

GROWING UP IN EXILE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Dedicated to the memory of Avraham Yosef ben Shmerel, z"l (Alan J. Smith), on his yahrzeit by his daughters Tamar Rachel, Yehudit Esther, Malka and Zissa Sima.

FRIDAY NIGHT:

A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef. (Shemos 1:8)

And so the party ended. The golden years in Egypt came to a close with the death of the last of Ya'akov's sons, Levi, in the year 2332 from creation, some 94 years after the family arrived in Egypt. All of a sudden the exile changed gears and Yosef's relatives went from being strangers in a foreign but cordial land, to being actual slaves of an oppressive empire.

It is a familiar pattern of Jewish history. The concept of the wandering, pursued Jew seems to be an eternal one, lasting at least until Moshiach arrives, may that be sooner than later. And, here we are once again, on the run, if not physically, politically, which is usually only the start of things.

"It is possible even Ariel Sharon has begun to get the message. During a Cabinet meeting on November 30, Gideon Meir, deputy director general of the Foreign Ministry, gave a presentation to Sharon depicting the way Israel is portrayed in the foreign media. 'I showed him examples of both distorted coverage and legitimate pictures of bad Israeli behavior,' Meir says, pointing out that the prime minister was appalled by both. 'I would not say that everything is anti-Semitism, but these images go a long way towards inflaming hatred of the Jews.' But of course it's not just about the media coverage. 'Anti-Semitism is being spread through those who teach Islam, and it's metastasizing,' says Orthodox feminist Blu Greenberg. 'It took Christianity 2,000 years to clean up its act and now it's being taught again through a religious system. I'm frightened for my grandchildren.' Most American Jewish leaders believe they are up against huge forces around the world and that ultimately they cannot fight this fight alone. 'We have to make people understand that anti-Semitism is not a uniquely Jewish problem,' says Harris. 'It's a cancer which left unchecked infects and ultimately kills democratic societies,' he says. 'That's the message we have to get out.' (From the December 15, 2003 issue of New York Magazine.)

If that is what our salvation depends upon, convincing world leaders and their billions of constituents whose main moral dilemma is whether or not they can live in peace, feed and clothe their own children, educate them, and still have money and time left over for leisure, then I am not only worried about my grandchildren, but about us. Lavan's reach was only until Gilead, Spain's throughout Spain, Nazi Germany's throughout Europe, but Islamic devotees are EVERYWHERE in the world today, and ironically, they have the oil, the money, and the clout.

Even the Talmud says, according to one opinion, that Pharaoh knew Yosef only too well (Sotah 11a). However, when his board of directors, every one of them anti-Semites, gave Pharaoh the option of enslaving the Jewish people or checking the Help Wanted section of the Pyramid Post for a new job, he exercised voluntary amnesia. Necessity is the mother of invention, and it is also the cause of the quick erosion of the moral fabric of many a civilized society.

The upshot: Jews should hang their shingles of "Home Sweet Home" using screw eyes that allow for easy removal. Even from our own, Biblically-given homeland we have been removed at least twice, and they're talking about a third time in some very influential circles:

Most Jewish leaders, however, instinctively respond that blaming Israel is blaming the victim. "It's not about this or that Israeli policy," says Malcolm Hoenlein, head of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, a mix of anger and exasperation in his voice. "It's about Israel's right to exist." (ibid.)

What it is really about is exile. Exile for the Jew means that the entire nation no longer lives by Torah, which will often lead to being forced out of Eretz Yisroel. The fact that we have been able to live in other countries and not only survive, but prosper, has never been a sign that the exile has come to an end, just that it is in a different gear. Exiles have more than one objective, kind of like, "Since you're here anyhow, you might as well do something meaningful for Creation."

Indeed, the scariest thing about a golden era while in exile is knowing it is going to end faster than it came in; they always do. The scariest thing about Jews in exile is the way they live with the belief that this time will be different, that somehow the latest golden era is part of a renaissance of mankind that finally allows the Jewish people to take its rightful place among the family of nations.

But there is a large difference between belief and hope, as we ought to know only too well:

In the Muslim world, where anti-Israel and anti-Jewish extremism are hardly news, the speech by outgoing Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad broke new ground. Not since Hitler has a head of state had the gall to take off the rhetorical gloves with such zeal. Addressing the 57-member nations of the Organization of the Islamic Conference - a group where the sole membership requirement is religion - he called on the world's 1.3 billion Muslims to defeat the Jews. "The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million, but today the Jews rule the world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them," he said. "The Jews, " he continued, "invented socialism, communism, human rights, and democracy so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong, so

that they can enjoy equal rights with others." "Israel," says Zuckerman, "is not allowed to live like other members of the family of nations." It is one thing that the leaders of all 57 states gave Mahathir a standing ovation - including those from supposedly moderate states like Egypt and Jordan - but their reactions later, after they had time to consider what he said, were stunning. The Egyptian foreign minister said the speech was "a very, very wise assessment." After making it clear he agreed with everything Mahathir said, Yemen's foreign minister decided to pile on: "Israelis and Jews control most of the economy and the media in the world." (Ibid.)

Who would have thought? Apparently not many in the upper echelons of secular Jewish leadership: This fifteenth century-like hatred and prejudice is infuriating and frustrating for Jewish leadership. It is also endless. Egyptian television just finished airing a 41-part series based on the decades-old screed called Protocols of the Elders of Zion. "It was as anti-Semitic as anything you've ever seen," says Zuckerman. (Ibid.)

What is exile, and more specifically, why are the Jewish people exiled? True, there are many verses in the Torah, most obviously in Parashas Bechukosai and Ki Savo that speak of exile as a punishment, as a way of waking up the Jewish people to their errant ways. But what is exile on a deeper, perhaps more technical level?

The answer to this question is, of course, Kabbalistic, and will take some time to explain, even only superficially. But, since these parshios are about exile and redemption, as has been the bulk of Jewish history, it is worth understanding the mechanism behind the biggest menace the Jewish people have ever faced.

SHABBOS DAY:

Egypt enslaved the Children of Israel with crushing harshness. (Shemos 1:13)

It always seems as if the Jewish people get picked on for no reason, as if G-d has a vendetta against His own children. After all, what had we been up to? Raping? Stealing? Pillaging? Hardly. On the contrary, nothing Jews want more in life, from my experience, is to just lead a decent family life. For some, that may include great riches and wielding some amazing political influence, but usually not at the cost of honesty and integrity.

But, as usual, it is often at the cost of Judaism. Exile makes living as a Jew more difficult, and in the eyes of some, very impractical if not downright impossible. But that does not mean that they become mean, stingy people instead. Irreligious, perhaps, but still kind and charitable especially compared to others around them.

All of sudden, the mood of the gentiles change. For some reason or another, their faces do not look at us today as they did yesterday. Perhaps our acceptance into their societies were always at best tenuous, but eventually our memberships are cancelled and we are out on the street once again, vulnerable to the forces of hatred and evil. It is baffling.

Well, not really. At least, not on the level of Sod, because as always, it has to do with the Sefiros. You can't really understand the concept of exile until you see from the point of the Sefiros. There are ten Sefiros: Keser, Chochmah, Binah, Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchus. However, this is just the beginning for each of these individual sefiros have ten sefiros of their own, and they are considered worlds unto themselves, such as Partzufim in Kabbalistic jargon, with names such as: Arich Anpin, Abba, Imma, Zehr Anpin, and Nukveh - Long Face, Father, Mother, Small Face, and Female.

Sounds Indian, doesn't it? Only in English. Stay with me.

You may have noticed a problem with the math. We began with ten sefiros, gave them each ten of their own, but ended up with only five partzufim. Something got lost in the translation.

The answer is that six of them - Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod - did not become independent worlds - like Keser, Chochmah, Binah and even Malchus did - once they received their own complement of ten sefiros. Rather, they combined to become one partzuf together called Zehr Anpin. And that is not the only major difference.

Indeed, unlike Keser, Chochmah, and Binah, these six sefiros received only six of their own intended ten sefiros, leaving them in a state of incompleteness. Keser, Chochmah, and Binah, or rather, Arich, Abba, and Imma, are in their state of perfection, have been since Creation, having received all ten of their sefiros. However, Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod only received their own six sefiros of the same name, and thus, each of them is missing its Keser, Chochmah, and Binah. (We'll ignore the issue of the missing Malchus of each of them for now.)

There is a name for this state of existence. When Chesed through Yesod - Zehr Anpin - is missing its top three sefiros, referred to as Muchin - Brains: Exile. Hence, the reason for exile is the lack of Muchin in each of these six sefiros, and collectively, in the world they comprise what is called Zehr Anpin. Since these six sefiros govern our six millennia of history (Binah, Chochmah, Keser, and even Malchus, correspond to periods after the year 6000, including the World-to-Come). Chesed corresponds to the first one thousand years of history, Gevurah to the second one thousand years, etc., until Yesod, which governs this sixth millennium. The status of these sefiros affect our history, resulting in the necessity for the Pharaohs and Hitlers of history, and all those before, between, and after them.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

G-d heard their mourning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov. (Shemos 2:24)

In case it did not occur to anyone from the names of the partzufim, the Sefiros make up one big happy family. Arich Anpin is likened to the grandfather, Abba and Imma are themselves, Zehr Anpin is considered to be their child, and Nukveh is his bride.

And, like with all children, Zehr Anpin was born with all of his brains, but with parts that have yet to become active and influential in his life. Like a human child, he has enough sefiros to function and live, but not enough to survive on his own or to stay out of trouble. He needs to grow up, to mature, become intellectually developed to the point that he becomes an adult like his parents. He needs his own Muchin, his own Keser, Chochmah, and Binah to function, giving him ten sefiros (the Malchus below becomes his own Malchus in the process) and completion.

The word for this state: Geulah - Redemption.

The analogy of the child is not an unrealistic one. On the contrary, we have been created as we have been and work the way we do because that is the way the Sefiros do. We mimic their reality. Thus, just as the parents educate the child with information, which is really light, to expand the mental capacity of their child, so too must the "mental" capacity of Zehr Anpin be expanded. That is, light must be drawn down into it to result in its own Keser, Chochmah, and Binah.

This is really the meaning of the words:

I am G-d; I called you for righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people's covenant, for a light to nations. (Yeshayahu 42:6)

A light to nations? To draw down the light from the upper worlds to the sefiros that govern our world, and bring the redemption. Thus, when we say, "May the redemption come in our time," we could be even more accurate and descriptive and say, "May the light of the upper sefiros come down into the head of Zehr Anpin and give it its own Muchin."

Aside from being a little lengthy, it will probably cause your audience to tilt their heads sideways in bewilderment, but that would not mean you were inaccurate in any way. Quite the contrary, you would be right on the money, and speaking about money, that leads to another important analogy.

As is well known, local banks do not keep all of their deposits on hand, but enough to handle the average withdraw of funds by their customers. Should a customer require a very large amount of money, more than the bank usually allows for on a daily basis, the amount has to be ordered in advance so that the local bank can turn to a more central and larger bank for additional funds.

Think of Zehr Anpin as a local bank. Think of our mitzvos as cash deposits and withdrawals. When we do a mitzvah we withdraw light to accomplish the task, and the light that results from our mitzvos becomes our deposit. For the most part, Zehr Anpin has what it takes to handle our daily deposits and withdrawals. Should we require more light than he has on hand, more light than the six sefiros of Chesed through Yesod can offer, it will force him to turn to higher sefiros for additional light, which results in Zehr Anpin receiving that light, getting its Muchin, and redemption for the Jewish people.

And, this is precisely what happened when:

... The Children of Israel groaned because of their work and they cried out. (Shemos 2:23)

The crisis caused them to suffer, and their suffering caused them to cry out, creating a demand for light:

Their outcry went up to G-d. . . (Ibid.)

More light than Zehr Anpin could provide, and therefore it was then that:

G-d heard their mourning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov. (Ibid. 24)

Because:

This is done as a result of Bris Avos, which is in the 620 Amudei Ohr in Keser; there is the sod of Bris Avos and Yisroel, and from there the Torah was given, and this is the 620 letters of the Aseres HaDibros, because the beginning of redemption is not possible except from very high up in a place that the actions of men cannot affect - the beginning of the will for all revelations of G-d, and from there redemption from Egypt originated. In the merit of Bris Avos the world survives . . . (Dayah 2:3:16)

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d saw the Children of Israel; and G-d knew. (Shemos 3:1)

An interesting and confusing statement about One Who is Omnipotent and Omniscient. It cannot be taken at face value.

For, G-d is not hard of hearing that the Jewish people had to first suffer and then scream before He took note of their misery and sent Moshe to redeem them. He saw their affliction from the beginning, knew about it before they even descended to Egypt. However, there was famine and then exile because Zehr Anpin was in a state of Katnus - Immaturity - and that is the way it remained until the redemption came.

However, even in a state of Katnus exile can be sweet, at least in the beginning. Prosperity is possible, either because G-d is merciful or because exile demands it, or both. But when a keitz comes, a built-into- Creation moment by which Zehr Anpin must mature and reach what is called Gadlus, the Jewish people are expected to bring about this result, to draw down sufficient light to give Z"A its Muchin.

Which we will do one way or another, as we mentioned last week:

Rav said, "All the dates of redemption (keitzim) have already passed, and now it depends upon repentance and good deeds." Shmuel said, "It is enough that the mourner remains in mourning!" This is like an earlier disagreement: Rebi Eliezer said, "If Israel will repent then they will be redeemed, and if they will not, then they will not." Rebi Yehoshua said to him, "If they do not repent they will not be redeemed?!" Rather, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will cause to rise a king who will make decrees as difficult as Haman's were and Israel will repent and return to the right path." (Sanhedrin 97b)

And, that is really the essential difference between meriting the redemption and bringing Moshiach earlier, or not meriting the Final Redemption and having him come at the last possible minute. If the Jewish people wake up on their own and recognize from their surroundings, both abroad and in Israel, that we are in exile, then maybe we can, on our own, turn to Zehr Anpin with mitzvos and tefillos and require more light than he can provide. Moshiach, a light himself, will arrive while we are still safe from the anger of the nations around us, before they close the ring around us.

However, should we take exile for granted and live as we have already been redeemed, then Zehr Anpin will remain void of its necessary Muchin. After all, everyone has to grow up at some point, and that is especially true of the Sefiros, particularly for the sefiros of Chesed through Yesod. Creation demands it.

By judging the situation that we presently find ourselves in, with storm clouds forming on the horizon and new crises arising for the Jewish people around the world, it is time for Zehr to grow up, hopefully for the last time, b'ezras Hashem. True, the outreach organizations are doing all they can to trigger the necessary processes to bring about a smooth transition to adulthood, but they are limited by their lack of manpower and financial backing.

Time is running out, as we will discuss next week, b'ezras Hashem. Remember this lesson about the Sefiros. You'll need it. This week is about exile. Next week is about redemption.

Have a great Shabbos,

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