

Behold, a caravan of Yishmaelim was coming from Gilead, their camels bearing spices, balsam, and lotus...(37:25)

What does the composition of the Yishmaelim's cargo mean to us? *Rashi* claims that Hashem intervened on Yosef's behalf. Yishmaelim usually carry foul-smelling cargo. In order to spare Yosef from being subjected to the harsh odor, Hashem "arranged" that this caravan carry only sweet-smelling spices. This is enigmatic! Imagine being sold as a slave -- with no hope for redemption. Yosef's life was literally falling apart in front of his eyes. Should he be concerned about the odor of the cargo that was to accompany him?

Horav Mordechai Pogremonsky, zl, compares this to a sick man who has undergone a very serious and dangerous surgery. Everyone stands around his bed as he lies unconscious from the effects of the surgery. Suddenly, he opens his eyes; all assembled break into extreme joy, knowing that phase one of his recovery has been successfully achieved. His open eyes are far from proof that the surgery was successful, but the initial alertness is a hopeful sign that the patient is on the road to recovery.

The same idea may be applied to Yosef. Amidst his terrible predicament, Yosef noted a slight change, a behavior pattern which is atypical. Thus, he was encouraged and hopeful. Everyday the Arab merchants carried foul-smelling cargo. If --specifically today the caravan to which he was sold was carrying sweet-smelling spices, it was a message from Hashem that the future would not be so bad. There was hope. There is no greater assurance than the knowledge that Hashem is with us--all the way. Perhaps if we look a little closer, we might also see the silver lining shining through the clouds.