

SALVATION: EXPRESS LANE

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Pharaoh sent and Yosef was called, he was rushed out of the pit [prison]. He cut his hair, changed his clothing, and came before Pharaoh. [41:14]

After 12 years in a dungeon, without even a hint of what was coming, Yosef was suddenly dragged (vayiritzuhu - he was made to run) out of his pit. After hurried preparations and without any forewarning, he was appointed viceroy of Egypt, second in power only to Pharaoh. As Shlomo Ha-Melech says in Koheles (Ecclesiastes 4:14), "For from prison he went on to rule."

Our nation is no stranger to abrupt redemptions. "Because they were driven from Egypt, and they could not delay," (Shemos/Exodus 12:39). "The dough of our forefathers had not time to rise before the King of Kings appeared to them," (Pesach Hagadah). In the course of one night we went, "From darkness to a great light." This is one of the reasons we eat matzah on Pesach.

The same thing happened on Purim. One moment Mordechai is draped in sack- cloth and ash, fasting over the doomed plight of his brothers. Hours later, he's being led through the streets of the capital in a royal procession.

Mashiach's coming will be no different.

*One nice bright sunny day,
The storekeeper at his scales,
And the tailor in the midst of mending.
The porter with his package,
The carrier with his sack,
And the gardener in the midst of planting.
Suddenly, we'll hear a call,
That the time has come already,
That we'll be free,
Removed from exile. [Yiddish song]*

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 98a) tells how R' Yehoshua ben Levi asked the prophet Eliyahu where Mashiach is to be found. "He sits among the lepers," Eliyahu told him. "You can tell which one he is, because all the other lepers change their bandages all-together, but he changes them one at a time, in case the time [to reveal himself] comes."

Mashiach, mefarshim explain, is the soul of Israel. He appears full of leprous wounds because our nation is full of imperfections. When we sin, G-d forbid, we add another lesion to his body. Still, he patiently waits, cleansing his wounds and changing his bandages (praying for our forgiveness and for us to repent). Even though things have been thus for more than 2,000 years, he treats his wounds one by one, so as not to keep us waiting even the shortest moment when the time arrives.

Mayan Ha-Shavua notes that if one begins to ponder the massive revolution that changed the face of the world over the past 100 years, it is no less than breathtaking. It is as if Hashem turned up the dial on time, as if the world has gone into fast-forward.

It's as if we're all rushing somewhere, but can't quite figure out where or why. Yet.

While most of us are generally blind to this reality, for the righteous it is a matter of fact. The previous mashgiach of the Lakewood yeshiva owned a shtreimel (traditional fur hat) that he took with him where ever he went, despite the fact that it was not his custom to wear a shtreimel even on Shabbos. "I will put this on," he would say, "to greet Mashiach. And one never knows when that will be." Even in the darkest of moments, not only do tzaddikim not lose sight that Hashem can change things in an instant, they await that moment as if it were here.

Perhaps this allows us a novel interpretation of a famous Midrash which appears to criticize Yosef for his lack of trust in Hashem when he asked the wine steward to remind Pharaoh of his imprisonment in the hope of being released.

"Fortunate is the man who makes Hashem his Trust, and turns not to the arrogant [for help], (Tehillim/Psalms 40:5)." This refers to Yosef...

The Midrash seems to imply that because Yosef twice asked the wine steward to keep him in mind after he returned to Pharaoh, two years were added to his sentence. Yet this approach is fraught with difficulty. First, why cite a verse which praises the faithful, and not a verse that criticizes those who lack faith? More importantly, Yosef could not possibly have come before Pharaoh two years earlier. His appearance before Pharaoh was the signal that seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine, were about to begin, as dreamed by Pharaoh. Yosef, as the bearer of the message, was to be given the reins of leadership in order to save the land from famine. The episode could not have happened earlier, because Yaakov's descent to Egypt, the timing of which was by no means accidental, was a result of the famine.

Also noteworthy is the expression Yosef uses when addressing the wine steward. *"Ki im z'chartani..."* A literal translation could give us, *"If only [= please] you remember me."* But in Hebrew the term *'ki im'* denotes a condition. I.e. you are being released conditionally; you must remember me before Pharaoh. What kind of condition is this? If the steward didn't keep his part of the bargain (as indeed he didn't), what was Yosef to do to enforce their pact?

Perhaps Yosef wasn't asking the steward to remember him. Maybe he was telling him he would. "I

have no doubt that our meeting, and my interpreting your dream, which sees you reinstated as Pharaoh's wine steward, is no accident. Whether you care to or not, the time will come when you will remember me before Pharaoh against your will."

Yosef knew that Jewish redemption is not a gradual process. That Hashem, to the extent we can express it, puts the pieces in place, and when the moment arrives, it comes with great haste. The Midrash is not criticizing Yosef for his lack of faith in Hashem; it is praising him for never losing trust despite his extended imprisonment. It places Yosef among the righteous for whom salvation comes in an instant - in the blink of an eye. Two years were added to his imprisonment in order that his release would perfectly coincide with the moment he was to rise power, thereby serving as a model for Jewish redemption, past and future. Behold, I will send My messenger, he will clear the way before Me. Suddenly he will come into His Temple, the master [Mashiach] whom you seek, and the angel of the covenant whom you desire [Eliyahu], so says Hashem, the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)

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