

“Yosef was handsome of form and handsome of appearance.” (39:6)

Yosef’s physical appearance was certainly to the *yetzer hara*’s, evil inclination’s, advantage. Undoubtedly, one who is blessed with the gift of extremely “good looks” is left wide open to contend with the pitfalls which the *yetzer hara* is so skilled at placing before him. *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, cites a story that occurred concerning *Horav Yitzchak Bender, z.l.*, when he was *Rosh HaYeshivah* in Makov. It was the summer of 1913, when a young student by the name of Yitzchak Krakowsky from the city of Lodz, Poland, registered in the *yeshivah*. He was known as “*Reb Yitzchakel Otvozker*,” because of the time he had spent in the city of Otvozk due to a lung condition from which he suffered. He was only sixteen-years old, but his youth extended only to his chronological age. As a scholar, he was well beyond his years, soon becoming one of the foremost scholars in the *yeshivah*. His sagacity was captivating, his profundity in *Torah* knowledge was exemplary.

The *Rosh HaYeshivah*’s *shiurim*, lectures, were well-known for their depth and brilliance. Yet, when the *Rosh HaYeshivah* would begin to say the *shiur*, *Reb Yitzchakel* would soon complete his ideas. It got to the point that the *Rosh HaYeshivah* felt there was nothing more he could teach this young prodigy.

Reb Yitzchakel was also blessed with a physical appearance that was remarkable. His face shone, his high forehead seemed to glow.

Indeed, his total physical image was captivating. Here was a human specimen who was outstanding in his physical and intellectual capacities. The *Rosh HaYeshivah* once related how it came to pass that this exceptional young man was blessed with such an enchanting physical appearance.

It happened that *Reb Yitzchakel*’s parents came to the *yeshivah* to take their son home. The winds of World War I were beginning to gust. While it would not be safe anywhere in Europe, they wanted their child at home with them. When the parents arrived, the *Rosh HaYeshivah* was shocked at the physical appearance of *Reb Yitzchakel*’s father. He was the extreme opposite of his son. While the son was tall, erect and handsome, with radiant skin that seemed to glow, the father was dwarflike, with skin like leather that was dark as a blacksmith’s. It was difficult to imagine that there was any physical relationship between these two people. The *Rosh HaYeshivah* turned to *Reb Yitzchakel*’s father in bewilderment and asked him point blank to explain the “discrepancy” in the physical appearance between father and son. The father turned to the *Rosh HaYeshivah* and said, “Let me tell you the following story which will shed light on the inconsistency in our appearances.

“The story goes back ten generations to the time of *Rav Mordechai Yoffe*, the author of the *Levushim*, an epithet given to him because of his brilliant, scholarly works, each entitled *Levush*,

i.e. *Levush Techeiles*, *Levush Malchus*, etc. As his family name was Yoffe, which was derived from the Hebrew word *yafeh*, beautiful, so was *Rav Mordechai* a man of captivating physical appearance. His visage was something to behold. It is quite possible that his last name was directly associated with his appearance.

“One day *Rav Mordechai*’s good looks almost became the source of his downfall. Similar to what occurred to *Yosef Ha’tzaddik*, our grandfather was confronted with an overwhelming challenge. A beautiful gentile woman was so enchanted with his appearance that she did everything possible to encourage him to sin. When *Rav Mordechai* realized what was occurring, he was determined to ward off her blandishments – even at the expense of his own life.

Outside of the house was a canal filled with sewage. He immediately jumped into the foul-smelling water. The stench on his clothes was so overpowering that the woman was “turned off,” and left *Rav Mordechai* alone. The sewage seeped through all of *Rav Mordechai*’s ten garments that he was wearing at the time. Although his garments were filthy and foul-smelling, his *neshamah*, soul, and moral character remained as pure as before.

“In the merit of his self-sacrifice to triumph over the *yetzer hara*, Hashem gave him the ability to author ten volumes of *halachic* treatise which he named *Levushim*, garments, corresponding to the ten garments that had become soiled. The ten garments which saved him, would yield ten *seforim*, that would inspire a world of *Torah* students. At that moment, *Rav Mordechai* turned his eyes Heavenward and in emotional prayer beseeched Hashem, ‘The next ten generations that will descend from me should be repulsive in appearance, so that they should not encounter the challenges associated with physical beauty.’

“The ten generations, ten generations of descendants whose physical appearance was far from appealing,” continued *Reb Yitzchakel*’s father, “ended with my son. He is the eleventh generation, and with him the beauty begins anew. The external beauty and inner spiritual, moral beauty that reigned simultaneously in my sainted grandfather has returned to my son.”

This incredible story gives us but a glimpse of the greatness of our *Torah* luminaries.