

Vayeshev: I Seek My Brothers

- Submitted by Nisson Shulman.

How could Joseph get lost on the way to Shechem? When the angel found him he doesn't ask "mi tevakesh" but "ma tevakesh". Joseph isn't looking for the road. He is looking for brotherhood. The angel was asking, "What disturbs you?" And Joseph answered "I seek those I can call real brothers. This is a story that applies in many ways today.

VAYESHEV
(Unknown authorship)

Everyone knows the story of Joseph. And yet, whenever I read it and study it, there is something new that leaps out of the words, a nuance, and an insight that can teach us about our society, our people, and ourselves.

Remember when Joseph was searching for his brothers, and got lost in the area of Dotan? Here was the great Torah personality who dreamed of heaven and earth kneeling at his feet, who envisaged a career of power and prestige for himself – who was destined to head an empire and to save humanity from hunger and starvation. Joseph, who was preferred by his father and taught by him, so that he was the direct heir to the sacred knowledge that came down from Avraham. And yet here he is, portrayed as toeh basadeh, a lost man.

It is perplexing. Why should a young man like Joseph be lost? The road to Shechem was easy enough to find. Perhaps that is what the angel had in mind when he asked him, not – "Mi tevakesh", "Whom are you seeking?" but rather, "Ma tevakesh, " What are you seeking?"

The word "Ma" teaches that the angel was aware that something was disturbing Joseph. So he asked him, "What ails you? What's missing from your life that makes you, of all people, a lost man"? And the reply comes vehemently and without hesitation; "Et achai anochi mevakesh" – "I am looking for my brothers!" My tragedy is that those that have so much in common with me, who are part of the same heritage and tradition that is mine, they who have it within their power to make my lot happy and my goals easier to attain, are at this very moment plotting against me. Et Achai Anochi Mevakesh; I seek those whom I can call real brothers and true friends."

Now this question applies to all of us today. Are you lost? There are thousands of people in every society who are lost, troubled and weighed down by pressing problems, paralysed by fears and doubts, who cannot find themselves. They are lost to themselves and to the world.

How true – and how painful that is. We have many acquaintances, but rarely do we have true friends. We have business associates, organisational brothers, card circles, but the all important thing in life – a true friend – a real brother or sister whose heart is at one with our own heart – that we rarely find; and, lacking that, how poor and anaemic life can be!

Stop and consider! Do we honestly feel we have someone on whom we can depend in an hour of need? Who will honour the trust we place in them? How many people who relied on friends have

been disappointed? At a time of such recession as we are now in, there are many who will come to friends for help, and sometimes they will be relieved and gratified, but sometimes, the story will be a tragic rejection.

How many young people have dreamed of a day in their lives when they would establish homes with a sweetheart, a good friend, walking through life hand in hand, and then found themselves lost in a maze of infidelity, moral dishonesty and unfaithfulness! How many parents are there who toiled and slaved and denied themselves even bare necessities of life, dreaming of the day when their children would crown their own old age with honour and joy, only to find themselves forsaken, unwanted?

There is an old, well-used story of a man who found it hard to locate his clothing and other items upon arising in the morning. One evening he took a paper and pencil and, as he undressed, noted down exactly everything he had on and where he put it. The next morning he took the slip of paper in his hands and he started to read. "Cap is on the chair. Trousers and jacket are in the closet. Shoes are under the bed." He dressed according to this list and it worked out beautifully. When he came to the last item on the list, he read "And I am in bed". The story goes that he began to search for himself and after a while he cried out in frustration "I've found everything that belongs to me but what good is it when I myself am lost?"

Well, the story is old, and does not sound very realistic. But that surely is the real story of mankind today! We have found everything! Our inventions are immense. Our discoveries are colossal. But we ourselves are often lost. We thought we had finally achieved a measure of freedom for the world and possibly tranquillity, when suddenly wars are erupting like little volcanoes in different parts of the world. It's very hard to teach people of the world, even if they are neighbours, inhabiting even the same stretch of land, that brotherhood means that they should recognise and understand each other. I am not speaking of those evil people who have dedicated themselves to our death and destruction as a people, and to whom human life means nothing. That is a parsha by itself. I am speaking of fellow human beings in our own towns and cities, our own offices and shuls. I am speaking of bringing people closer.

When a stranger comes to shul, is he greeted warmly? If he is in a strange city for some reason, far from home and loved ones, is he readily invited to share home and heart with you? When someone seems troubled, do you seek to help? When real trouble comes to a family as it has to so many in recent months, are you there with them, with all your heart?

The tragedy of September 11th has helped all America become more sensitive to this. We should lead the way.

There was a man in a mountainous country who was walking along one misty morning and saw something so strange-looking moving on a mountainside that he became frightened, and was ready to run from danger. When he approached he found it was a man. When he came very close to the man he discovered that it was his brother.

In times like this, we must seek our brothers, to give more than physical help. Now is the time to reach out like a brother and a sister to those who are searching for fellowship, for help, for a

heart in which to confide, for a shoulder on which to cry, for someone to hold their hand and support them over difficult places in life. Et ahay anochi mevakesh. I seek my brothers.