

OUR GREATEST RESOURCE

by Rabbi Label Lam

And so it was- just as she coaxed Yosef day after day, so he would not listen to her, to be with her. Then there was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work- no man of the household staff being there in the house - that she caught hold of him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and he fled and went outside. (Breishis 39:10-12)

To do his work: Rav and Shmuel dispute whether he actually came to do his work or whether he came to be with her and an image of his father appeared before him... (Rashi)

This was the defining moment for Yosef. For all time he would be crowned with the rare title "Yosef HaTzadik"- "The Righteous One". He became worthy of this status for having resisted enormous temptation. Congratulations! However, when we read Rashi we find out that perhaps he had put himself in grave jeopardy that day, and he would have capitulated had not a picture of his father suddenly appeared at the crucial moment. It seems like Yosef was saved by some external force. So where do we see in this episode an exhibition of his greatness?

A local Rav recently related this story. It was something that had just occurred, but the roots of the incident reach back more than sixty years. He was a young boy strolling with his father in the country. With them was a German-Jew a businessman who had just returned from the Midwest. He was raving about the abundance of business opportunities in Wisconsin.

The Rav admitted he had been a precocious child, and so he interjected his own opinion into the adult conversation. "Wisconsin only has a few hundreds of thousand people! What's so great about Wisconsin?" At that instant the man became enraged and gave him a verbal thrashing that left him crying shaken for many weeks. He throttled him over and over again with the phrase, "What you don't know about, don't talk!"

Sixty something years later this now mature man is called by a night nurse to accompany his elderly mother to the hospital on Shabbos, because of complications from an infection. The attending physician questioned him about whether his mother is allergic to penicillin. In his initial thought process he assumed that because he had never heard that she was and neither he nor his siblings were that neither was she.

He was about to tell the doctor that his mother was not allergic to penicillin when a voice from sixty years earlier shouted, "What you don't know about, don't talk!" So he humbly admitted, "I don't know!" A few calls were made and it was discovered that she was in fact allergic to penicillin. Had he

not been told off so harshly, years ago, he might have spoken with presumed assuredness and contributed to the demise of his own beloved mother.

From where did this answer suddenly come? It was retrieved from a rich storehouse embedded deeply within the human mind, where there can be found limitless treasures of useful information and life lessons. Certainly, his sincere desire to do the very best for his mother allowed him to, not only cull that crucial piece of advice at the critical moment, but also to be obedient even to a voice he once found so hurtful. Perhaps this is what King Solomon refers to when he tells us, *"Deep waters of counsel are in the heart of man but a man of understanding will draw it up!"* (Mishlei 20:5)

Yosef was treated to no miracle by the appearance of his father's image. Otherwise, what was his accomplishment? Sure he was conflicted, and he may even have contributed to that conflict but ultimately it was his own powerful desire to overcome that temptation that helped him to conjure his timely memory. Factor now the reverential response to that picture from the past and appreciate, what rescues the Tzadik from the gravest of moral dangers is also our greatest resource. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.