

2007 Kol Nidre Honor Roll

Yasher Koach and Thank You to the members of our **2007 Kol Nidre Honor Roll**. There is still time to join by pledging \$180 or more towards this year's important campaign. We will update our Honor Roll weekly. We look forward to 100% participation from all our members and friends. The funds raised will literally support all the wonderful programs that make our synagogue such a special place. All contributions are very much needed and greatly appreciated.

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PLANNED HISTORY by Rabbi David Algaze

"And a man found him (Joseph) and behold he was blundering in the field and the man asked him, 'What are you seeking?'. And he said, 'My brothers I am seeking; tell me, please, where are they pasturing.' The man said, ' They have journeyed on from here, for I have heard them saying,' 'Let us go to Dothan.'" (Beresheet 37:15ff)

This mysterious passage, which appears superfluous to the main narrative, has attracted many commentaries. Why should we know this detail which seems unnecessary? Why is Joseph "blundering" (*to'eh*) in a place which was probably very familiar to him? Finally, who is this "man" that appears out of nowhere to give Joseph this pithy message?

The Midrash Tanhuma identifies this "Man" as the angel Gabriel (see Rashi). This man was probably a mere man who, unaware of his mission, was fulfilling an important role in the involvement of the events that will create the Egyptian bondage and Israel's ultimate redemption from there. The Ramban comments that these "men" are called "angels" because they have a role assigned to them by the Author of all history. This is to demonstrate that "The plan of G-d will be realized" (Proverbs 19:21). The Angel is a mere man who becomes, ignorant of his role, a real agent of G-d and who fulfills, unaware, the mission that G-d desires. This anonymous man did not know his role at all. He was probably happy that he had simply helped a "lost" traveler by showing him the way. Yet, his role was a decisive element in the events that were to follow, namely the Egyptian bondage, the Exodus, the receiving of the Torah at Sinai and the conquest of the land by the people of Israel.

We find a parallel in the strange story attending the illness of Count Esterhazy's wife at the end of the 19th century. Esterhazy was at the time an important official in France who, pressed by his debts resulting from his wife's ailments, resorted to stealing important documents from the French Army and selling them to Germany. This action eventually led to the false accusation of Col. Dreyfus and the impact of his trial on the young mind of Theodor Herzl. This led him to conceive the need for a Jewish state, the convening of the Zionist Congresses and the ultimate creation of the State of Israel. What would have happened if his wife had not been ill? Here is a clear example of a key in the chain of events performed by parties who are oblivious of the grand design and act only according to their own personal needs. Yet, in the grand design of History, the Author links these events together to achieve His Ultimate Plan.

We are aware of the apparent disconnect between our actions and the results that follow. We all encounter situations in which our acts and plans do not achieve the intended goal and, sometimes, they actually produce the opposite of what we intended. How often have our most elegant plans crushed against the rocks of a hard reality for reasons beyond our control? This is true both on the personal and national levels.

This phenomenon has led to two divergent theories to explain these anomalies. One is the fatalist theory, by which all human actions are meaningless and all our plans are led by the absurd. Man's actions are deemed to be a mere Sisyphean attempt that leads nowhere. This was the philosophy of modern existentialism and it resonates today with most of the people in the world.

Against this negativist theory, The Torah presents a new and important view. This is a positive, optimistic view that considers that all acts, whether good or bad, are being intertwined by the Supreme Weaver of historical events, in order to produce a tapestry according to His design. In our parasha, all human actions are meaningful because they are a part of a pattern that the Weaver is creating. The sale of Joseph, the subsequent events in Egypt, the going down there by Jacob and his family and the subsequent enslavement there—all were part of the original design. Although the main characters may have been oblivious of the grand design—as the mysterious "man" in our passage was—they all were fulfilling the roles assigned to them by G-d. Hashem, Who watches everything from His Superior perspective, was able to weave all these pieces together into the tapestry He originally designed. We, as human beings, limited in our perspective and unable to see the whole plan may not always see the connection between our actions and the ultimate results.

This is the beautiful message of this passage and the entire story of our parasha: "the plan of G-d will become a reality." Man's actions are not absurd or meaningless. Even passive or apparently insignificant acts, may be part of a Divine Design that links pieces together into a beautiful tapestry. This passage teaches us that all human actions, even when we are unaware of it, have meaning. It is just because of our limited perspective that we fail to see the meaning behind our actions or the events of our lives, but if we have trust in G-d's Design, all the actions of our lives will acquire greater significance and we will not feel the oppression of meaninglessness and despair. When we doubt, when we do not know why this is happening to us, we should recite this verse, "The plan of G-d will be realized." This will lead to trust in Hashem and help us regain our optimism in a difficult and sometimes threatening world.