

## After these things, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Yosef. (39:7)

After spending a year in Potiphar's service, the stage was set for Potiphar's wife to express her desire for this handsome slave. *Chazal* teach that there is more to the story. Yosef ruminated, "My father was tested, my grandfather was tested, and I should not be tested?" Immediately upon hearing this, Hashem decided to grant Yosef his wish. He, too, would be tested. *Chazal* conclude that Yosef wanted to be tested, so that his latent strength of character would be freed and he could ultimately achieve more. Clearly, languishing in an Egyptian jail was not conducive to Yosef's hidden abilities.

The *Midrash* states that Yaakov *Avinu* experienced *nisyonos*, tests. Is this true? We find the Patriarch experiencing great troubles, but are those troubles to be classified as *nisyonos*? *Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, suggests that listening to his mother's advice and presenting himself before Yitzchak *Avinu* dressed as Eisav, speaking in his vernacular so that he could obtain the *berachos*, blessings, was a test for Yaakov, the *ish emes*, man of truth. During his entire life he had personified truth. Now, he had to go against everything he believed in in order to fool Yitzchak, his father. This was a test.

Furthermore, living twenty-two years in Lavan's house, in an environment permeated with moral and spiritual filth, where decadence and underhandedness went hand in hand, was also Yaakov's test. It took incredible self-control and perseverance to maintain himself on the same lofty spiritual perch as when he had originally come from Yitzchak's home.

Yosef also sought to be tested, so that his hidden powers would emerge. Yosef got what he requested. This way, whatever powers were concealed within him would now be able to work for him and for his descendants.

Hashem tested Yosef atypically. His test was completely unlike that of his father and grandfather. Yitzchak was asked to give up his life. Avraham *Avinu* was thrown into a fiery cauldron. Yosef's test appears to be on a completely different level. His life was not in danger. No one was out to kill him. Can his test be considered that compelling? Is it so difficult to maintain moral rectitude, to control one's basic desires and not act like an animal? Is this in any way similar to the noble acts of Avraham and Yitzchak, when their lives were actually in danger?

*Rav Zaitchik* explains that this is actually the meaning of *nisayon*, test. A test is a way of determining one's spiritual stamina, his ability to deal with adversity, to maintain his character and ethics on a high moral ground. The problem is that we think that once we have achieved prominence, we no longer need to worry concerning the "simple" tests. Who would think that a great *tzaddik* could fall into a situation that was inappropriate? What we do not realize is that it is the "little," "simple" tests that trip us up, that even the greatest spiritual personalities fall prey to

these trials.

One must always remain vigilant, never knowing from where the attack against his spiritual status will come. The test of Potiphar's wife leaves a subtle message: one must **always** be careful, never taking anything for granted. Too often, the things that could "never happen" – happen! We read about great people who make foolish mistakes. "There, if not for the grace of G-d, go I," should be on the lips of everyone. Yosef learned that it is often more difficult to triumph over the "small" test, than what one perceives to be the "big" test.