

"And Yehudah approached him and said, 'If you please, my master, may your servant speak a word?'" (44:18)

Rashi views Yehudah's opening statement as blunt and provocative. Yehudah was telling Yosef that if he did not release Binyamin, dire consequences would ensue. If necessary, Yehudah was prepared to wage war against Yosef and his country in order to effect Binyamin's release from captivity. What happened? Yehudah seems to have undergone a remarkable personality change. In his previous encounter with Yosef, Yehudah appeared to be a meek, simple person, imploring Yosef to exercise his good graces towards them. Suddenly, Yehudah had become the mighty statesman, who threatened to wage war and heap disaster upon Egypt if he did not get his way. What catalyzed this transformation?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, cites his *rebbe*, **Horav Yosef Leib Bloch, zl**, who inferred from Yehudah's actions the remarkable fortitude one is able to find within himself once he assumes responsibility for an endeavor, a function, or even his own actions. When Yehudah told Yosef that he had accepted the responsibility of being the guarantor of Binyamin's welfare, he became a new person.

Accepting responsibility enhances a person's self-esteem. It transforms the meek into the courageous, the weak into the strong, and the unassuming into the assertive. This same transformation takes place when one accepts the yoke of *mitzvos*. Such an approach may seem difficult as long as one gazes from afar. When one makes up his mind, however, to perform *mitzvos* or to undertake to do a specific deed, he will instantly notice that he is blessed with a new source of physical and emotional energy.