

And she said, “Identify, if you please, whose are this seal, this wrap and this staff.” Yehudah recognized and he said, “She is right. It is from me.” (38:25,26)

Yehudah and Tamar were progenitors of *Malchus Bais David*, the Davidic dynasty, and *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*, who descends from it. When one peruses the story of Yehudah’s encounter with Tamar: how Tamar was prepared to die rather than shame Yehudah; and Yehudah’s ultimate public confession despite the humiliation that would ensue, we see that the entire incident revolves around the *middah*, character trait, of *bushah*, shame. Tamar refused to shame Yehudah, because she understood that if word would get out that someone of his spiritual distinction was involved in a less-than-licit affair, it would humiliate not only him, but also what he represented. When Yehudah became aware that he was the one whom Tamar was protecting, he declared *Tzadkah mimeni*, “She is right. It is from me,” and he was prepared to accept whatever humiliation would ensue. The obvious question is: Tamar was willing to die, thus snuffing out the lives of three souls. Yehudah is lauded for coming forward and chancing public humiliation. What about the three lives that would otherwise die? Shame is a terrible chastisement to have to endure, but certainly the lives of three innocent souls should take precedence. Why all the accolades?

Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl, derives from here that the power of shame is overwhelming and serves as a powerful deterrent. Public censure, embarrassment, disgrace, destroys people. They will do anything to spare themselves and their family from the pain of disgrace. Yehudah overcame his fear of shame, because, as *Chazal (Targum Yonasan ben Uziel)* teach, Yehudah weighed the temporary shame experienced in this world against the eternal shame of *Olam Habba*, and he decided that he would rather endure the fleeting disgrace in this world. Apparently, it was not an issue of the three lives that prompted his decision to confess, but his fear of eternal shame. Tamar understood the effect that shame has on a person, and she was not prepared to hurt Yehudah in such a manner.

We have no idea of the everlasting emotional pain that we cause when we embarrass someone. We live in a time when self-righteous zealots feel that it is necessary to expose every indiscretion of their antagonist – without sensitivity to the lifelong anguish they cause for him, his wife and children. These zealots feel that they are expunging the evil from their respective communities when, in fact, they are committing character assassination in its most ignominious form. I would simply call it murder, because that is what it is. Sadly, these holy men will find some way to justify their unholy actions, because, after all, they are holy. Tamar feared shaming Yehudah, and Yehudah feared shame. Tamar left the decision up to Yehudah, who, as a result of his decision, became the progenitor of *Malchus Bais David* and *Moshiach*.

Shame is a powerful deterrent, as demonstrated by the following story. The *Noda B’Yehudah*, *Horav Yechezkel Landau, zl*, was *Rav* of Prague and one of our most distinguished *gedolim*. His daughter married *Horav Yosef, zl*, *Rav* of Posen. It is related that when the *Noda*

B'Yehudah would address his son-in-law in learning, his entire being would shake out of fear of his son-in-law's wisdom. The respect and admiration that the *Noda B'Yehuda* had for the *Rav* of Posen was extraordinary, but this is in keeping with the fact that the *Rav* of Posen was an unusual *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar.

Sadly, the *Noda B'Yehudah's* warm feelings for his son-in-law were not emulated by his daughter, who publicly treated her husband with contempt. She would shame him, using painful barbs to disgrace him in front of his peers. She would enter a meeting of rabbinic leaders and publicly excoriate him in the most denigrating terms. The people were prepared to quiet her, but their *Rav* asked them to ignore what she said and to show her the deference that she deserved as the *Rebbetzin*. *Rav* Yosef swallowed his pride and never once responded to his wife's mortifying remarks. While no one opened their mouth to the *Rebbetzin*, they did not give her the time of day. She was definitely not one of the community's favorite people.

Rav Yosef passed away in the month of Adar, 1801. The community came to pay their respects to their beloved *Rav* whose body, wrapped in a white sheet, was laying on the ground as the *Chevra Kaddisha* recited *Tehillim* near it. Suddenly, his widow, the *Rebbetzin* who all those years had belittled him in public, and, as a result, became the community's least favorite person, entered the room in the presence of the most distinguished members of the community.

"*Rav* Yosef! Confess before the members of the community that it was you who insisted that I humiliate you in public. It was not because I was a bad person or because I did not care for you; you know that this is not true. When we first agreed to marry, you made me promise to act in such an unseemly manner because you were afraid of falling into the abyss of arrogance. Against my will, I accepted your demand, because I am an *ishah k'sherah*, ritually fit and decent woman, who carries out the will of her husband. Who more than I knows that the foolishness that I said about you was untrue?! I know that you were a holy, righteous man!" When she concluded her declaration, everyone in attendance observed that the head of the deceased moved as if in agreement with the *Rebbetzin*.

Exclusive of what we learn concerning the *middah* of *bushah*, we derive a powerful lesson concerning how far a holy man went to prevent himself from becoming arrogant, and the level of devotion of his *Rebbetzin* to carry out his will, even at the expense of her own popularity and esteem.