

THE CURIOUS CASE OF "ANONYMOUS" IN GENESIS 37: OFFERING DIRECTIONS, CHANGING HISTORY

Genesis 37: 1-20 (Parshat Vayeishev)

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְדוֹר אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: ב אֵלֶּה | תְּלֻדֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שִׁבְעֵ-עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־אֲחָיו בְּצֹאן וְהָיָא נֶעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בְלֵהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל־אָבִיהֶם: ג וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בְרִזְקִים הָיָה לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים: ד וַיֵּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי־אִתּוֹ אֶהַב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכִלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם: ה וַיַּחְלֹם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגִּד לְאָחָיו וַיֹּסִפּוּ עוֹד שָׁנֹא אֹתוֹ: ו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמַעוּ־נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתִּי: ז וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי וְנָחְנוּ מֵאֲלֵמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלֵמְתִי וְגַם־נִצְבָה וְהִנֵּה תִסְבְּינָה אֲלֵמְתֵיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּן: ח לְאֲלֵמְתִי: ח וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם־מִשׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיֹּסִפּוּ עוֹד שָׁנֹא אֹתוֹ עַל־חֲלַמְתּוֹ וְעַל־דִּבְרָיו: ט וַיַּחְלֹם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיֹּסִפֵּר אֹתוֹ לְאָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלַמְתִּי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד עֶשְׂרֵה כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּיִם לִי: י וַיֹּסִפֵּר אֶל־אָבִיו וְאֶל־אֲחָיו וַיַּגִּיעַ־בּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֶה הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתָּ הֲבֹא נִבּוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמְךָ וְאֶחָיֶךָ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אֶרְצָה: יא וַיִּקְטְאוּ־בּוֹ אָחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת־הַדָּבָר: [שְׁנִי] יב וַיִּלְכוּ אָחָיו לְרַעוּת אֶת־צֹאן אָבִיהֶם בְּשֶׁכֶם: יג וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא אֶחָיֶךָ רַעִים בְּשֶׁכֶם לָכֵה וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ אֲלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַנְּנִי: יד וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֵךְ־נָא רֹאֵה אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אֶחָיֶךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וְחַשְׁבֵּנֵי דָבָר וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מֵעַמְקֵי חֲבְרוֹן וַיָּבֵא שְׂכָמָה: טו וַיִּמְצְאוּהוּ אִישׁ וְהִנֵּה תֵלַע בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר מֶה־תִּבְקֶשׁ: טז וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־אֲחִי אֲנִי מִבְּקֶשׁ הַגִּידָה־נָא לִי אֵיפֹה הֵם רַעִים: יז וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ נָסְעוּ מִזֶּה כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֲמָרִים נִלְכָה דִּתְיַנֶּנֶה וַיִּלְכֵד יוֹסֵף אַחֵר אָחָיו וַיִּמְצָאם בְּדִתָּן: יח וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתוֹ מִרְחֹק וּבְטָרֶם יִקְרַב אֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּתְנַבְּלוּ אֹתוֹ לְהַמִּיתוֹ: יט וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחָיו הִנֵּה בָעַל הַחֲלָמוֹת הַלְזָה בָּא: כ וְעַתָּה | לָכֵן וְנַחֲרָגְהוּ וְנִשְׁלַחְהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת וְאֶמְרֵנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלְתָהּ וְנִרְאָה מֶה־יְהִי חֲלַמְתּוֹ:

Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan. This, then, is the line of Jacob: At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic. And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.

Once, Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers; and they hated him even more. He said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered

around and bowed low to my sheaf." His brothers answered, "Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us? And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams."

He dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: And this time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." And when he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated him. "What," he said to him, "is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?" So his brothers were wrought up at him, and his father kept the matter in mind.

One time, when his brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock at Shechem, Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "*Hineini*/I am ready."

And he said to him, "Go and see how your brothers are and how the flocks are faring, and bring me back word." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. When he reached Shechem, a man came upon him wandering in the fields. The man asked him, "What are you looking for?" He answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Could you tell me where they are pasturing?" The man said, "They have gone from here, for I heard them say: Let us go to Dotan." So Joseph followed his brothers and found them at Dotan.

They saw him from afar, and before he came close to them they conspired to kill him. They said to one another: "Here comes that dreamer! Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, A savage beast devoured him. We shall see what comes of his dreams!"

Bereishit Rabbah 84:14: Rabbi Yannai said: Three angels met up [with Joseph], for it says "*ish*/man three times: "a man found him," and "the man asked him," and "the man said."

Eitz Yosef (Enoch Zundel ben Joseph, Russian Talmudist/commentator on Midrash Rabbah, d. 1867): Since the word man appears three times in the passage, we infer that God sent three angels to meet up with Joseph: one to save him from being killed by his brothers, one to save him from being injured in the pit filled with snakes and scorpions, and one to arrange for his sale to Egypt.

Maharzu: (Rabbi Zev Wolf Einhorn of Horodna, Poland, d. 1862): The "man" must be an angel; how else could Joseph expect him to know where his brothers are pasturing?

Ibn Ezra (12th century Spain)

Understand this literally: one of the passerbys

דרך הפשט אחד מעוברי דרך

Rashi (R. Sholomo Yizthaki, 11th cent France):

זה גבריאל, שנאמר "והאיש גבריאל" (דניאל ט:כא; תנחומא ב)

This is [the angel] Gabriel, as it is said: "And the man Gabriel." (Dan. 9:21). [From *Tanchuma Vayeshev 2*]

Ramban (Nachmanides, 13th cent. Spain) This story informs us that the decree of God is truth, and the effort is falsehood. We cannot escape our Divinely ordained fate. For the Holy One of Blessing arranged a guide for [Joseph], without his knowledge to bring into [the brothers'] hands. It was this that our sages had in mind when they said (Bereshit Rabbah 84:14) that these three men mentioned in [these three verses] were angels, and that this whole story did not occur for naught, but to teach us that it is G-d's counsel that prevails.

Rashbam (Samuel ben Meir, Troyes, 11-12th cent., leading French Tosafist and grandson of Rashi): This speaks to Joseph's greatness: he did not desire to return to his father when he didn't find [his brothers] in Shechem; rather he sought them out until he found them; although he knew they envied him, he went and sought them as he had promised his father.

Pirkei Avot 2:1:

א כבי אומר, איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם, כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן האדם. והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצוות. והוי מחשב הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה, ושכר עברה כנגד הפסדה. והסתפל בשלשה דברים ואי אתה בא לידי עברה, דע מה למעלה ממך, עין רואה ואין שומעת, וכל מעשיך בספר נכתביון

Rabbi [Yehudah HaNasi] would say: Which is the right path for one to choose for oneself? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it, and harmonious for all. **Be as careful with a minor mitzvah as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards of the mitzvot.** Consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards, and the rewards of a transgression against its cost. Contemplate three things, and you will not come to the hands of transgression: Know what is above from you: a seeing eye, a listening ear, and all your deeds being inscribed in a book.

