

WHO ARE YOU FOOLING?

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

This week's sidrah, Shemos, begins with a review of the end of sefer Bereishis (Genesis).

"And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt with Yaakov, each man and his household came: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehudah... [In total] seventy souls, and Yosef was in Egypt. (1:1-5)"

Rashi is bothered by the obvious redundancy: Was Yosef in Egypt more so than any of the other brothers? And didn't we already know that Yosef was in Mitzrayim (Egypt) - he was, after all, a major focus of the last part of sefer Bereishis?

Rashi explains that the intention of the verse is not simply to make us aware of Yosef's whereabouts. That we knew. Rather, it comes to teach us about Yosef's attitude: Yosef did not change despite his position.

"He was the same Yosef who shepherded his father's sheep in Canaan - and he was the same Yosef who was viceroy in Mitzrayim; he remained righteous."

What may at times to the casual eye appear to be simple, is in fact not simple at all. Was Yosef in Mitzrayim; or was Mitzrayim in Yosef?

Yosef lead a dual life. To the Egyptians he was a viceroy, second only to Pharaoh. He was dressed in royal garments of fine linen, and had a gold chain placed upon his neck. He rode in the second royal chariot, and undoubtedly played the part of one vested with the power of monarchy. To his brothers, Yosef seemed to be an older but largely unchanged version of the same brother they had always known. Where did Yosef's heart - his priorities - truly lie? Was he "Tzafnas Pa'aneach" (his Egyptian name), Egyptian viceroy, playing the role of Yosef, son of Yaakov? Or was he one of the Twelve Tribes of Yaakov, who had inadvertently been raised to the position of viceroy.

Rashi explains that the latter was true. Yosef remained Yosef. The riches, the monarchy, the power, did not change him at all. He remained true to his heritage and his upbringing.

The story is told of a successful young shopkeeper in pre-war Europe who used to daven (pray) in a chassidische shtiebel (shul), and who owned two sets of clothing. Every morning, when he got dressed to go to his pre-davening shiur, he would don his chassidische garb. After praying, he would return home and change into his "work attire," clothing which in his mind made him seem more acceptable to those with whom he did business. In the evening, when he returned home from work,

he would again change back into his "davening clothes," and make his way to the shtiebel for Mincha and Ma'ariv (afternoon and evening prayers).

One day, as he stood in his store absent-mindedly making sure his beard was rolled up neatly, it hit him that he was living a sham: To the street, he was a successful and worldly businessman. Yet before setting foot in shtiebel, he meticulously made sure that he was no different than his friends. Occasionally, in his rush to catch prayers on time, we would momentarily set out to shul in his street clothing, only to catch himself and quickly go back home to change into his shtiebel-attire, sometimes missing Mincha in the process. When this would happen, he would thank Hashem for saving him from embarrassment.

"What a fraud I am!" he thought to himself. "It's about time I stop fooling all of my friends, and let them see 'the real me.'" He made up his mind that he would show up that day to Mincha without changing his clothing.

As expected, the moment he entered the shtiebel with his short jacket and beard rolled up neatly, heads turned. One of the elderly members even approached him and asked him what was wrong.

"Nothing," he said. "It's just that I've been fooling you all these years. I have always dressed this way in my store. I decided that the time has come for you all to see 'the real me.'"

"But you don't understand," said the elderly chassid. "We always knew that you dressed differently 'out there.' Yet all along, we thought it was 'them' you were fooling. Now we know that the whole time, you were really fooling us!"

At some level, all of us lead "dual-lives." We are one way in shul; and another way at home. At work, we portray a certain image; among friends, a different us becomes apparent. The question we must ask ourselves is: Who are we fooling?

There are times we may feel we are suffering from a case of "multiple personality syndrome." We are so many things to so many people, that it is all too easy to lose sight of the "real us." When asked where our true priorities lie, the answer at first appears to be simple. Sometimes, however, when we gaze within ourselves a little deeper, we are shocked to find that the real us proves to be more elusive to find than we had at first expected.

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