

# REDEMPTION-SENSITIVE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

*The duration of the stay of the Children of Israel in Egypt had been 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, on precisely that day, all the hosts of God went out from Egypt. (Shemos 12:40)*

So ended Golus Mitzrayim, the Egyptian Exile. In truth, they had only been in Egypt for 210 out of the 430 years, and only 116 of the 210 years had been in slavery, but we get the message: after 430 years, the 430-year exile had finally come to an end.

Actually, God had only told Avraham about 400 years in exile: He said to Avram, "Know that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and [the host nation] will enslave them, and afflict them for 400 years." (Bereishis 15:13)

But then again, what's an extra 30 years after 400? At least they had a relatively precise date by which to determine the length of the exile, and therefore, the redemption as well. If they had kept track of time, they could have figured out that the redemption was at hand, and expect it. Well, not really, as Rashi explains. In fact, even we have to be told the starting point of the 430 years, since we all know that the Jewish people only stayed in Egypt for only 210 years, 190 years short of what was foretold to Avraham Avinu. Who would have thought that the clock began ticking from the birth of Yitzchak? No wonder four-fifths chose to stay behind in Egypt, and didn't believe the redemption was actually at hand.

Likewise with respect to the Babylonian Exile, for though there had also been a prophecy in terms of the length of the exile, 70 years in total, no one knew the correct starting point of the exile until it was over. This is, perhaps, the reason why so few Jews joined the battle. Even after victory was finally at hand, as the Megillah reports, a minority of Jews still didn't support Mordechai and what he had done, perhaps, unsure, if victory also meant redemption.

And, as we say in the Shemonah Esrai with respect to the Chanukah miracle, only a handful of Jews went to war against the massive Greek army. True, the Midrash says that the Greek Exile also had a pre-destined end, this time of 180 years, but it also wasn't so clear when the exile began, so it wasn't so clear when it was supposed to end either. Even Mattisyahu had to be prompted into battle by Heaven, setting up the miracle.

If previous generations could not detect the end of exiles that had been predicted before they occurred, then how can we figure out the end of ours, the years of which no number was previously given? Remember? In Ya'akov's dream of the ladder, the angel of Eisav just kept going up, and up,

and up, as this exile just keeps on going on, and on, and on.

What determines the end of an exile?

This, of course, seems to be the flip side of a different question: What is the date of the arrival of Moshiach, which, of course, is forbidden to be calculated. So, then, what is the point of asking either question?

In truth, that is a mistaken understanding. It is not forbidden to calculate the arrival date of Moshiach, as many Rishonim explain. It's just a question of the method used to do so. However, for 99.99 percent of us, that information is irrelevant since we have no idea how to calculate the date anyhow, and those who say they do, usually are fooling themselves and others.

But, more relevant is the point that figuring out the end of an exile is not necessarily the same thing as calculating the arrival date of Moshiach. Obviously, the two dates may be close in time to each other, but an exile can come to an end over a period of time, as it did in Egypt, Babylonia, and during the Greek Exile as well. And, not only is it permissible to figure that out, but doing so can be the difference between survival and being swallowed up by the end of the exile, as we have to admit, has happened to so many Jews so many times before.

So, what do you need to figure out such a thing?

First of all, you have to want the redemption to come. Indeed, there is a mitzvah to anticipate the redemption:

The Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan explained the positive mitzvah of, "I am God, your God, Who took you out of Egypt," to mean that one must know that He Who created Heaven and Earth alone controls the world above and below. However, to this he added: "This is the basis of what the rabbis teach: At the time of a person's judgment after death they ask him, 'Did you anticipate redemption?' (Shabbos 31a). What is the basis of this mitzvah?

It comes from here, for, 'I am God, your God, Who took you out of Egypt' means: 'Just as I want you to believe that I took you out [of Egypt], I also want you to believe that I, God your God, will gather you in and redeem you in mercy a second time'." (Ohr Yechezkel, Emunas HaGeulah, 1960; p. 287)

Awareness is always a function of intellectual sensitivity, and sensitivity is always a function of intellectual priorities. What we value most goes to the top of our priorities list, and we become the most sensitive about it. It usually becomes part of the way we view the world until we can automatically detect which aspects of life support or endanger it.

It is like a security person who is hired to protect a President or a Prime Minister. Since the well-being of the leader depends upon how well he does his job, he trains himself to become super-sensitive to any potential threat. In time, he sees things the average person can't see, hears things the average person can't hear.

If someone in the vicinity of the leader reaches for his belt, the guard's eyes automatically see the hand move and his body automatically prepares to go into action. If he hears a suspicious noise, of which there can be dozens, his head snaps to the direction of the noise, and again, he prepares to act if necessary. That's how priorities affect our lives.

The Thirteen Principles of Faith speak of how we, as Jews, are supposed to daily await the arrival of Moshiach. The Talmud tells us that, of the six things they'll ask us in Heaven on our day of judgment, one of them is, "Did you anticipate the redemption?" Of all the things to ask, that one seems to be the least obvious to many today.

They won't ask us if we only believed in the eventual coming of the Final Redemption, because they will already know that we did, at least on some level. After all, it is in our daily Shemonah Esrai, and so much of Torah literature. Some even finish their drashos with the hope Moshiach is just moments away.

Rather, they ask us if we anticipated the Final Redemption, the same way we might anticipate anything we value, like getting married, or winning the lottery, or getting a refund on our yearly taxes. In each case, we not only don't forget about our reason for anticipation, but we even maintain a daily sense of excitement at the thought of the good fortune coming our way. "Did you have daily excitement about the potential for Moshiach's arrival?" they basically ask us.

Why is that so important? Because, as we have said, it is such anticipation that sensitizes us to what it is in life that supports redemption, and what deters it. More importantly, it sensitizes us to what is occurring in history that might indicate the potential for it to be at hand, or at least that an exile is coming to a close, something we have not been very good at doing in the past.

As we learn from the first Rashi in Parashas Vayikra, God likes to stay in touch with His people on an ongoing basis. He is constantly communicating with us, but are we able to hear Him? And, it is not a question of God talking louder, but an issue of us listening better. If you do not actively anticipate the redemption, then you are not on the right channel to hear Him warn us about the impending end of the current exile, whenever it might be.

This is why Moshe Rabbeinu was first contacted by God in the form of the burning bush:

The angel of God appeared to him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush. He saw it, and noticed that the bush was burning, yet the bush was not consumed. Moshe said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, [and] why the bush is not consumed." (Shemos 3:2-3)

Why the spectacle? And, why not in Moshe's path, so that he didn't have to "turn aside and see this great sight"? Because, redemption is about increased sensitivity to the reality of God, and His messages, as the plagues were meant to prove. Certainly this had to be the prerequisite of the redeemer himself, which is why Moshe was sensitive enough to notice the miracle, and to appreciate its importance to turn aside to see it.

This is what made Mordechai the redeemer in his time as well, resulting in the Purim miracle. While everyone else was missing the point of the end of the exile, either capitulating to the Babylonian lifestyle or living nervously in the shadows as Haman rose to power, Mordechai was on a different page altogether. He saw signs of redemption while others just saw signs of a worsening exile.

What was the difference? The difference was that, just like with respect to Moshe Rabbeinu, but unlike so many others around him, Mordechai believed that redemption had to come at some point, and anticipating it, kept a lookout for it. This helped him to maintain his sensitivity to any Divine signs that might occur warning of changes to come.

Hence, when the signs finally came, Mordechai noticed them, and was inspired to act upon them. Even Esther was unsure of herself until Mordechai warned her that her miraculous rise to Queenship was probably the biggest and most obvious sign of all that redemption was at hand, and that if she didn't seize the opportunity she'd lose it forever.

And, even though Mattisyahu didn't go looking for a fight against the Greeks, his redemption-mentality left him ready for one when it came. As a result, when God was ready, He plugged Mattisyahu into His plan for redemption, and he became the vehicle through which it came about.

Perhaps this is also why, in last week's parshah, when the Torah recounts the lineage of Moshe and Aharon, and mentions Pinchas, it spells his name with a Yud, even though he wouldn't get that Yud until Parashas Pinchas, a few books away.

That's not unusual, since the Torah is not recounting a historical event, just the genealogy of Moshe Rabbeinu. However, given the meaning of that Yud, it could be telling us that 40 years before Pinchas was able to spring into action and end the Zimri-Cosbi disaster, he had already been the zealot he later proved to be. He had already been redemption-sensitive. The Torah makes the following promise:

God, your God, will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your descendants, so you may love God, your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, in order that you may live. (Devarim 30:6)

What does this mean? It means that at the End-of-Days, after thousands of years of exile, and after losing hope in the redemption, either because of too much suffering, or because of too much success, we will be redemption-desensitized. We will not be anticipating it, and therefore it won't be high on our priority list.

In fact, it will become unimportant to many, especially for millions who will have already drifted away from Torah and Jewish values. It will even become a very distant reality for many who faithfully observe Torah, even learn it constantly, and who pray for the redemption a few times a day.

As a result, even as God talks to us, and arranges events of history in such a way as to indicate the direction of history and the end of this exile, it will go mostly unnoticed. People will see, but not

know what they are looking at. They will hear, but not know what they are hearing, and as a result, they will go about life in exile as if it will last for decades more.

However, at some point in time, we're going to have to wake up. At some point, we're going to have to leave our spiritual stupor, and get with the program that God is clearly bringing to bear on history and mankind. And, as events begin to occur in way that will literally shock us to attention, it will be about then that God removes the orlah from our hearts, and completes the process of spiritual circumcision.

But, the smart person knows not to wait until then. Who wants to miss the boat on redemption, or be shocked into realizing that it has arrived? The smart person takes the Talmud's advice, and learns to anticipate redemption until he too becomes geulah-conscious, redemption-sensitive. Rather than be like Yosef's brothers when he revealed himself to them, we can be the ones to reveal what is happening, and enjoy the transition to better times.

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