

And Sarai, Avram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maidservant...and gave her to Avram her husband, to him as a wife. (16:3)

Avraham and Sarah had almost everything, they lacked only a child to carry on their legacy. Sarah suggested that Avraham take Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant, as a wife. Sarah would raise the child, that would hopefully be born to them, as her adopted child. One would think that Hagar would be enthusiastic about the idea of becoming Avraham's wife. Indeed, her father told her, "Better to be a maidservant to Avraham and Sarah than a mistress anywhere else." *Rashi*, however, says that Sarah had to convince Hagar to marry Avraham. This hardly seems consistent with a person who pursued any avenue in order to get close to the Patriarchal family.

Horav Chaim Shmulevitz, zl, offers a profound explanation into Hagar's behavior. He first cites the *Navi Melachim I 2:8*, in which *David Ha'melech* instructs his son, Shlomo, to use his wisdom to punish Shimi ben Geira in a dignified manner. Veritably, Shlomo was to think of a way to "trap" Shimi, so that he would commit an error that would warrant his execution. What "brilliant" idea did Shlomo conceptualize? He forbade Shimi to leave Yerushalayim. He was permitted to do whatever he wanted, but he was never allowed to leave the city. At first, this seemed to be a convenient punishment for Shimi. He was quite comfortable remaining in the city. It was not a terrible imposition to be confined to Yerushalayim. Obviously, not only was this a compelling punishment, but it was also an act of brilliance, since Shlomo was to carry out his father's command, to act with wisdom.

After three years, Shimi left the city. He was later put to death for his infraction. Why did Shimi do it? What provoked him to leave the city? Did he not realize that he would be executed if he left? Did he have a death wish that caused him to leave? Why would such a wise man do something so foolish? **Rav Chaim** cites the **Alshich Hakadosh** who says that while a person can certainly live in Yerushalayim for an extended period and never leave the city, it is difficult to live there in a state of imposed confinement. It is not significant where a person is confined, the mere thought that he is told what to do, that he is incarcerated in a state of siege, so to speak, can provoke a rational individual to act in a most illogical manner. Shimi knew what would happen were he to leave the city. The thought, however, of being cornered, restrained by the king's edict, was too much for him to handle. He took his life into his own hands.

Rav Chaim suggests that the same idea applies to Hagar. While she certainly wanted to be as close to Avraham as possible, were she to be presented with a direct command, she might have balked. Human beings by nature seek freedom. Restraints of any kind, whether they are made of steel or imposed by others, have a devastating effect upon a person. Sarah knew that Hagar, like most people, could not handle having anything being forced on her, even something which she had sought with great anticipation.

We see from here that people often react, rather than act. We tend to do things out of reflex, as an automatic response, not because we really want to do them. It is necessary for a person to think before he acts, determining clearly and truthfully what is really motivating his action. A Jew should act for a single reason--it is the will of Hashem. In fact, one must force himself to isolate all other motivations and act in response to Hashem's command. All too often we attempt to convince ourselves – and others – that we should perform various observances due to ulterior motives. This artificial reason for doing the right thing, for observing Hashem's command, works at the onset, but in the long run a person must reason with himself and focus on the logical truth. Yaakov told Yosef that he buried Rachel on the road to Efras, rather than in Chevron, because that was the will of Hashem. The *Midrash* relates that Yaakov told him, "It had nothing to do with the weather nor the distance. I buried your mother on the road, because Hashem told me to." The lesson is clear. Yaakov did not seek to rationalize his actions--not to himself, nor to Yosef. He trained himself to act because it was the will of Hashem. He sought to eliminate any outside reasons for his actions. If one does something right for the wrong reasons, he might end up doing something wrong for the same reasons.