgive the Jewish People from all we have done wrong!"

When Rav Chaim related this story, he would pause for a moment and weep. Then he would say, "Her prayer saved us!" This is the power that the impact of rejection has on a person. If a person who has experienced such humiliation is able to forgive, it is truly an incredible *z'chus*.