

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

In the *brachos*, blessings, which Moshe *Rabbeinu* conferred upon the various *shevatim*, tribes of *Klal Yisrael*, Reuven’s blessing is juxtaposed upon Yehudah’s blessing. *Chazal* (*Bava Kamma* 91A) explain that, during all the forty years that the Jews journeyed in the wilderness, the bones of Yehudah, which the nation took with them to be interred in the Holy Land, were rolling around in the coffin. Moshe came and asked Hashem for mercy on Yehudah’s behalf.

He said, “Yehudah was the impetus for Reuven to confess to his sin/error concerning his tampering with his father’s bed.” When Reuven saw that Yehudah made a public proclamation of his involvement with Tamar, Reuven did likewise. Thus, Yehudah’s proclamation was the incentive for Reuven’s confession.

In the preface to *Maadanei Shmuel*, *Horav Shmuel Truvitz, zl*, quotes *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*, who asks why Yehudah required the added merit of Reuven’s confession to catalyze an end to his bones rolling around in his coffin. Should not the merit of his public declaration of guilt suffice to earn him the reprieve for which he had waited for forty years? Furthermore, Yehudah’s confession was much more significant than that of Reuven. By confessing Yehudah opened himself to humiliation. He was the leader of the *Shivtei Kah*, Tribes, and he confessed to acting in an unseemly manner, establishing a *laisson* with a woman of unquestionable repute. Yet, he confessed, because it was the right thing to do. Reuven, however, did not really sin. It was an error in judgment, resulting from acting impetuously. Why did Yehudah need Reuven’s confession to elevate his merit?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the merit one receives for helping others to turn back to Yiddishkeit; the virtue of changing another Jew’s spiritual trajectory for the better, outweighs anything he does for himself. Thus, Yehudah’s impact on Reuven was of much greater value than Yehudah’s public humiliation to confess his wrongdoing.

Furthermore, Yehudah had no intention of inspiring Reuven to come forward. Reuven acted on his own, not connected to Yehudah’s confession. This is the enormous power of *zikui ha’rabim*, bringing merit to the multitude. Just doing the right thing -- living ethically, morally and spiritually as a Jew should live -- will, in and of itself, inspire and influence others.

Horav Reuven Elbaz, Shlita relates that, fifty years ago, one of the attendees at *Horav Ovadyah Yosef’s shiur* asked him to give a class to a group of lay people in a small *shul* in Yerushalayim. *Rav Elbaz* expressed his regrets, asserting that it was a two-hour round-trip bus ride for a *shiur* that would last no more than a half hour. In addition, these were men whose relationship with Torah and *mitzvos* was limited at best. One morning, the *Chacham* himself called *Rav Elbaz* and asked why he had refused to give the class. His response was simple, “I am a young *kollel* fellow devoting my

time to achieving greater knowledge and proficiency in Torah. How can I balance the two?" The *Chacham* countered, "What will become of these men if no one will teach them Torah? No one is available to teach them even one *halachah*." "But *Rebbe*, I want to grow in learning!" The *Chacham* replied, "And I do not? I teach a group for an hour and a half, during which I cover many areas of Torah *halachah*. Included in the class are many stories which I relate as a motivator to inspire them to learn more. Do you think that I have nothing else to do with my time? Should I permit them to remain *amei ha'aratz*, illiterate in Torah, just so that I can learn?"

Case closed. *Rav Elbaz* commenced the class with four listeners, which eventually grew into forty men and twenty youngsters. Today, the parents are religious Jews, their children erudite and their grandchildren following in the footsteps of their forebears – all because *Rav Elbaz* acquiesced to teaching four men at what seemed to be the expense of his own learning.

Every person possesses extraordinary potential which is often not attained because he does not believe in himself. One example is an illustrious Torah scholar who studied at an unbelievable pace. He did not waste a minute, almost pushing himself to the point of exhaustion before he would close his *Gemorrah* and rest. When asked from where he was able to draw such an unbelievable strength, he replied, "I have a fire in my brain. I feel it incumbent upon myself to grab and save whatever I can." We do not realize the incredible things we are capable of doing until we are compelled to do so. The person rushes into his burning house and grabs his valuables, as many as he can, regardless of weight. How does he do it? When it is burning, one's adrenaline kicks in, and he is capable of achieving what otherwise would have been deemed impossible.

Everyone has hidden potential just waiting for the opportunity for it to explode into reality. The limit on this potential is himself. If he does not believe that he can do it, his potential will remain just that: potential.

Horav Chaim Sheinberg, zl, would instruct his *talmidim*, "Do not settle for merely being a soldier.

Strive to become a general! One whose goal is to be a soldier settles for mediocrity. He then has nothing."