

As for me, Hashem has guided me on the way. (24:27)

How often do we become frustrated with a situation or a person, to the point that we wonder what is it that Hashem is asking of us? Eliezer was sent on a mission, an impossible mission: to find a suitable mate for Yitzchak (*Avinu*). Yitzchak was raised by Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Imeinu*. He was the *Olah Temimah*, perfect sacrifice. The world “out there” was pagan-oriented, with no moral/ethical compass and even less of a spiritual focus. If Avraham sends, Eliezer goes. The lodestar that guided and maintained him was, *Anochi baderech nachani Hashem*; “As for me, Hashem has guided me on the way.” Alone, far away from the spiritual home in which he was mentored, Eliezer realized that geographic distance and venue had no impact on him. He was *b’derech nachani Hashem*, led by the Almighty, Who is his Guide and Companion. He was never alone. As such, he left himself entirely to the guidance of Hashem. His mission was to travel – where the end of the journey would be was to be determined by Hashem. Hashem would also determine how it would end – in success or failure. If one maintains such an attitude toward life, he has no reason for frustration. The most impossible situation, the seemingly overwhelming obstacles, seem to iron themselves out.

Rashi alludes to this idea when he comments on *ba’derech*, on that way: *derech ha’mezuman*, “the way which has been prepared”; *derech ha’yashar* “the straight way”; *b’oso derech she’ha’yeesee tzarich* “on that way which I needed.” Eliezer teaches us that Hashem prepares the straight way, even though, in our limited vision, it does not appear to be straight. Hashem presents us with the way that we need, the way which is best suited for us. We do not necessarily see it this way, but, as observant Jews, we believe that the way we travel is the Heavenly-designated way best suited for us, because Hashem Himself has prepared it for us.

Al chayeinu ha’nesunim b’Yadecha, “For our lives which are committed to Your power.” Lest anyone think that he is master over his own life, we acknowledge and declare (*Modim*) that our every breath and step is the direct result of Hashem’s will. Our destiny is in Hashem’s hands. This is what is meant by, *Anochi ba’derech nachani Hashem*.

Hashgachah Pratis, Divine Providence, Heavenly manipulations: we could write a book of stories about this topic. It would be about daily occurrences, many of which we do not understand, but nonetheless believe occur for a good reason. A young high school student from an assimilated family in New York was sent by his parents to a private high school. It was no ordinary private school, because his parents wanted the finest education for their precious son. The fact that the school was run by Jesuits and that the teachers were themselves priests meant nothing to them. They had long ago discarded any affiliation with Judaism.

They told their son that he was Jewish, but “today” it meant nothing. The teacher gave his class an assignment at the end of the school year: write a paper about the life of a great man. The teenager went to the library (in the days before Google) and somehow came across Maimonides, the Rambam. He read that he was a famous Jew. Well, since he, too, was Jewish, he would write

about him. He received an A+ on the paper and a note from the teacher to meet him after class.

The teacher was impressed with the young man and said so. He asked him what had prompted him to write about the *Rambam*. "I am Jewish, so I figured I would write about a famous Jew," the boy said. "You are Jewish?" the teacher asked. "Why do you attend a Catholic school?" "My parents insist on an excellent education," the teenager replied. "Do you know what it means to be Jewish? Do you know what Judaism believes, its tenets and religious codes?" the priest asked. "No," the student replied. This was the first time in his young life that he actually felt a sense of shame that he was clueless concerning a religion that he was a part of. (Indeed, this is often what happens when one is raised in a secular background. He is unaware that he is missing out on his heritage. He does not know that he is part of a national destiny.) The priest took out a small pad of paper, wrote a phone number in *Eretz Yisrael*, and said, "If you one day have occasion to be in Jerusalem, call this number. They will guide and educate you about your religion."

The conversation left its impact on the young student. Since he had just completed his sophomore year of high school, a trip to the Holy Land was not in the plans. Two years later, upon graduation, however, he decided to make the trip and discover more about the Judaism his parents had so conveniently deleted from his life. (This is another injustice which secular Jewish parents perpetrate against their unknowing children. What right does a parent have to deprive a child of his/her G-d-given legacy? He should be allowed to make his own decision.) The student went to *Eretz Yisrael*, made the call and was welcomed with open arms by a *yeshivah* that specialized in reaching out to unaffiliated students who were interested in studying about their heritage. Four years later, he returned home. (Apparently, his parents were understanding. After all, he could be climbing the mountains of Tibet in search of himself. This seemed safer.) When he returned to America a different person, with a different external image, he was now very knowledgeable in Jewish learning and fully observant. He decided to return to his school and look up the priest that had catalyzed his spiritual metamorphosis.

When he entered the priest's office, the priest had no idea who he was. Four years had passed, and he no longer looked the way he did then. Today, he looked like a full-fledged *ben Torah*. It is not every day that a *yeshivah* student visits a priest in a Catholic high school. He introduced himself to the priest as the student to whom he had given a phone number in Jerusalem, and it all came because his parents wanted the finest education for their precious son. The fact that the school was run by Jesuits and that the teachers were themselves priests meant nothing to them. They had long ago discarded any affiliation with Judaism.

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