

And Timna was a concubine to Elifaz, son of Eisav, and she bore Amalek to Elifaz. (36:12)

Rashi cites the Talmud Sanhedrin 99b which explains the Torah's emphasis on Timna. Avraham Avinu was held in such esteem that people were eager to associate in any way with his descendants. Timna was the daughter of nobility; yet when she came to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov to convert, she was not accepted. Since she was so anxious to marry a descendent of Avraham, she said to Elifaz, Eisav's son, "If I may not become your wife, at least let me be your concubine." This union produced our archenemy--Amalek. The commentators are all troubled by the Patriarchs' reaction to Timna's request for conversion. The Avos were the paragons of Jewish outreach. Avraham Avinu sat outside in the heat of the day, on the third and most painful day after his *Bris Milah*, searching for wayfarers. Regardless of their beliefs, Avraham sought them out to show them kindness and, thereby, bring them closer to Hashem. How could they turn their backs on Timna, who was apparently sincere in her request?

Horav Meier Bergman, Shlita, cites *Rashi* in *Parashas Lech Lecha* that says that Timna's motivation to convert was her appreciation of the level of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, exhibited by the Avos. This makes our question more compelling. How could they turn away someone who so valued *yiraas Shomayim*? After all, this was no ordinary maidservant! This was an intelligent, well-bred, highly perceptive woman!

Horav Bergman suggests that Timna's appreciation of *yiraas Shomayim* was the reason that she was not accepted. Although she realized the value of fearing Heaven, she was able to continue acting like a pagan. She presented herself as an individual who was secure in her ways, inflexible, unwilling to accept what others had to teach her. Such a "finished" individual would not convert properly. On the contrary, she could be a hindrance to *Klal Yisrael*. The Avos were obviously correct in their assessment of her true qualities. We have only to look at the child she bore--Amalek, the paradigm of evil.

While this may shed light upon the Patriarchs' decision not to accept Timna, we note that the *Talmud* declares that Amalek's birth was a punishment for not accepting Timna as a convert. Obviously, the best reason does not justify turning our backs on someone who seeks to convert or repent. *Kiruv rechokim*, outreach to those who have been alienated, regardless of the reason, is an overwhelming obligation, one that makes enormous demands upon our conscience. Yaakov Avinu was punished for hiding his daughter, Dinah, from Eisav. He felt justified in his actions because he feared that Eisav would desire to marry her. While he was undisputedly correct in rejecting Eisav as a son-in-law, he was still punished. He ignored the possibility that Dinah would have influenced Eisav positively, eliciting his repentance. To paraphrase *Horav Bergman*, "For the lack of *kiruv rechokim*, we pay a dear price." If this is the price paid by the Avos for rejecting those whose history of evil and spiritual ambiguity was so predominant, how vigilant should we be in reaching out to those around us whose alienation is not their fault.