

THE IMAGE OF FATHER IN THE WINDOW SAVED HIM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayeishev

The Image Of Father In The Window Saved Him

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 748 -- The Menorah -- Inside the House or Outside. Good Shabbos!

In Parshas VaYeishev, Yosef rose to become the overseer of the house of Potiphar. Eventually, Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Yosef. The pasuk [verse] teaches, "And Yosef came home to do his work..." [Bereshis 39:11] At that time, Mrs. Potiphar tried to seduce him. According to one opinion in the Talmud, Yosef haTzadik's intention, when he entered the house that day, was in fact to be intimate with her, but at that very moment, the image of his father appeared to him from the window and caused him to abstain from carrying out his intentions.

The Talmud relates that a certain Roman matron asked Rav Yosi the following question: How can it be that a 17-year-old boy, who has been away from his family and all family influence, immersed in the sensuality of Egyptian society -- how was it possible for him to be able to withstand this temptation? The Talmud [Sotah 36b] elaborates that it was that vision of his father in the window telling him "Yosef, in the future your brethren will want to inscribe your name among the stones of the Ephod worn by the Kohen Gadol, together with the names of the other tribes. Do you want to do something that will cause your name to be blotted out from amidst the names of my other sons? Do you want to have the title a shepherd of prostitutes?" When Yosef heard that, he backed off. This fear of losing his connection to his father is what held him back from sinning.

By natural instinct and logic, as the Roman matron asked Rav Yosi, this temptation required super human powers for a 17-year-old young man to resist. However, it was the image of Yaakov -- how can I do this to my father? -- that held Yosef back.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky makes two interesting observations. This image only works if the father has "currency" with his son. If the father does not have "currency" with the son, his appearance in the window is not going to save the day. Just as there is a concept [Chagiga 15b] that "If a teacher appears (in stature) as an Angel of G-d, then one seeks the words of Torah from his mouth," so too it

is the case that if a FATHER appears (in stature) to his children like an Angel of G-d, then and only then will be able to have influence on them. We as parents need to act in a manner that will cause it to be simply impossible for our children to contemplate "how could I ever let my father down and do this to him?"

This is one of the foundations of child rearing -- that a father needs to gain respect and prestige in the eyes of his children. He has to maintain credibility and inspire love and admiration, such that one's children would never contemplate harming their father's reputation or expectations of them.

There was once a Jew who live in Baltimore, Mr. Harry K. Wolpert, who came here in the 1920s. For many years, he was the chairman of the Board of Ner Israel Rabbinical College. He was a student of Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, the Kamenitzer Rosh HaYehsiva and learned under him in Kaminetz. When Mr. Wolpert came to Baltimore in the 1920s, it was almost impossible to make a living without working on Shabbos. Like so many people of his generation, he faced the great test of earning a living that "If you do not come on Saturday, do not bother coming on Monday either." He relates that he was on the verge of taking such a job that required a six-day workweek. However, he was stopped by the image of his Rebbe, Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz. He could not do it to his Rebbe. That literally held him back and he remained a Sabbath observant and honest Jew for all of his 101 years.

Rather than Yaakov Avinu appearing in the window as by Yosef haTzadik, Rav Baruch Ber appeared in the window. This Chazal is telling us that we need to have that type of relationship with our children, such that they love and respect us and want to remain attached to us, thereby never doing anything that puts that relationship at risk.

In Parshas B'Shalach, Rav Yaakov Kamensky writes that Yosef HaTzadik's action enabled the entire incident of the Splitting of the Red Sea. A Medrash states that it was by merit of Yosef's bones (being transported from Egypt back to the Land of Israel) that the Red Sea split, allowing the Jews to pass through. The Medrash derives this from the pasuk "the Sea saw and it fled (vayanas)" [Tehillim 114:3], which uses the same word as when it says "Yosef left his garment in her hand and he ran out (vayanas)" [Bereshis 39:12]. The two "vayanas" words imply a midah k'neged mida - Yosef's supernatural vayanas was the zchus that enabled the super natural Krias Yam Yuf. The Yam Suf could resist deviating from its nature until confronted by Yosef, who deviated from his nature.

Rav Yaakov makes the following observation. By the Splitting of the Sea, the Almighty contemplated drowning the Egyptians and saving the Jews. However, the Midas Hadin [the Attribute of Justice] complained that "these are idol worshippers and those are idol worshippers". In other words, why drown one group of idolaters to save another group of idolaters? The answer to this question is that the Jews are different. They are different because just like the Roman matron could not understand what power held back Yosef from committing that act of adultery, the Almighty could point back and say, "Yes they may be idolaters, but they are still different from the Egyptians. A nation that can have someone like Yosef within their midst, is a nation on a different level. This is a nation that I want

to save, because they can produce a Tzadik such as Yosef and in that merit I am going to save them."

Sometimes It Is Better Not To Say "Please"

At the end of the parsha, Yosef is in prison. He interprets the dream of one of Pharaoh's advisers. He asks this advisor for a favor: (V'asisa nah imadi chessed) "When you will be released from prison, please intercede with Pharaoh to have me released as well." Rashi says regarding the words "V'Asisa nah...." that the word "nah" indicates a request (please).

This seems strange. Someone who is already up to Parshas VaYeshev should already know that the meaning of the word "Nah" is "please." Why is Rashi telling us this again? Rashi already mentioned it in connection with "Kach nah es bincha" (Please take your son) [Bereshis 22:2]. And Rashi says it earlier in this parsha in connection with Tamar "Haker nah" (Please recognize...) [Bereshis 38:25]

The Shemen haTov answers, based on Chazal's criticism of Yosef for -- based on his spiritual level -- putting too much faith in the Wine Butler (Sar haMashkim): by mentioning twice the expression "remember me (to Pharaoh)" Yosef had to spend two more years in prison.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik once met Rav Shimon Shkop and asked, "If Yosef would have only mentioned 'remember me' once to the Sar HaMashkim, how many additional years would he have had to spend in prison?" Rav Shimon responded that since Chazal say that he had to spend two years in prison for mentioning it twice, most likely he would have had to spend one year if he had mentioned it once. Rav Chaim said "No. For mentioning it once, there would have been no punishment at all." Mentioning it once would have been legitimate "hishtadlus" [making appropriate effort to take care of oneself]. Saying it twice shows a lack of faith in G-d by overdoing the hishtadlus. That lack of faith encompasses both of Yosef's requests and such both are deserving of punishment.

Similarly, the Shemen haTov says that the addition of the word "nah" (pretty please) indicates that Yosef was becoming too reliant on the Sar HaMashkim and having too much faith in the Sar HaMashkim's ability to save him and not having enough faith in the Almighty's ability to save him. This is why Rashi once again emphasizes the meaning of the word Nah in this pasuk. It was an unnecessary request.

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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