

Bring them to me, if you please, and I will bless them. (48:9)

Yosef brought his two sons to his father, Yaakov *Avinu*, for a blessing, as the Patriarch had instructed him. Is this not why Yosef brought them? He did not want a long-distance blessing. What was Yaakov intimating when he said, “Bring them to me”? Yaakov was alluding that not only was his blessing of great significance, but it was also important for his grandsons to see him up close, to sear into their minds his visage and bearing.

When Yerushalayim was under siege by the Roman army, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai met with Vespasian, the Roman commander and chief. He told Vespasian that his position had changed, since the Caesar had died and the Roman dignitaries had appointed him to be the new Caesar. Vespasian was happy with the news that the sage conveyed to him, that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai had been promised by Vespasian that he would grant him his wishes. The sage made three requests: to spare the town of Yavneh with its Torah scholars; to allow the house of Rabban Gamliel, the *Nasi*, who was a descendent of David *Hamelech*, to live; and to provide doctors to heal Rabbi Tzadok. (He had fasted for forty years in an attempt to avert the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*. His intestines had shrunk to the point that he was unable to digest solid food.)

We can understand the critical importance for *Klal Yisrael* that Yavneh and its scholars be saved: we need Torah. Without Torah, we are not an enduring nation and will not survive. We require leadership. Hence, we requested that Rabbi Gamliel, the *Nasi*, and his family be left untouched. How does the cure of a single Jew – albeit a holy, pious scholar – guarantee our nation’s future?

Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, explains that, indeed, Jewish survival requires more than just Torah study and strong leadership. Times change, and levels of greatness decline. This is the concept of *yeridas hadoros*, the descending of the generations. Each generation goes down one notch. Thus, for the continuity of our people, it is imperative that we preserve an example of the previous generation in our midst. It is vital that we and our children see and hold in esteem those who lived before us, who confronted formidable challenges and survived painful trials.

The generation following the *churban*, destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*, had sustained a cataclysmic blow – a blow strong enough to retard, and even halt, their spiritual affiliation with Torah, with Hashem. They required an example of greatness, a sage who lived pre-destruction, at a time in which the *Bais Hamikdash* had been a vibrant reality. When they saw him, they would say, “Yes, we can do it. We can return to our relationship with Hashem. We will once again be the *am Hashem*, the Torah nation of Hashem.

My generation, which immediately followed the European Holocaust, was fortunate to have as its *rebbeim* and *moreh derech* survivors of the *Shoah* – men and women who went into *Gehinnom*, Purgatory, and survived with their *emunah*, faith, intact. They rebuilt European Torah in America and *Eretz Yisrael*. They modeled for us and future generations what a Jew can and should strive to be.

V'hayah einecha ro'os es morecha, "And your eyes will behold your teacher" (*Yeshayah* 30:20). We derive from here the importance of seeing and remembering the image of our Torah giants. The impression they leave on us cannot be overstated. *Horav Elazar M. Shach*, *zl*, was devoted body and soul to Torah study and dissemination. He dedicated every waking moment to Torah – regardless of his advanced age. It was his lifeblood. Rabbi Yisrael Besser ("Warmed by their Fire") relates that a distinguished *mechanech*, Torah educator, visited *Rav Shach* and related that he had arranged a large, festive gathering in honor of the completion of *Shishah Sidrei Mishnah*, six orders of the *Mishnah*, by thousands of boys. All these boys would be gathered the next day in a large hall right next to the *yeshivah*. "Would the *Rosh Yeshivah* honor the assembly to attend just for a few moments, so that the young students could gaze upon him?" He was certain that seeing what a young boy can strive to achieve would serve as a life-long inspiration for them to raise their standards, so that they could achieve even loftier goals.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* apologized profusely, explaining that he simply lacked the physical strength to attend. When the *mechanech* left, *Rav Shach* asked his confidante whether he agreed with his decision. The man (*Rav Toib*) hesitated, then asked permission to share a story with him. The *Rosh Yeshivah* replied, "Yes."

"My father-in-law," the man began, "was a Holocaust survivor who lost everything – his entire family and all his material possessions. Despite his travail, his *emunah*, faith, in Hashem, remained unaffected. In fact, it was even stronger. I asked him what it was that inspired him to maintain such superhuman strength, to believe even when everything screams out at you to turn your back on your past, on your faith. He replied that when he was a young child, the saintly *Chafetz Chaim* visited his town. The entire community went out to greet the sage. Though it was crowded with people jostling to get a better view, his father raised him on his shoulders, so that he could see the radiance of the one whom they called the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest. (The *Chafetz Chaim* was a *kohen*. He warranted this appellation because of his unparalleled greatness.) For but a moment, he beheld the face of the *Chafetz Chaim*, and he felt the image being inflamed in his consciousness. He knew in his heart that this image would be with him as long as he lived. In the darkest moments, in the bitterest of times, during most painful travails, the brilliance of the shining countenance of the *Chafetz Chaim* illuminated the darkness and gave warmth to the cold, bitter feelings that overwhelmed him. The unforgettable image gave him the strength to go on, to survive, to rebuild.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* listened intently and said, "We will go!"

A *chasid* once came to the *Chidushei HaRim* and stared at him for what seemed an inordinately long time. The *Rebbe* asked the man what he was staring at. The *chasid* replied, "The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* writes, *Re'eh anochi*, 'See, I' (opening words of *Parashas Re'eh*, *Devarim* 11:26), in which Moshe *Rabbeinu* exhorts them: 'A blessing and a curse. A Jew should make an effort to gaze upon the countenance of a *tzaddik*. It will inspire him.' The *Rebbe* replied, 'We say, *v'ameich kulam tzaddikim*, Your nation is all righteous' (*Yeshayah* 60:21). As such, you are also a *tzaddik*. You should look into yourself."

A powerful lesson. One needs to introspect, to be aware of who he really is, and to examine himself without the subjectivity of ego, so that he can determine exactly what he has achieved in his life; his habits, feelings, reactions and behaviors. Forget about the stories you tell others about yourself and your accomplishments. Be truthful with yourself, and you will find that you will be a happier, more satisfied person.