

## How then can I perpetrate this evil and have sinned against G-d! (39:9)

Potiphar's wife did everything within her power and resources to beguile and seduce Yosef. True to his earned appellation of *tzaddik*, righteous man, he resisted her advances. According to *Rashi*, he employed ingratitude as an excuse, asserting that his master had entrusted him with the total run of the house. To sin with his wife would be the nadir of ingratitude – not to mention indecency – and a betrayal of trust. In the beginning of his *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Rabbeinu Yonah* derives a different tactic from Yosef's words – one that should, likewise, apply to each and every one of us. Yosef made a point to acknowledge his many positive attributes, character traits and *yichus*, pedigree, as deterrents from sin. To paraphrase *Horav Avraham Pam*, *zl* (quoted by Rabbi Sholom Smith), *Es pasht nisht!* "It is unbecoming for someone like me" to commit such a base sin.

A person creates a protective barrier against sin when he stops to think of his Jewish identity. What he is about to do is certainly inappropriate for someone of his standing. Everyone has positive worth; some even have noble lineage. He must ask himself: Is this becoming of me, of someone of my status? Do my ancestors deserve for me to sully their reputation? These are powerful points. So why do they not work? After all, people do sin. Not just spiritually-deficient people, but people who are observant, from distinguished backgrounds, individuals who possess wonderful attributes. It is these same individuals who shock the community when they act in a manner unbecoming someone of their standing. What happened to their self-identities?

Perhaps we can elucidate this with a well-known parable from *Horav Nachman Breslover*, *zl*. There was once a prince who lived with his father and mother, the king and queen. Everything went well. He was a fine young man who received a splendid, well-rounded education, reflective of his aristocratic background. One day the prince transformed. He suffered what we might term an identity crisis. He thought that he was a turkey. He no longer ate with his parents at the dining table, choosing to peck at crumbs under the table. He did not wear his princely garb. Since turkeys wear no clothes, he did not either.

It is understandable that the king and queen contacted any and every professional who might cure their son – to no avail. Money was of no issue. The finest doctors and psychiatrists were summoned, but no one succeeded in convincing the prince that he was anything but a turkey.

One day a gentle - looking man showed up at the palace requesting to meet the prince, "I hereby offer to cure the prince. I want no money. I do, however, have one condition: no one, absolutely no one, may interfere with anything that I do. If you mix in, it will hamper the therapy and produce negative results." They agreed.

The next day, the prince had company underneath the table. The man had shed his clothes and began pecking crumbs in the royal dining room, underneath the table. The turkey/prince looked at

him and asked, "Why are you here?" the man countered, "Why are you here?" The prince replied, "I am a turkey. This is where I eat." The man looked at him defiantly and said, "Well, I am also a turkey, and it is time to eat." With that, he began to gobble, gobble like a turkey and peck crumbs from the floor. This went on for a few days.

One morning, the man said to the prince, "I see no reason why a turkey should not wear a shirt." The price thought about it and said, "You are right." Soon the two "turkeys" were wearing shirts. A couple of days passed, and the man asked, "Is there any reason that turkeys should not be allowed to wear pants?" The prince agreed that there was no reason. They now wore pants and a shirt. The process continued until they were both fully dressed "turkeys" pecking at crumbs beneath the table.

Next, the man convinced the prince that nowhere was it stated that turkeys may neither eat human food nor eat at the table like humans. Before long, the turkey/prince sat at the table dressed in his full regalia, eating human food. He continued identifying as a turkey, but, for all intents and purposes, he was acting like a human being.

The moral: we are fortunate not to suffer from turkey or other complexes, but what about our self-perception? Do we recognize our inherent qualities, our hidden potential? Are we limiting ourselves either by diminished self-perception or delusion? Yes, some of us delude ourselves into believing that we are so much greater than we really are. We cannot fail; we can take chances and will not fall into the trap of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. We are wrong on both counts. By diminishing our self-perception, we think that we have no spiritual worth anyway – so why not sin? By convincing ourselves that we can walk a tightrope over sin and maintain perfect balance, we delude ourselves until we fall and fail.

*Rabbeinu* Yonah's tactic works only for he who does not suffer from a weakened self-perception. In that case, then he really is a turkey.