

## **But he (Yosef) adamantly refused. (39:8)**

*Chazal* (*Yoma* 35:13) teach that, if a wicked person (his *neshamah*, soul) comes before the Heavenly Tribunal and is asked, “Why did you not engage in Torah study?” and he replies, “I was handsome and preoccupied with my evil inclination,” we reply to him, “Were you any more handsome than Yosef who did not neglect Torah, despite his beauty?” *Chazal* go on to describe Potifar’s wife’s various machinations to entice Yosef to be with her. He rejected it all because of his abiding devotion to Hashem. This may be good and well, but *Chazal* (*Sotah* 36B) add something to the equation. When Zulikah, Potifar’s wife, grabbed hold of Yosef’s garment, at that moment, an image of his father, Yaakov *Avinu*, appeared in the window and said to him, “Yosef, one day, your brothers’ names will be engraved on the stones of the *Eiphod* (garment worn by the *Kohen Gadol*). Do you want your name to be erased (from that august list)?” In other words, Yosef would have fallen prey to Zulikah’s wiles, if not for Yaakov’s appearance telling him that he was not only throwing away his present, but his future destiny as well. Veritably, Yosef was compelled to contend with a powerful woman who was bent on sin. If his father had not appeared to him, he might have capitulated. If so, he had an advantage over the wicked men who fell prey to their desires. After all, how many wicked people have a father like Yaakov *Avinu* to protect them? If so, Yosef is hardly one to serve as proof that physical appearance and strong desires are able to be surmounted.

*Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, shlita*, explains that *Chazal* are not suggesting that Yosef saw the actual image of his father; rather, Yosef saw his own personal visage which was very much like that of his father. This inspired him to introspect and ask himself, “Is it acceptable for me, the son of the Patriarch Yaakov, grandson of Yitzchak *Avinu* who was prepared to be sacrificed on the *Akeidah*; great-grandson of Avraham *Avinu*, who was the father of *hamon goyim*, a multitude of nations, to act in such a profligate manner? He realized that if he would accede to her advances, he would break asunder the chain of patriarchal lineage.

Thus, Yosef’s behavior obligates all wicked men, because, if they would envision the image of their forebears, they would not sin. The problem is that they refuse to acknowledge their roots. If each individual would just look at the pictures of his elderly grandfather, his visage, and what he represented, it would reconnect him with the teachings of his family. He would realize the trust that was placed in him, as well as the responsibilities he has as a member of the family of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Just as this awareness provided Yosef with the moral clarity and resolve to flee from sin, so, too, will it help each and every one of us.

The following vignette is not new, but, nonetheless, it is well-worth repeating. A man who survived the Holocaust, after tragically losing his sons in the inferno, was getting on in years. Time does not stand still for anyone, and he knew that one day he would be gone and no one would stand up to recite *Kaddish* on his behalf. He turned to his daughter, who was born after the war. A fine *bas Yisrael*, she had given her father much *nachas* over the years. He called her over and explained that, while she could not be his *kaddish*, she could, however, be his *matzeivah*, monument, a living

testament to the manner in which he raised her. He wanted to impress upon her that, while she had done well, his concern was for the future. Would her descendants follow in her path? He explained that his lifetime labor could all be undermined if future generations do not stay the course charted for them by their forebears. One person all the way down in generations can take down the entire family legacy.

He applied a meaningful analogy. Two adjacent communities need to build a large bridge to connect them to one another. The administrators took bids, and one company came in with the lowest bid. They put together a crew of engineers, craftsmen and laborers; hundreds of people were engaged in constructing the bridge. On the day of completion, members of both communities stood at their respective perimeters to see the first car drive across the bridge. The construction company was waiting to be paid before anyone would be allowed to use the bridge. The respective communities were unwilling to pay until they tested the bridge's sturdiness. In order to test the bridge, they took a train of forty loaded freight cars and planned to run the entire train across the bridge. If it withstood the weight, a check would be forthcoming and everyone would go home happy.

The test began. One by one, the freight cars rolled over the bridge. The contractor and all the employees were watching with bated breath to see the outcome of years of physical and emotional toil. The community members on both sides also waited anxiously. The freight cars went over one by one. Thirty cars crossed – thirty-one, thirty-three, thirty-eight, thirty-nine. Finally, the fortieth car began to cross, to the cheers and back-slapping of everyone. When the fortieth car reached the middle of the bridge, they heard a thunderous clap as the bridge buckled in the middle, pulling down all the freight cars and the locomotive. All the toil of the engineers and laborers went down into the ravine in vain. In one moment, they lost everything; their money, reputation, the glory they would have had, all went down, because the last freight car did not make it.

One can live a life of virtue, devotion and abiding commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*. As such, he serves as another link in the succession of generations committed to Hashem. If *chas v'sholom*, Heaven forbid, one of his descendants falls by the spiritual wayside, the link is broken and all the toil of the previous generations will be for naught. We may never be complacent, because complacency leads to stagnation and missed opportunities for growth. It can cause us to overlook potential challenges, underestimate risks or become too comfortable with the status quo. When one does not grow, he regresses. The negative effects may not show up in his time, but the long-term effect can affect future generations. We should never forget the past – but we should always think of the future.