

REDEMPTION, TAKE 2

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Moshe told it to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses because their spirit was broken, and because of the hardness of their work. (Shemos 6:9)

HERE WE ARE, exactly 3,330 years since the first redemption from Egyptian Exile, waiting for the final one from the "Roman Exile." Even though the Roman Empire is long gone, since it was the one to kick off this fourth and final exile, the name stuck. Yet, the difference between today's world and that one are not as great as one might assume.

Perhaps "waiting" is the wrong word, at least for many. This stage of this exile, at least since the Holocaust, and certainly after the collapse of the "Iron Curtain," hasn't been too bad, thank God. Jews enjoy unprecedented religious and material freedom. In the opinion of many Jews today, especially those who prosper at this time, Moshiach can take his time.

Of course, our opinion does not count in THAT vote. You can be sure that if we "delay" Moshiach's arrival, it will cost us. It already has on countless occasions. Jewish prosperity in exile has always only been temporary, and the welfare of the nation has been in the hands of a Divine timetable, not our own.

A major part of the problem is that we do not read Heaven very well. We don't have prophets today to help us do that, but we do have profits to "help" us avoid it. As the expression goes, "There is nothing better for the Jew than Anti-Semitism." Material prosperity has brought us spiritual drought.

There are many reasons for this, but they basically all boil down to two negative traits: givah and tivah, pride and desire. Not all pride is bad and not all desires are dangerous, but the ones that are end up becoming the real "bars" behind which we are locked away in life.

How many people have a difficult time accepting God because they do not like relinquishing control over their lives to anyone else? Or, how many people are just too busy making a name for themselves that they consider religion a very unwanted obstacle along their path to success? Of course, they are only fooling THEMSELVES if they think that ignoring God makes Him go away.

Other people just like physical comfort too much. They want Paradise in THIS world, not the NEXT one, and, they want it on THEIR terms, not God's. They think religion is something you can opt out of because, anyhow, it is MANMADE. "Of course religious people think it's Divine," they argue. "Just as I

want to believe it is not, they want to believe that it is."

Out of a world Jewish population of just over 12,000,000, the VAST majority of Jews belong to one of the two categories, with many having a "dual membership." They may be wide awake materially, but they are FAST asleep spiritually, and it would take a massive "alarm clock" to wake them up.

It was the same way in Egypt just prior to the redemption. Even though the Jewish people were enslaved, they were still "asleep" because they had come to accept their fate. They had given up on ever becoming free again, and most had been born right into slavery. Redemption wasn't even on their radar.

The first stage of redemption was to change that. That was redemption, Part 1. That included Moshe Rabbeinu going down to Egypt, gathering the elders to inform them of God's plan to redeem them, demanding Pharaoh let the Jewish people go, watching Pharaoh do just the opposite, and then hightailing it back to Midian for another six months in despair while the Jewish people suffered in the meantime.

This phase of redemption was called "Moshiach Ben Yosef." It is MBY's job to wake the nation up spiritually and to ready them for redemption, based upon the needs of the time. For this phase of redemption, therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu acted in the role of "Moshiach Ben Yosef." He complained to God because he wanted to already be functioning in the Moshiach Ben Dovid role.

This is why God reacted so harshly to Moshe's complaint at the end of Parashas Shemos. Moshe complained about his lack of redemption success while God extolled the progress they had made. Moshe at the moment was just not on the same page of redemption as God was.

Who could blame him? HE had to deal with the bitterness of the Jewish people who had also expected a MBD level of redemption. It wasn't like he could tell them, "I'm going in to Pharaoh, but don't expect him to agree to let you go. On the contrary, HE'S going to greatly increase the slavery to the point that it is going to break your spirit entirely. But don't worry! It's all part of the Divine plan, and I'll be back SIX months later to destroy Egypt and free you!"

Would anyone have agreed to that?! More than likely they would have told Moshe to go and redeem some OTHER slave nation and let them serve Egypt in peace! Or, at least more peace than they would have Moshe's path to redemption.

That was the redemption from Egypt. It was similar in the redemption from Persia as well. Esther became queen (whom the GR"A says was the MBY in her time), but then things only became a lot worse, and because of Mordechai as well. But then that led to the Jewish people doing massive teshuvah, and the complete redemption.

Many sources compare the Final Redemption to the first one. If anything, it seems as if the final one is really the completion of the first one. So, expect a similar path to redemption: MBY first, and MBD second. A wake-up call to redemption first, and the actual redemption second. And, the Talmud

points out, just as four-fifths of the Jewish people ignored the signs of redemption in Egypt and died instead, likewise will it occur similarly during the Final Redemption (Sanhedrin 111a).

It's all about the signs, and the proper interpretation of them. There are, and have been so many throughout history. There are so many these days. The question is, what to make of them? So far there has been a lot of disappointment and frustration. So many times it looked as if "this was it," and then everything went back to "normal," and the Jewish people remained in exile. People just went back to Midian thinking that it had all been a false start.

The annoying thing is that the signs seemed so real. Getting back the land after thousands of years of losing it. Waves of aliyah for the last couple hundred years. Miraculous military victories against a backdrop of tremendous infrastructure and social development. Being able to withstand the onslaught of countless nations against tremendous odds. Does that not sound like redemption to you?

Yet here we are. Millions of Jews happily living in the Diaspora. Millions of Jews living in Eretz Yisroel who'd rather Israel be more like Europe than Israel. Countless Jews who have no connection to God, and don't want one. Does that not NOT sound like redemption? Hence, the despair.

Hence the need for redemption definitions. The signs so far have been part of the Moshiach Ben Yosef phase of geulah. They are real, and need to be appreciated. This way, as we move into the Moshiach Ben Dovid phase of redemption, we will be primed to recognize those signs, and be ready, unlike the proverbial four-fifths, for the FINAL Redemption, it should come in our time. Amen.