

# COMPLETING THE MOTHER OF ALL EXILES

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

*And the angel of God said to her, "You are pregnant, and you will give birth to a son. You will call him 'Yishmael,' because God has heard your affliction. (Bereishis 16:11)*

It was the mother of all exiles. As such, it was supposed to have been the only exile, lasting a full 400 years, as stated in the prophecy to Avraham Avinu, and resulting in Yemos HaMoshiach at its end. For, though everyone knows that the Jewish people descended to the 49th level of spiritual impurity, few have heard that it had been the mission of the Jewish people to elevate the Egyptians to the 50th level of holiness (Arizal)!

We didn't succeed because it was an overwhelming mission. It was like going to President Obama, convincing him that the Torah is from Sinai, the Jewish people are God's 'Treasured Nation,' and that all gentiles must adhere to the Seven Noachide Laws. Not impossible, but not very likely either. Therefore, once again, we have become more like the host culture with whom we live, rather than them becoming the Torah's version of righteous gentiles.

For the fun of it, what would it take to set things straight, even today as Islam grows across the world exponentially? What kind of program would we have to follow to put this world on track?

The first stop would have to be the Jewish people. No one would be convinced of anything unless the Jewish people were already an example of some kind of human perfection. People would have to see, at least the people who profess to believe in Torah and mitzvos from Mt. Sinai, that living a spiritually-consistent life, that is, a material life that is consistent with Torah values, is the only way to go. That would be stage one, admittedly a VERY difficult task at this stage of Jewish history.

Nevertheless, onward.

Then, once that was achieved, we would have to convince leaders like President Obama that not only is the Torah from God, but that he must, for his own good and the good of his nation, adhere to the Seven Noachide Laws. Convincing Western leaders of the importance of reverting to the Noachide Laws would provide the necessary support to approach the masses with the same message.

Once in agreement, the campaigning would have begin, not for re-election into office, but for getting the people on side with the master plan. And, if the obstacles until now have not been humongous, this would certainly make them so. For this part of the plan calls for nothing less than

taking on all the leaders of the other major religions of the world, who are so invested in their ways of life and approaches to God that change would be next to impossible, if not actually impossible.

However, if such convincing was indeed possible, then they could turn to their followers and facilitate their conversion to the Torah-way of life. But that would still leave hundreds of millions of unaffiliated people who would have to be affected through others means, if they even exist. It is one thing to market something people know they will enjoy. It is something else altogether different to market something people think they hate.

All in all, bringing the world to the 50th level of holiness would be far more than simply a Herculean task. It is humanly impossible, as it was probably in Egypt as well, which is why it didn't even come close to happening.

So, then what is the point of talking about it? If I could fly on my own, I would not need to travel by airplane. But, what is the point to thinking about it if such thoughts are not rooted in any kind of practical reality? Could we really get the world back on track today? Could the Jewish people have really elevated the Egyptians to the 50th level of purity?

The answer comes from understanding history a little better. In fact, we just finished putting away our Menorahs, a holiday that states explicitly what our role in the cosmic drama is all about.

Among the many things that we mention in Al HaNissim, inserted in the Shemonah Esrai and Birchas HaMazon on Chanukah, is how the miracle that occurred for the Chashmonaim included the impure being given over into the hands of the pure. Why wasn't it enough to just to say that the many were conquered by the few, and the strong were overcome by the weak? Why must we also know that the impure were vanquished by the pure?

Because, it is not so uncommon for the few to physically or militarily overcome the many (especially when the former uses guerilla warfare), at least not as uncommon as one might think. Very often, it is just a matter of logistics, and good military planning. Sometimes it is just a question of persistence, but either way, the few can, and have on many occasions, won the war against the larger army.

However, for the pure to overcome the impure, they must overcome psychological and emotional resistance. To make society LESS moral is rarely an issue, as Hollywood, et. al., has proven over the last 50 years. But, to make society MORE moral ... that is something that will not happen unless a major crisis occurs to prompt it, or a major miracle occurs to make it happen, something Al HaNissim says God is prepared to perform if someone is willing to take the lead.

We see this as well from the story of Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon HaKohen who saved the day when he killed Zimri and Cosbi. As the Midrash reveals, the intrusion of the Midianite women and their culture into the Jewish camp was an unmitigated disaster that just kept getting worse until Pinchas stepped up, put himself on the line, and merited several miracles that allowed him to overcome the 'impure' of his time. This stopped the spiritual decline dead in its tracks, and put the

Jewish people on a path to recovery.

Perhaps if that had happened in Egypt, it would have been the last exile the Jewish people would have had to experience.

In the end, it wasn't. In the end, not only did we leave 190 years early just to stay alive as a people, but we have had to endure four additional exiles: Bavel, Medai, Yavan, and Edom, with a grand finale courtesy of Yishmael. And, each one has been a facet of the Egyptian exile that was left unrectified by our early departure, through which some kind of tikun occurred.

This means as well that each of the redemptions that have occurred were supposed to have been part of the redemption from Egypt. The original redemption from Egypt had only been partial, evident by the fact that only one-fifth of the Jewish population of that time left Egypt with Moshe Rabbeinu. Even the one fifth that did leave ended up dying in the desert, never making it to the Promised Land.

Golus Bavel, apparently, could have rectified all that. Indeed, the Zohar seems to indicate that had all the Jewish people returned to Eretz Yisroel with Ezra when the time had come, that would have prompted the Final Redemption. For, apparently, the upper wellsprings of wisdom opened up just to allow the redemption to be the final one, but closed shortly after when many of the Jewish people chose not to follow Ezra back home, and remained in Bavel instead.

This, of course, forced the issue, creating the need for additional exiles. Apparently whatever could have been accomplished by the Babylonian-Median Exile would have been enough to end the need for additional exiles, had the Jewish people returned home and re-built the Temple. They didn't, so something was left over that had to be rectified by the Greek Exile, which came only to an end when Mattisyahu and his sons took on the Greek army and prevailed.

But the fire didn't catch. Whatever it was that the victory over the Greeks was supposed to have achieved, crystallized by the miracle of the Menorah, did not spread to rest of the Jewish people. Indeed, it didn't even spread to the Chashmonaim who, according to the Ramban, held on to the recovered kingship of the Jewish people too long, and suffered extinction as a result.

Now, you would think that after the first three exiles, the fourth would be the shortest and lightest of all, since most of the rectification should have already been completed. However, it has been anything but that, being the longest and the most severe of all. It is the grand finale to the Egyptian Exile, which makes one truly wonder what could possibly be left after thousands of years of rectification.

The answer has to do with the fact that there is another dynamic at work here: Yeridas HaDoros, literally, the descending of the generations. As history trudges forward, the generations that are born are spiritually weaker, and therefore less capable of major strides on national rectification. And, the less we can do to rectify ourselves, the more history has to complete the job for us. It certainly takes

its role more seriously than we do.

However, whatever happens until the end, it will be for the sake of completing the Egyptian exile, which begins in this week's parshah. Hence, the catch phrase for the 'End of Days' is 'Keitz HaYamim,' which literally means, 'end of those days.' Which days? The days, or rather, the years left over from the Egyptian exile.

And, as the Ben Ish Chai points out, the gematria of 'keitz' is 190, the amount of years the Jewish people left Egypt early, indicating once again the all of the years since leaving Egypt until Moshiach comes and finishes his work have been about completing the exile from Egypt, once and for all. This is why the Haggadah can tell us to view ourselves each year as if we too left Egypt, because the truth is, we are everyday.

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