

# BIT BY BIT/WITHOUT DELAY

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

Twelve years had passed since Yosef's imprisonment. "Vayehi miketz shenasayim yamim, And it happened at the end of two years to the day..." Chazal, our sages, note that the term Vayehi/And it was, always alludes to grief. One can imagine Yosef's distress at this point. He had entered prison at the tender age of 17. He was now almost thirty years old. A good part of his life had been spent in a dreary cell. And there was no end in sight.

"And Pharaoh was dreaming... Then the head of the cupbearers spoke before Pharaoh... And there, with us, was a Hebrew youth... And Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and he was rushed from the prison." Sforno comments, "And he was rushed - this is the manner of every Divine salvation, which comes hastily and unexpectedly. Mashiach's coming, too, will occur hastily and without any warning."

Indeed, regarding the future redemption it is written (Malachi 3:1), "And suddenly - He will enter his Sanctuary!" The Gemara states, "Three things come be-hesach ha-daas/without any warning; Mashiach, a found object, and a scorpion."

In a different Gemara, however, we find the exact opposite. "Rabbi Chiya Rabbah said to Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta: Such will be the redemption of Israel: Bit by bit it will sprout and grow... like the rising of the sun." [Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachos 1:1] So which one is it - A gradual process or an abrupt surprise?

Actually, there are two distinct aspects to the ge'ulah/Final Redemption. First, we must prepare and make ourselves ready and worthy of being redeemed. This part of the redemption occurs bit by bit, each time we perform mitzvos and study Torah. When we are ready, however, the actual redemption will be "ke-heref ayin, like the blink of an eye," without any delay whatsoever, as it was when the Jews left Mitzrayim. [Michtav Me-Eliyahu v.5 pp. 14]

In the passages quoted above from this week's Sidrah, you may have noticed a discrepancy. I began by saying twelve years had passed since Yosef's imprisonment. But then quote a pasuk which says, "And it happened at the end of two years." Was it two or twelve? The answer, of course, is that the twelve years refer to Yosef's overall stay in prison, while the two years refer to the two years that had passed since his encounter with the head cupbearer. Our Sages teach that Yosef, according to Heavenly decree, should only have been imprisoned for ten years. But since Yosef placed his trust in the cupbearer, by asking him to mention him to Pharaoh, an additional two years of imprisonment

were placed upon him.

This itself, however, presents an interesting question. Why did the Torah choose to address the two years that had passed since that fateful encounter, and not the twelve years of his overall stay?

It appears that Yosef's release from prison was \*dependent\* upon his placing his absolute trust in Hashem alone. When ten years, the time set for Yosef's release, came, he was tested. And he failed. He momentarily placed his trust in the cupbearer, believing it was he who would secure his release from prison. Perhaps, as some mefarshim (commentators) explain, some time was needed in order for Yosef to meditate upon his experience, and recognize that his salvation would come from Hashem alone. The additional time was not a punishment, but an opportunity for Yosef to attain the "tools" vital to his redemption. This is why the Torah harps on these two years, for it was they that made the difference.

Thus, in regard to Yosef as well, we encounter the concept of two distinct aspects of redemption. His readiness, which is a gradual process of personal growth; and the Divine salvation, which, when its time comes, arrives suddenly and with great force. "And they rushed him from the cell.. "

Rav Dessler z"l [Michtav Me-Eliyahu ibid.] uses a metaphor to explain the two aspects of redemption, the "gradual" and the "sudden". Redemption, he says, is like illuminating a dark room. The redeemed's darkness is transformed into bright light. There are two ways one can brighten a dark room. One can light candles, one by one, until there is enough light to see. Or one can turn on a light switch, suddenly throwing light upon the entire room.

In this metaphor, we are the lighters of the candles. Slowly, gradually, we bring light of the Torah to the world through its study and the performance of its mitzvos. Hashem, at the precise moment He sees fit, will "throw the switch," and illuminate the entire universe with the brilliant light of His redemption.

The Chanukah candles we light allude to these candles. In accordance with the opinion of Beis Hillel, we light in ascending order; one candle, then two, three, etc. Bit by bit we fill the dark recesses of our galus (exile) with light; the light of the Torah. The Chanukah candles are lit in the wintertime, when the nights are at their longest and the days at their shortest. When darkness seems to rule. Even the darkest corners of the earth must become illuminated by the radiance of those who study Torah and perform its mitzvos.

Sometimes, like Yosef, we too despair. We begin to wonder if we will ever be redeemed from our prolonged galus. We must remember, however, that although for us the process is a gradual one, on Hashem's side the redemption is imminent, and will arrive without any warning. As the Navi (prophet) Chavakuk says (Chavakuk 2:3): "For there is another vision, regarding the appointed time, and it speaks of the End, and it does not lie. Though it tarry, wait for it. For it will surely come; it will not delay." Perhaps, hopefully, we are already lighting the "eighth light" of our national menorah.

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