

“And she (Hagar) departed, and strayed in the desert of Be’er Sheva.” (21:14)

The *Torah* should have said, “She departed to/towards the desert of Be’er Sheva and she strayed,” for she did not stray immediately upon her entry into the desert. The sentence reads that “she departed and strayed,” implying that she did not stray only in the concrete sense: she strayed from the truth immediately upon her departure. In his commentary, *Rashi* suggests that Hagar shirked off the yoke of belief, exchanging it for a life of nomadic belief, straying farther and farther from the truth. We have yet to understand *Rashi*’s reason for saying that “straying” here does not only mean in a physical sense, but moreso from a spiritual perspective. She had alienated herself from Hashem.

Horav Sholom Shwadron, z.l., offers a penetrating response based upon an incredible incident that took place concerning the great *gaon* and *tzadik*, *Horav Mordechai Pogremanski, z.l.* Once *Horav* Pogremanski had occasion to travel by train to a distant city. It happened that he was sitting next to another traveler, a Jew who happened to be a *shochet*, ritual slaughterer, and *mohel*, ritual circumciser. The two became so engrossed in conversation that they did not realize that they had missed their stop. The *shochet* looked out the window and realized that they were in a strange town quite a distance from their intended destination. To make matters worse, it was *Erev Shabbos* and no other train was around that could take them back that day. They would have to spend *Shabbos* in this town far away from Jewish civilization.

The *shochet* was very worried: where would they find a Jewish family to host them? Where would they find *kosher* food for *Shabbos*? *Rav* “Mottel” told him, “Do not worry. A Jew never strays on the road. Every place that he comes to is Providential, ordained by Hashem for a purpose.” With these words in mind, they descended the train and started out into the town in search of one of their co-religionists. They quickly learned that this was a gentile town; no Jews were to be found anywhere. The *shochet* worried, while *Horav* Pogremanski maintained his conviction that they were here for a purpose, yet to be revealed.

After awhile, they discovered that there was one solitary Jew living in the town. They immediately proceeded to locate his home. When they arrived at the home of the Jew, the man who greeted them was in a state of shock. Never before had two Jews come to his door! Suddenly, the shock gave way to great emotion, as tears began streaming down the Jew’s face. After a few moments, he was able to constrain himself long enough to welcome his guests amid great joy and emotion. “What great merit I have that Avraham *Avinu* and Eliyahu *Ha’Navi* have come to grace my house,” the Jew excitedly blurted out. When they looked at him in amazement, he related the following story: “A week ago, my wife gave birth to a healthy little boy. Today is the eighth day, the day that he should have his *Bris Milah*. My mind has been overwhelmed with the question, ‘Who will be

his *mohel*, who will give him a *Bris*?’All day I have been standing in prayer, crying out my heart to the Almighty to hear my plea. Please, Hashem, send me someone to perform the *Bris Milah* on my son. Undoubtedly, the two of you have been Heaven-sent for this purpose. Hashem has listened to my prayers.”

As mentioned, the *shochet* was also a *mohel*. He performed the *Bris*, according to *halachic* tradition with *Rav* Mottel serving as *sandek*, godfather, who holds the infant during the procedure. One can only begin to imagine the joy and happiness that permeated that home during that memorable occasion. As they left after *Shabbos* to return to their respective homes, *Rav* Mottel turned to his fellow traveler, commenting, “See, I told you that a Jew never goes astray on the road. It is all for a purpose.”

Horav Shwadron adds that this idea applies equally to Hagar. If she was “straying” in the desert, it is an indication that she had already alienated herself from Avraham *Avinu*’s monotheistic teachings, for a Jew never strays on the road. She was no longer a member of that august milieu.