

# REDEMPTION

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

*These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who left the land of Egypt in their legions, under the charge of Moshe and Aharon. (Bamidbar 33:1)*

The Jewish people, or what was left of them at the time, left Egypt over 3300 years ago. It had been 210 years since they had first come to Egypt as a large single family, and the last 116 years had been spent in slavery. Two hundred and ten years and ten miraculous plagues later, the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov were on their way to freedom.

On their way to freedom, yes, but they had yet to fully achieve it. Once Pharaoh woke up to the fact that his slave work force had been taken away from him he pursued the fleeing Jewish nation with the best of his army, catching up with them by the Reed Sea. He had cornered them with the goal of recapturing and returning his slaves to Egypt.

Unbeknownst to Pharaoh, and the Mixed Multitude that had left Egypt with the Jewish people, God had lured the Egyptians to the sea to make an end of them altogether:

Moshe said to the people, "Do not be afraid! Stand firm and see God's salvation that He will wreak for you today. As you have seen the Egyptians today, you shall no longer continue to see them for eternity. (Shemos 14:13)

The rest is history that almost everyone knows: the sea miraculously split, the Jewish people fled to safety, and the Egyptians who followed after them drowned in the sea. The prophecy of being a stranger in a land that was not ours had finally been fulfilled. That chapter on Jewish exile had finally come to a close.

It had certainly seemed that way at the time. Though troubles still lay ahead for the newly freed Jewish nation, including another exile in the desert for 40 years, they had nothing to do with Egyptians. In the millennia that followed there would be the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and even the Romans to conquer, subjugate, afflict and even exile the Jewish people, but not Egyptians.

True. But though, as Moshe Rabbeinu promised, the Egyptians are buried in our past, Yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt, is not:

Just as the coming to the land [of Israel] was with two of the 60 myriads, so too was the leaving

of Egypt with two of the 60 myriads. (Sanhedrin 111a)

The Talmud is discussing how many men between the ages of 20 and 60 years survived the Ten Plagues and actually left Egypt with Moshe Rabbeinu. Four-fifths of the Jewish people had died during the Plague of Darkness for deciding not to join the exodus, and the Talmud wants to know how many men of this age group actually survived to go out.

It concludes, based upon a connection between two verses, that it was the same amount of men from this age group that actually survived the 40 years in the desert and entered Eretz Yisroel with Yehoshua Bin Nun: two. The rest had died off from one punishment or another while wandering in the desert. The discussion in the Talmud could have ended there. A question had been asked and answered, seemingly providing us with little else than an interesting fact about a past exile and redemption. Until, that is:

Rava said, "It will be likewise in Yemos HaMoshiach." (Sanhedrin 111a)

All of a sudden what had seemed relevant only to the past has become completely pertinent to the future. Perhaps this was the intention of the Talmud when asking its question, to tell us about our past for the sake of our future. Apparently it is about more than just learning from the past. On a deeper level the future is the past all over again:

Also in the final generation the entire "Generation of the Desert," with the Mixed Multitude will reincarnate, and this is [also alluded to by the verse], "this people will rise up, etc." The matter is that there is not a single generation in which Moshe Rabbeinu, a"h, is not there b'sod, "The sun rises and the sun sets" (Koheles 1:5), [and] "One generation goes and another comes" (Koheles 1:4), in order to rectify [each] generation. Also, the Generation of the Desert itself with the Mixed Multitude, all of them will reincarnate in the final generation, "like in the days of leaving Egypt" (Michah 7:15). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

According to this the final act of Jewish history will really be the first act all over again. The question is, why bring the souls of the generation of the exodus back in the generation of the Final Redemption if not to get right the second time what was failed the first time. This may be the deeper meaning of the following as well:

The Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan wrote in his explanation of the positive mitzvah, "I am God, your God, Who took you out of Egypt," that "it . . . is the basis of what the rabbis teach: When a person is brought to judgment they will ask him, 'Did you anticipate the redemption?' (Shabbos 31a) . . . 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 [from Egypt], I also want you to believe that I, God your God, will gather and redeem you in mercy a second time." (Ohr Yechezkel, Emunas HaGeulah, p. 287)

Would it not have been sufficient to simply command us to believe that God is God, aside from the fact that He took us out of Egypt? Does God really need to justify to us His demand of loyalty from us, by saying that He redeemed us from slavery? Not at all.

Rather, says the Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan, Yetzias Mitzrayim was not included only to teach us to be loyal to God. It was also included to inspire us to have faith in the Final Redemption, to remind us that God will, eventually, take us out of exile another and final time.

The only thing is that we could have still learned that lesson without mentioning the exodus from Egypt. Therefore, the question remains, why connect the Final Redemption to the first one if not because the first one has an important lesson to teach us about the final one. Perhaps it will even tell us about how events will unfold and why.

Just knowing this information may save a person from the difficulties of the time. The answer to some of the most pressing questions about the present lie in the past. To make sense of the current redemption, we have to first understand and appreciate the first one.

Moshe Rabbeinu had known even before going down to Egypt that his first attempt to free the Jewish people would fail. God had told him this during their first encounter on Mt. Sinai while Moshe had been grazing his father-in-law's sheep:

*However, I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except through a mighty hand.  
(Shemos 3:19)*

Therefore, it is a curious thing that after he was rebuffed by Pharaoh that Moshe Rabbeinu returned to God upset and complaining:

*So Moshe returned to God and said, "God! Why have You harmed this people? Why have You sent me?" (Shemos 5:22)*

The answer, of course, is that though Moshe had been forewarned that his first attempt to free the Jewish people would not meet with success, he had not known in advance that his request to free his troubled people would actually make their situation worse:

*"Since I have come to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name he has harmed this people, and You have not saved Your people." (Shemos 5:23)*

In fact the situation deteriorated so much that it resulted in a complete sense of helplessness and hopelessness for the Jewish people. To break their spirit and to cause them to abandon all hope in being redeemed Pharaoh demanded that the Jewish people fill their daily quotas of bricks without

receiving sufficient supplies to do so:

*"You shall not continue to give stubble to the people to make the bricks like yesterday and the day before yesterday. Let them go and gather stubble for themselves. But the number of bricks they have been making yesterday and the day before yesterday you shall impose upon them; you shall not reduce it, for they are lax. Therefore they cry out, saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' "* (Shemos 5:7-8)

What Jewish leader would not have been upset by the situation? Understandably, Moshe Rabbeinu, well-known for his ability to feel the suffering of his less fortunate brothers, certainly had been. The only problem is that his reaction to the crisis didn't seem to impress God that much. Quite the contrary, it invoked harsh Divine criticism:

*God said to Moshe, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a mighty hand he will send them out, and with a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land."* (Shemos 6:1)

You have questioned My ways [of running the world, which is] unlike Avraham, to whom I said, *"For in Yitzchak will be called your seed"* (Bereishis 21:12), and afterwards I said to him, *"Bring him up there for a burnt offering"* (Bereishis 22:2), yet he did not question Me. (Rashi)

*God spoke to Moshe . . .* He called him to account since he [Moshe] had spoken harshly by saying, *"Why have You harmed this people?"* (Shemos 5:22). (Rashi, Shemos 6:2)

It even sealed his fate to die in the desert and not enter Eretz Yisroel with the nation:

What will be done to Pharaoh you will see, but not what will be done to the kings of the seven nations when I bring them into the Land. (Rashi, Shemos 6:1)

In short, what Moshe Rabbeinu had seen as contrary to redemption God told him was the basis of it. He informed Moshe that what he had perceived as an extension of exile was in fact the beginning of redemption, in fact the key element of it, the nadir at which point the descent ends and the ascent can finally begin. The Torah makes this point here:

*Moshe spoke thus to the Children of Israel, but they did not pay attention to Moshe because of [their] shortness of breath and because of [their] hard labor.* (Shemos 6:9)

*They did not listen to Moshe:* They did not accept consolation, i.e., they despaired completely of ever being redeemed . . . *because of [their] shortness of breath:* Whoever is under stress, his wind and his breath are short, and he cannot take a deep breath. (Rashi)

In Hebrew it is called *"kotzer ruach,"* literally, "shortness of breath." On the surface of it, it sounds as if the Torah is merely reporting on the psychological and emotional state of the Jewish people when

Moshe Rabbeinu returned to tell them the good news about the impending redemption. In truth the Torah is telling us what it is that actually makes redemption possible in the first place.

It is this knowledge that makes sense of an otherwise murky Jewish history, and which has the most to say about current Jewish and world affairs. Understanding how is only meaningful after a review of some of the most important and sublime principles of existence, which we will discuss next week, b"H.

Text

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