

A TEST OF YOUR OWN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayeishev

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 308, Secular Studies.
Good Shabbos!*

The Test You Face May Be Your Own

Yosef was confronted by the test of Potiphar's wife. Potiphar had taken Yosef in and appointed him in charge of the entire house. Later, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Yosef. She persisted day after day. Yosef told her that it was simply improper. It would be a terrible crime for Yosef to do anything with her, in light of all that her husband had done for him. "There is no one in the house who is greater than me, he did not refuse me anything - except for you since you are his wife - how then could I do this great act of wickedness; and I would thereby be sinning against G-d" [Bereishis 39:9].

Rav Gifter (1916-2001) asked an interesting question. Yosef enumerated all the reasons why it would be inappropriate for him to commit this act. However, why didn't Yosef tell her why it would be inappropriate for HER to commit the act? He should have told her that she would be betraying her husband, who was so kind and good to HER. He should have told her "You are a married woman - Noachides are prohibited from adultery!" Why did Yosef only focus on why HE should not perform this sin?

Rav Gifter answered that when Yosef felt the severity of this test, he sensed that the reason why he was facing this particular situation was due to a shortcoming in his own personality. He felt that in spite of her obligations, it was basically his fault and his test. He felt that had he maintained the level of purity and sanctity that was appropriate for him as the favorite son of his elderly father, Yaakov, he would have never faced such a situation.

Yosef thought to himself, "I got into this situation as a result of failing to do everything properly. I apparently made mistakes." When a person finds himself in such a situation, it is usually not because 'all of a sudden' the situation evolved. The situation usually has a history. Apparently he did not enact all the proper boundaries and separations and fences much earlier in the developing scenario to preempt such a situation from ever occurring.

These situations do not develop in 5 minutes. They develop over the course of weeks, months and years. Therefore, ultimately, Yosef felt that it was his test and his problem. Consequently, he had to convince himself that HE (not she) was the one who could not proceed, for all the reasons enumerated.

This concept contains a significant lesson. Sometimes people are faced with situations that test their spirituality. There are all kinds of excuses for succumbing to these situations. There are many people to blame for these tempting situations. Perhaps spouses sometimes share some blame for the temptations that a person confronts when tempted by infidelity. But ultimately a person must know and realize that it is HIS test and HIS responsibility.

Yes, maybe it is not completely his fault. Maybe if things had developed differently or if some people were more understanding and more helpful, he would not be in this mess. Yes, there may be contributory negligence. But this is not a lawsuit. This is a test. Ultimately, we have to deal with our tests ourselves. Ultimately we must not shift the blame. We must ask ourselves "How can I do this great evil act?" If one succumbs, it will be his fault alone. He will be held fully accountable and will have to pay the price.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayeishev are provided below:

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