

# MANY ROUTES, ONE DESTINATION

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

*"And [Yosef] sent off his brothers, and they went, and he said to them, 'Do not become agitated on the way.'" (45:24)* Why was Yosef concerned that they may become agitated on the way? Simply, it appears that Yosef feared that having just revealed himself, the matter of his sale into slavery must certainly be on the brothers' minds, and perhaps the brothers would quarrel with one another over who was responsible for his sale.

Rashi, however, quotes a Midrashic explanation: Yosef told them, "Do not become engrossed in halachic discussion, so that the trip should not become a source of agitation for you." What was it that caused Yosef to worry at this juncture that his brothers may become so involved in a halachic discussion as to affect their very safety during the journey? And if such a problem was to be expected, why didn't Yaakov warn them about this when they left Eretz Canaan to journey to Egypt?

Yalkut Yehuda explains that Yosef, by instructing them to move to Mitzrayim, had presented them with a complicated halachic dilemma. Under normal circumstances it is forbidden for one who lives in Eretz Yisrael to leave. However, the Gemara (Bava Basra 91a) says that when there is a shortage of food, and produce is only available elsewhere, one may leave. Now, one could reason that this only applies if one has no means of arranging for provisions to be delivered to Eretz Yisrael. Here, however, Yaakov's family could have made arrangements to obtain provisions from Yosef. On the other hand, it is possible that they are only required to remain if food is obtainable within Eretz Yisrael, but if produce is only available from abroad, they are permitted to leave. This was the sort of halachic discussion which could have caused intense argument and agitation among the brothers. Thus, he cautioned them, "Do not become agitated on the way!"

Rav Yechezkel of Kuzmir zt"l used to explain Yosef's warning homiletically. There is a saying that when three Jew's have a discussion, there will be four opinions. Even among the Orthodox and Chareidi populous of our nation, the number of different sects is astonishing. We have Chassidish; Litvish/Yeshivish; Mizrachi; Yekish; Sefardi; Centrist; Modern Orthodox; and so on and so forth. Within each of these major groupings, there are tens and in some cases hundreds of sub-groups. Each of these groups and sub-groups adheres to and promotes its own tenets and principles.

There is nothing wrong with this. There are many ways to serve Hashem, and what "does the trick" for one Jew might not feel right to someone else. What often happens, however, is that to some extent each person begins to feel that their way is "the right way". This is where the "divisions" become divisive. Hostilities arise between different groups and sub-groups, each side claiming that

their way is clearly the truthful one. And when arguments are based on "truthfulness," hostilities can become particularly bitter.

If only people would remember the words of Chazal, our Sages (Berachos 58a), "Just as their appearances differ, so do their attitudes differ." We don't get upset with others just because they don't look like us!

A tzaddik was once asked, "There are so many different opinions - Which is the correct way to serve Hashem?" He answered, "If a doctor were to prescribe the same medicine for each of his patients, no matter what their ailment, what kind of doctor would he be? Each patient requires his own care and his own medicine. So too, each Jew requires his own dose of spiritual medicine!"

Two Jews were once arguing about the best route to get to a certain destination. "My way is the best," insisted the one. "No, my way is certainly the best," claimed the other. Along came a mutual friend. "Listen," he said to the two of them, "you arrived safely, right? And you also arrived safely. You're happy with your way, and you're happy with your way. So what are you arguing about?!"

This concept, says R' Yechezkel, can be alluded to in Yosef's warning. "Don't become agitated on the way!" You have your own way; that's fine. But don't become agitated when others don't see things the same way you do. Each person and each group is entitled to forge its own way in serving Hashem, providing it falls within the Torah framework.

This is also alluded to, says the Rizhener Rebbe zt"l, in the beginning of this week's sidrah (44:18), "And let not your anger flare up at your servant." Don't allow your anger to flare up over your service of Hashem, just because others don't see things the same way you do. We have to be tolerant, accepting, and even encouraging of all Torah factions. Each group reveals new paths upon which some Jews will "find their way" to serve Hashem.

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