

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"They [the brothers] sat down to eat bread, and they lifted up their eyes, and they saw; and behold, a caravan of Yishmaelites was coming from Gilad, bearing various spices, going to descend to Egypt." [32:35]

Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, asks a straightforward question: why does the verse bother to describe the cargo? Does it make a difference?

The answer, Rashi explains, is to tell you the benefits given to righteous people. Normally, the Arab caravans would carry kerosene and resin, which have a bad smell. For Yoseph's sake, this one happened to be carrying pleasant spices, so that he wouldn't need to suffer the bad odor.

In common language: huh?

Yoseph goes out to meet his brothers. They turn on him, strip him of his coat, and throw him in a pit. A snake could bite him at any moment - but he can pray to G-d to be rescued from the pit. But when his brothers take him out, it is only in order to sell him! He is about to be carried off into slavery, hundreds of miles away. And Rashi says, because he's a righteous person, the people carrying him into slavery are carrying sweet-smelling spices. What sort of wonderful benefit is this? Would Yoseph even *notice* the smell?

The answer, as offered by Rabbi Asher Rubenstein, shlit"a, is that whether or not it was of any importance - G-d gives a person exactly, precisely what's needed. For whatever reason, Yoseph needed to go down to Egypt not as a prince, but as a slave - and to enjoy elevation, downfall, and then a rise to prince-hood while he was there. This was all part of the Divine plan.

But there was no need for Yoseph to experience a bad odor. He had no transgression which he might be moved to correct with this mild punishment. The odor would not better enable him to fulfill his destiny or elevate himself spirituality. So he was given only what he needed - and the same is true for every person.

There's another angle here as well. It looked pretty bad for Yoseph, going from the pit into slavery. When the situation was so terrible - perhaps that was exactly the time to recognize a small signal that G-d was still with him. He was a righteous person, and G-d wasn't rejecting him.

When everything looks bad, we often only need to look around us more carefully to see the good parts. Perhaps the best way to find the light at the end of the tunnel, is to look for its reflection on the walls.

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