

Yehudah recognized and said, “She is right; it is from me.” (38:26)

Chazal (*Sotah* 10b) teach, “As soon as Yehudah confessed and said *Tzadkah mimeni*, “She is right; it is from me,” a *Bas Kol*, Heavenly voice, issued forth and declared, “You saved Tamar and her two sons from the fire. By your life, I swear that I will save three of your descendants in your merit. Who are these? They are Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah.” Yehudah’s name is eternalized because he withstood and triumphed over the challenge to his integrity. *Targum Yonasan* (commentary to *Devarim* 49:8) says that, due to Yehudah’s confession concerning his involvement with Tamar, *Klal Yisrael* are called *Yehudim*, in tribute to him. *Modeh al ha’emes*, confessing to the truth, is an enormous attribute, because it requires integrity, accountability and often extra-ordinary courage. It is a difficult step to take, one which means taking responsibility for one’s actions – a challenge to which some find it difficult to rise.

Horav Shmuel Fundiler, zl (*Rav* of Riteve, Lithuania), wonders why the great astonishment over Yehudah’s confession, while simultaneously ignoring Tamar’s ardency to brook a terrible death as long as she did not shame Yehudah. She did nothing; yet, she was prepared to pay the ultimate price. One would think that she would receive special recognition, other than the lesson that it is more acceptable to throw oneself into a fire, rather than put someone to shame. It is almost as if Yehudah is receiving all the accolades for assuming responsibility – despite the consequences, while Tamar garners honorable mention for her willingness to give up her life.

From here, we derive a powerful lesson in human nature and emotion. It is more difficult to cause oneself to endure humiliation than to risk his life. *Rabbeinu Yonah* (3:139) writes: “The pain of embarrassment is more bitter than death.” Humiliation can be devastating, since it degrades one to the point that he loses his dignity. When one’s personal weaknesses, vulnerabilities, or errors are exposed or exploited, it can not only have a profound effect on his self-esteem; it can damage his overall well-being. Everyone seeks respect and acceptance; some thrive on accolades. When one is shamed, his/her feeling of self-confidence becomes eroded, causing self-doubt, possibly even leaving long-lasting psychological scars.

Based upon this idea, *Horav Moshe Tikuchinsky, zl* (*Menahel Ruchani Yeshivas Slabodka*), explains the *Chazal* that attributes the safe emergence of Chananyah, Mishael, v’Azaryah from the fire to Yehudah’s merit for confessing to his indiscretion. Veritably, they did not have to give up their lives. Nevuchadneszar’s statue did not have the *halachic* status of an *avodah zarah*, idol. Nonetheless, when they saw that no one was prepared to sanctify Hashem’s Name, they came forward and took the initiative. Now, if we were to be asked the reason Hashem spared them from death, the prompt reply would be, “They risked their lives to be *mekadesh Shem Shomayim*.”

From *Chazal* in *Meseches Sotah*, we see otherwise. *Chazal* teach that they were saved because of Yehudah. Why? Because the *z’chus*, merit, of accepting responsibility, even if it means public

humiliation and castigation, is greater even than giving up one's life to sanctify Hashem's Name.

Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, was Rosh Yeshivah in Chicago prior to moving to the east coast. His *talmidim* reciprocated the love he demonstrated for them in kind. He exemplified Torah and *mussar*, ethical character refinement, in all of his relationships – with peers, with students, even with gentiles who had the good fortune of crossing his path. Every once in a while, he was compelled to rebuke his students. He did so in a dignified manner to preserve their self-esteem.

The boys in the *yeshivah* were not happy with the cook whose menu selections were far from creative. After being served egg salad (yellow) and red jello for thirteen days successively, they wrote a sarcastic letter to the administrator asking if perhaps there could be a little variety, such as yellow jello and red egg salad. There was an immediate response from the administration. The students felt they had a victory. They had gotten their point across. The cook, however, was devastated. She was so upset that she was unable to greet anyone or serve food to the students for months.

Rav Mendel reacted to this slight of the cook, "It would be better to eat nothing but jello and egg salad for an entire lifetime than to embarrass someone publicly." They got the message.