

Parshat Mikkeits: The Angel Returns

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BH

In our reading of the Joseph story, the man in the field is a human angel, the sort of angel all of us could become. He helps Joseph find a way to his brothers and helps him understand his situation and possibly helps him formulate a plan to escape the abuse he's endured at home.

In Parshat Mikketz, Genesis 43:16ff we have a strange use of two terms: *asheir al beito* ("the one in charge of his house) and *ha'ish* (the man). The former term is used 3 times (44:1,4,16), the latter 4 times (43:24,17,19), once in conjunction with the term *asheir al beito*. Are these the same person or are they two different people? Joseph was very rich and powerful by this point, so he may well have had more than one servant. Joseph, himself, is referred to as *al beito* as Potiphar's overseer in Genesis 39:4. So we know what that term means. So who is the *ha'ish*?

Torah narratives demonstrate an unflinching desire to express the concept of *middah k'neged middah*, literally, measure for measure. Is it possible that the man is that same man who helped Joseph on his way in the first place? It's possible for a number of reasons. We know that drought and famine drove Abraham to Egypt (Genesis 12:10). If The Man in the field really did help Joseph understand his situation he could have become Joseph's spiritual father. *This* is the father he keeps close by. This is the one who mentors him in bringing justice and long-term planning to Egypt. If this is the case, Joseph has made the incredibly difficult step of replacing a toxic father with a loving one.

Everyone gets their just desserts in Genesis tales, so why shouldn't The Man be rewarded for his kindness by a life of ease? Most interestingly of all, does The Man help Joseph formulate a plan to make sure *all* of the brothers make the break with Jacob, especially Benjamin? The Torah text hints that this is the case because the brothers consistently refer to Joseph as...*ha'ish*, The Man.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the interpretation that the man in Joseph's house is The Man? Why? Why not?
2. How does this expand the role of The Man in the story? Is he a stand-in for God, guiding Joseph in every possible way?
3. Might Joseph indeed have become The Man, his role model?
4. How can we be The Man for children in trouble? Do we have to provide continuing care to help them recover from their childhood abuse?
5. How do we thank the people who have been angels in our lives? What rewards could we get from becoming angels such as The Man?

I write against the background of yet another childhood abuse scandal that went on for years, decades ago, and either no one suspected or no one could figure out what to do about it (<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/69920/former-bay-area-jewish-leader-accused-of-molesting-boys-in-60s-and-70s/>). Again, it seems more important than ever, now, to bring forth this interpretation of Joseph's story.

Looking forward to your insights, as always!