

PROPHECY: FULFILLED!

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In 2018, at the age of 70, Avraham receives the prophetic vision known as the Covenant Between the Halves. This prophecy (15: 13-17) foretold the future of the Jews, from the birth of Yitzchak till our Exodus from Egypt. Three stages are clearly delineated:

1. (15:13) "...your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs for 400 years..." 2. "...they will be enslaved..." 3. "...they will be oppressed." Note that Hashem doesn't say how long each stage will be, only that the total prophecy will be 400 years."

The seemingly open-ended time-line allowed the Avos to "play" with the prophecy and attempt to extend the first stage of strangers, limiting the amount of time their children would be enslaved and oppressed. Of the 400 years from the birth of Yitzchak till the Exodus: 190 years were spent in the land of Canaan as strangers; 124 years the Jews were in Egypt as an enslaved nation; and for 86 years they were oppressed and enslaved.

The first stage of the enslavement began with the sale of Yoseph into slavery. The rest of Yakov's family entered into slavery in this week's Parsha. Following the two years of extreme famine, Yakov accepted Yoseph's offer to voluntarily move to Mitzrayim. Although he crossed into Egypt as the honored father of the viceroy of Mitzrayim, he was really the honored father of the most glorified slave in Egypt. His own status was that of a dependent upon Yoseph, who in turn was a slave to Pharaoh, making Yakov and his family honored slaves of Pharaoh. This began the enslavement of Avraham's children and the second stage of the Covenant Between the Halves.

A key question regarding this prophecy is, why did the Jews have to suffer enslavement and oppression? Why not leave them to flourish in Canaan and grow to nationhood without all the trials and tribulations?

The nature of the Jew has always been to assimilate into society. As such, the family of Yakov could have remained in Canaan, but only a small number of them would have maintained their allegiance to the "family". The majority would have assimilated into the local Canaanite society severing their familial ties to the G-d of their forefathers. The only way to insure that the family would grow into a nation was to institute some sort of forced isolation and separation. Slavery was that institution. However, slavery did not need to be a negative experience. In fact, using Yoseph as a model, slavery could have translated into the most honored and exalted position in society.

This, in fact, was Yoseph's plan. If the only way the family can become a nation is to separate them from society, then let them be among the elite of society rather than the despised of society! As the elite, they will spurn society; as the despised of society, society will spurn them. Either way they will be separate; so why not be among the elite!

In order for Yoseph's plan to work he had to reconfigure the entire Egyptian society so that his family would be among the elite. Prior to the famine, the populace of Egypt was an independent constituency under the rule of Pharaoh. Their allegiance to Pharaoh was that of free men accepting the rule of another. Pharaoh was a servant of the people rather than the people being servants to Pharaoh. We can see this from last week's Parsha (41:43), where it required a royal command from Pharaoh for the people to kneel before Yoseph, the elite slave of Pharaoh. The viceroy of Egypt did not automatically deserve or receive public deference.

In order for his family, the family of an elite slave, to be viewed as elite within a free society, Yoseph had to change the status of the Egyptian population from "free men" to "slaves of Pharaoh". The events detailed in this week's Parsha, starting with 47:11, explain the manner in which Yoseph reconfigured the entire Egyptian society so that everyone became slaves to Pharaoh before his family arrived in Mitzrayim. He was then able to construct a societal framework where his family were the elite among a nation of slaves, rather than elite slaves.

However, as history revealed, Hashem (G-d) knew better. As the glorified and pampered elite of society, the Jew would have never wanted to return to the land of their fathers. As the despised and oppressed of society, the Jewish nation would want to follow Moshe into the wilderness of Sinai, seeking respite from their oppression and freedom for their children.

The only remaining problem is how did Yoseph hope to fulfill the third stage of the prophecy, the stage of oppression? Eliyahu Ki-Tov suggests that the suffering of Yakov and Yoseph due to their 22 year long separation was the oppression. However, is it possible that Yoseph hoped that the third stage of the prophecy, oppression, would be fulfilled when the elite Jewish nation would be forced to give up their elitist positions and wealth within the Egyptian society in exchange for a "land flowing with milk and honey". Somehow, I think that there is a very contemporary lesson in this for all of us.

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