

IN A MONTH WE CALL -"AV"

by Rabbi Label Lam

They sat to eat food; they raised their eyes and they saw, behold a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, their camels bearing spices, balsam and lotus- on their way to bring them down to Egypt. (Breishis 37: 25)

Why does the verse reveal their burden? To let you know the reward for the righteous, because it is the way of the Arabs to only carry harsh smelling fuels and for this one spices were prepared so that he would not be damaged by the bad smell. (Rashi)

A question popped up in Chumash class just last week! Joseph is about to be cast away into a twenty-two year exile where he will endure false accusations and imprisonment. Where is the super duper reward for the righteous? Sure, he gets bumped to first class, but where's the flight headed?

Rabbi Moshe Weinberger has often spoken about how his father had managed to bring a pair of Tefillin into the infamous concentration camp of Mathausen. During the time he was interred there, he and many others managed to put on this particular pair of Tefillin. He told his son on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah that two times, for the purpose of delousing, all the inmates were made to remove all their clothing. He was forced to part with the beloved Tefillin. However after the bulldozer passed by pushing all the refuse to the side -behold, his Tefillin were there to be reclaimed. He puts on those same Tefillin till this very day. Although all seemed so bleak at times, he survived with a sense he was not alone.

I took a trip recently to Israel so that my son might put on his Tefillin for the first time, thirty days before his Bar Mitzvah, at the Western Wall. On the very last day of our ten day stay we went to visit Yad Vashem -The Holocaust Museum. It was packed with visitors of all types and stripes that day. As we moved from exhibit to exhibit we found ourselves becoming more and more emotionally impacted by what we were witnessing. At one point I was standing next to a smallish man with a Yarmulka. He was with his family. I glanced down and noticed numbers tattooed on his arm. I shouldered up to him. Without a word of exchange he looked in my direction nodding his head and confirmed, "Auschwitz!"

I told the man that we came to Israel so my son, who just began his career of wearing Tefillin might gather as many blessings as possible from great Rabbis and Tzadikim and that the Klausenberger Rebbe ztl. had said that if one wants to know from whom it is worthy to receive a blessing, find someone with numbers on his arm and he still puts on Tefillin. I asked him if he wouldn't mind

blessing my boy. He lit up with joy and a tearful sincerity and he blessed him. We treasure that encounter and value the blessing.

We can only imagine the enormity of the personal angst and torment Joseph experienced on his way down to the depths of his personal exile in Egypt. To be torn away from his father by his brothers, all at once like that, must have hurt him very deeply. Then a small drop of goodness enters his otherwise dreary universe- The pleasant aroma of spices surrounds him and the awareness- These are Ishmaelites. Their usual load consists of harsh smelling spices. He is not just briefly comforted but rather forever fortified. He is not alone. The suffering is not meaningless. His Father-in Heaven is orchestrating even this unpleasant event for some greater good. How true!?

Maybe it's only a Tzadik who can catch an ever so subtle sign in a world in which subtlety seems lost. Or perhaps, like finding a blessing in the gloomiest of places like a Holocaust Museum or in the Holocaust itself, this is what we can all hope to connect with in a month we call -"Av"! Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.