



Determining Direction

The Torah is not a book of simple stories; each incident contains an in-depth world of *hashkfah*. One such example is the story of Yosef Hatzadik looking for his brothers. As he wanders, he meets a man who asks him, “*mah tevakesh?*”, to which Yosef Hatzadik replies that he is searching for his brothers. The man responds, “*nasu mezeh*”, they already left this area and I overheard them saying they were going to Dotan. (*Bereisheet* 37;15-17) Why is this conversation necessary? In fact, if his destiny was to end up in Egypt, why couldn't the Midyanites have found him there and brought him directly to *Mitzrayim* without involving his brothers at all?

Rashi teaches that the man that Yosef met was none other than *Malach Gavriel*. He spoke, as the Ramban notes, in a way that could be interpreted on multiple levels, yet Yosef did not understand the deeper level. Yosef understood that they left the physical space where he thought

to find them; while the angel was intimating that they had left their relationship of brotherhood. Rav Wolbe in *Shiurei Chumash*, adds that the language of the *passuk* suggests this as the man said, “they left *mezeh*”. *Zeh* always implies pointing to something, in this case, the angel points to Yosef himself to insinuate, “your brothers have left **you**”.

Rav Sorotzkin in *Oznayim Latorah* notes that Hashem specifically sent an angel here to highlight that this episode was the beginning of the *galut* experience. The time had come for the Jewish people to go down to Egypt and begin implementing the Divine plan. Part of that plan had to include the sale of Yosef as a catalyst for their bondage. Had the Midyanites found Yosef at that point, before his encounter with his brothers, one could wonder why it was necessary for the Jews to endure the many years of torturous servitude in Egypt for no apparent reason.

The beauty of this dialogue notes Rav Rice in *Merosh Tzurim*, is the precise orchestration of these events. Had the man not appeared at that exact moment, had he not overheard the conversation of the brothers prior, the course of history would have looked very different. Hashem arranges the specific maneuverings of people and events to carry out His will. Indeed, this is the first principle of faith of the Rambam; we believe that

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Hashem is the master of all that occurs in this world, and he oversees everything. We can habituate ourselves to continually say, “*im yirtzeh Hashem*”, if Hashem wills. It reminds us of our limitations and our complete dependence on Hashem.

Rav Shternbach in *Ta'am Veda'at* adds that this episode reinforces our belief that Hashem leads each person on his path in life. The angel is a prototype; each encounter in every journey is directed from Above. The Ba'al Shem Tov relates how sometimes a person may travel far and although he thinks his purpose is to reach a certain destination, really, he was sent so that his wagon driver can say a *brachah* in a certain location. Our vision is so limited. We can only guess where we go and why we go there.

On a deeper level, this dialogue encapsulates a lesson that Yosef must take with him as he heads towards the next step in his journey, says the Kotzker Rebbe. As he was about to descend into his personal *galut* and endure many experiences, the angel was giving Yosef Hatzadik a valuable tool in perspective. The angel asked him, “*mah tevakesh*”, what do you seek? The Kotzker Rebbe continues, this must be a constant question as we go through life; What is our goal? What is our vision? What do we seek? It is when we can clearly answer this question that we will live a life of focus and meaning. ■

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