

# LIFESAVERS

*by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig*

Upon receiving word that Yosef (Joseph) was alive and well in Egypt, Yaakov (Jacob) was initially skeptical. But when "he saw the wagons ("agalos" in Hebrew) that Yosef had sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived." (Beraishis/Genesis 45:27) Rashi explains the significance of the wagons was that as Yosef departed from Yaakov's home they were learning about the mitzvah of Eglarufah (see Devarim/Deuteronomy 21:1-9), the heifer that is decapitated by the Elders of the closest city to a corpse that is found between cities ("eglar" and "agalar" share a common spelling). Yosef sent wagons to transmit the message to his father that he had internalized and continued to live by the lessons that he had been taught as a lad.

Maharal (acronym for Rabbi Yehuda Loewe, 1526-1609, one of the seminal figures in Jewish thought in the last half millennium; Chief Rabbi of Moravia, Posen and Prague; author of works in all fields of Torah) asks the significance of this particular mitzvah being the last thing Yaakov and Yosef had learned together. Surely it could not have been coincidental, for Yosef was so certain that Yaakov would remember that that was the last thing they had learned. Rabbi Loewe explains that part of the mitzvah of Eglarufah is that, after the animal is axed, the elders of the city wash their hands over the animal and declare that they did not spill the blood of the murdered individual. The Talmud (Sotah 46b) notes the peculiarity of this declaration: would one really think that the elders of the city murdered the stranger? The Talmud explains that the elders are declaring that they were unaware of this man's presence in the city, for had they been aware of his presence, they surely would not let him leave without accompanying him for the beginning of his journey, for no harm will befall one who is accompanied as he leaves a city. Maharal explains that the accompaniment upon departure indicates that he is a recognizable member of the greater society. As one making an impact on the society, he merits a heavenly protection. However, one who is not accompanied is not designated as a significant member of the society at large. If society does not value what he has to offer, they have, in a sense, killed him as they have negated his ability to contribute. Thus, the elders must declare that they did not kill him, because by ignoring his value and allowing him to leave unattended, they would have, in a sense, killed him.

Maharal concludes that as father and son reached Chevron, Yosef did not want to inconvenience Yaakov any further. Yaakov then taught him the lesson of Eglarufah, that one who does not escort is compared to a murderer. Twenty two years later, Yosef's wagons stated: "Dear Father, you escorted me. As per your teaching, I merited divine supervision, and I have survived this ordeal unscathed." When Yaakov witnessed Yosef's demonstration of this lesson, his spirit was revived.

In our life's effort to emulate the Divine, we must appreciate that we, too, have the ability to provide others with the gift of life. We know so many who question their value or import in this world, people who feel alone and downtrodden. When we take the time to demonstrate to them that we value them as people, and what they can contribute to the world around us, we do not simply offer them an emotional boost, we literally give them life.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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