

## **“Her mistress was lowered in her esteem.” (16:4)**

Aagar’s lack of *emunah*, belief, in Divine Providence, coupled with her insensitivity to others, resulted in her brazenness. She arrogantly called attention to the fact that she was able to conceive and bear Avraham’s child, while Sarah, her mistress, despite having been with Avraham for so many years, still had no success in bearing a child.

Obviously, from her perspective, she was more righteous than Sarah. Her first reaction was to claim superiority. Never did she allow herself to entertain the notion that there was a reason for Sarah’s barrenness. It certainly could not have been Sarah’s lack of virtue.

A similar episode occurred concerning Chana, the mother of Shmuel *HaNavi*. The *Navi* relates how she came to pray for a son. Eili, the *Kohen Gadol*, observed the peculiar manner in which she was praying, and he suspected her of imbibing a bit too much wine. He then proceeded to criticize her for her inappropriate demeanor. Her response was that she was bitter and was praying for a son. Immediately, Eili blessed her and wished her well. The rest is history.

*Horav Asher Kalman Baron, z.l., Rosh Yeshivah* in pre-World War II Ponevezh, asks a penetrating question. Let us imagine that we witnessed this episode with Chana. She was praying in a strange manner, acting like she was drunk, while in truth her prayer was actually perfect, to the point that it pierced the Heavens and catalyzed Hashem’s favorable response. Nonetheless, at first glance she gave the impression of being drunk. Eili, with all of his *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, was taken aback by her prayer. He immediately rebuked her behavior and told her to leave. After she explained herself to Eili, should Chana have renounced him as *Kohen Gadol*? What kind of *Kohen Gadol* was he if his *Ruach HaKodesh* did not give him a “clearer picture” and understanding of Chana’s prayer? At best, his reaction was certainly unbecoming a man of his stature. Yet, Chana overlooked his error in judgment and accepted his blessing with utmost faith.

Rav Baron derives a very important principle from here. Even though at times we might have a question about a *gadol*’s, Torah leader’s, behavior, it does not in any way give us license to renounce him. He does not lose his credibility as the result of a single lapse. Regrettably, this is the case in the eyes of so many simple people. As soon as the *gadol* acts in a peculiar manner or issues a statement that might be a bit out of character, they immediately pounce on him and make disparaging comments.

Such behavior is to be expected of a Hagar – not a *ben Torah*! As soon as Hagar saw that she had conceived while her mistress, Sarah, had not yet been blessed, she immediately felt that Sarah’s credibility had been impugned. *Horav Nosson Wachtfogel, z.l.*, supplements this, noting how people often prejudge an individual’s character and religious persuasion by his external appearance and behavior. Rarely do they delve into the individual’s *atzmias*, original and independent character. What they see is what they accept as belief. Let us ask ourselves, how many *shidduchim*, marriage negotiations, have been ruined because of what one saw initially and

did not like? We have to see beyond what “appears”, to observe what “is”, before determining the nature of a person.