

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Why did Moses tell Pharaoh, if not a lie, then less than the full truth? Here is the conversation between him and Pharaoh after the fourth plague, arov, "swarms of insects" (some say "wild animals")

"Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, 'Go, sacrifice to your G-d here in the land.' But Moses said, 'That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our G-d would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? We must take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our G-d, as he commands us.'" (Ex. 8:21-23)

Not just here but throughout, Moses makes it seem as if all he is asking is for permission for the people to undertake a three day journey, to offer sacrifices to G-d and (by implication) then to return. So, in their first appearance before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron say: "This is what the Lord, the G-d of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'"

"Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.'

"Then they said, 'The G-d of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our G-d, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword.'" (Ex. 5:1-3)

G-d even specifies this before the mission has begun, saying to Moses at the burning bush: "You and the elders of Israel will then go to the king of Egypt. You must tell him, 'The Lord, G-d of the Hebrews, revealed Himself to us. Now we request that you allow us to take a three day journey into the desert, to sacrifice to the Lord our G-d'" (3:18).

The impression remains to the very end. After the Israelites have left, we read: "The king of Egypt received news that the people were escaping. Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds regarding the people, and said, 'What have we done? How could we have released Israel from doing our work?'" (14:5)

At no stage does Moses say explicitly that he is proposing that the people should be allowed to leave

permanently, never to return. He talks of a three day journey. There is an argument between him and Pharaoh as to who is to go. Only the adult males? Only the people, not the cattle? Moses consistently asks for permission to worship G-d, at some place that is not Egypt. But he does not speak about freedom or the promised land. Why not? Why does he create, and not correct, a false impression? Why can he not say openly what he means?

The commentators offer various explanations. R. Shmuel David Luzzatto (Italy, 1800-1865) says that it was impossible for Moses to tell the truth to a tyrant like Pharaoh. R. Yaakov Mecklenburg (Germany, 1785-1865, Ha-Ktav v'ha-Kabbalah) says that technically Moses did not tell a lie. He did indeed mean that he wanted the people to be free to make a journey to worship G-d, and he never said explicitly that they would return.

Abrabanel (Lisbon 1437 -- Venice 1508) says that G-d told Moses deliberately to make a small request, to demonstrate Pharaoh's cruelty and indifference to his slaves. All they were asking was for a brief respite from their labours to offer sacrifices to G-d. If he refused this, he was indeed a tyrant. Rav Elhanan Samet (Iyyunim be-Parshot Ha-Shevua, Exodus, 189) cites an unnamed commentator who says simply that this was war between Pharaoh and the Jewish people, and it war it is permitted, indeed sometimes necessary, to deceive.

Actually, however, the terms of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh are part of a wider pattern that we have already observed in the Torah. When Jacob leaves Laban we read: "Jacob decided to go behind the back of Laban the Aramean, and did not tell him that he was leaving" (Gen. 31:20). Laban protests this behaviour: "How could you do this? You went behind my back and led my daughters away like prisoners of war! Why did you have to leave so secretly? You went behind my back and told me nothing!" (31:26-27).

Jacob again has to tell at best a half-truth when Esau suggests that they travel together: "You know that the children are weak, and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle. If they are driven hard for even one day, all the sheep will die. Please go ahead of me, my lord" (33:13-14). This, though not strictly a lie, is a diplomatic excuse.

When Jacob's sons are trying to rescue their sister Dina who has been raped and abducted by

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Shechem the Hivite, they "replied deceitfully" (34:13) when Shechem and his father proposed that the entire family should come and settle with them, telling them that they could only do so if all the males of the town underwent circumcision.

Earlier still we find that three times Abraham and Isaac, forced to leave home because of famine, have to pretend that they are their wives' brothers not their husbands because they fear that otherwise they will be killed so that Sarah or Rebecca could be taken into the king's harem (Gen. 12, 20, 26).

These six episodes cannot be entirely accidental or coincidental to the biblical narrative as a whole. The implication seems to be this. Outside the promised land Jews in the biblical age are in danger if they tell the truth. They are at constant risk of being killed or at best enslaved.

Why? Because they are powerless in an age of power. They are a small family, at best a small nation, in an age of empires. They have to use their wits to survive. By and large they do not tell lies but they can create a false impression. This is not how things should be. But it is how they were before Jews had their own land, their one and only defensible space. It is how people in impossible situations are forced to be if they are to exist at all.

No one should be forced to live a lie. In Judaism truth is the seal of G-d and the essential precondition of trust between human beings. But when your people is being enslaved, its male children murdered, you have to liberate them by whatever means are possible. Moses, who had already seen that his first encounter with Pharaoh made things worse for his people-they still had to make the same quota of bricks but now also had to gather their own straw (5:6-8) -- did not want to risk making them worse still.

The Torah here is not justifying deceit. To the contrary, it is condemning a system in which telling the truth may put your life at risk, as it still does in many tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. Judaism-a religion of dissent, questioning and "argument for the sake of heaven"-is a faith that values intellectual honesty and moral truthfulness above all things. The Psalmist says: "Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken My name in vain nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24:3-4).

Malachi says of one who speaks in G-d's name: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips" (Mal. 2:6). Every Amidah ends with the prayer, "My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech."

What the Torah is telling us in these six narratives in Genesis and the seventh in Exodus is the connection between freedom and truth. Where there is freedom there can be truth. Otherwise there cannot. A society where people are forced to be less than fully honest merely to survive and not provoke further oppression is not the kind of society G-d wants us to make. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Egypt shall know that I am G-d when I stretch My hand over Egypt: and I shall take the Children of Israel out from among them” .” (Exodus 7:5) The portion of Va'era opens at a time of grave despair. At the conclusion of last week's reading, Moses had accepted G-d's call and assumed the vocation of taking the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage. His visit to Pharaoh, however, turned into a disaster. Not only does the Egyptian despot refuse to allow the Hebrews a three-day respite for a sacrificial celebration in the desert, he even increases their workload by making them find their own straw for making bricks. Moses tearfully remonstrates with G-d: "As soon as I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he made things worse..." (Ex. 5:22).

What follows is G-d's promise that Pharaoh will send them out with a strong arm. Furthermore, G-d introduces Himself as the G-d of history and freedom, and proceeds to delineate the four (or five) redemptions - or stages of redemption - which will occur in Egypt.

But the Hebrews, frustrated and skeptical, refuse to listen to Moses' optimistic recounting of the forthcoming redemption. Moses takes his cue from them, likewise questioning: "If indeed the children of Israel don't listen to me, how can I expect Pharaoh to listen to me?" (Ex 6:12). G-d chooses not to respond to Moses' logical reaction. In what appears to be a new beginning to the Book of Exodus, the text re-introduces us to Moses by presenting - for the first time - his lineage going back to Jacob, and then delineating the first seven (out of ten) plagues. Why the ten-plague plethora of body-blows to Egyptian society which only seems to harden Pharaoh's heart even more? Why not simply end the Egyptian servitude immediately?

Rashi provides a very clear explanation: G-d wanted to teach the Hebrews the greatness of G-d, and the strength of His will to abolish slavery. G-d was not ready to redeem Israel until they had also repented, until they were truly worthy of redemption. "... Such is the way of the Holy One, blessed be He: He brings punishment on the nations of the idolaters in order that

Israel may hear and revere (G-d)..." (Ex 7:3, Rashi ad loc).

G-d's name in this Biblical verse is Y-H-V-H, the G-d of history, love and redemption. The G-d of history must work with the nations of the world, and especially with His covenantal nation, Israel. Egypt must be brought to its knees, Israel must repent before G-d and truly desire freedom; only then will they be redeemed. And so G-d "hardened Pharaoh's heart" until Israel repented!

The Seforno (on Exodus 9:16) justifies the lengthy process of the plagues not so much for the sake of Israel's repentance, but rather for the sake of the Egyptians' repentance: "Since G-d desires the repentance of the wicked and not their death, as it is written, 'As I live, says G-d, I do not desire the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked repent of their ways and live' (Ezekiel 33:11). And so G-d declares that he will greatly increase His signs and His wonders in order for Egypt to repent as He made known to them His greatness and His loving kindness with His signs and His wonders..." (ibid Seforno ad loc).

To be sure, the Seforno also mentions that the plagues brought the Israelites to repentance; however he emphasizes the fact that Egypt was a lesson to the world; that no human ought to be enslaved and no human might enslave others! And the Seforno goes on to explain that G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart after the fifth plague in order that the totalitarian autocrat would release the Hebrews not because of the devastation of the plagues, but because he had truly repented.

This is why our Biblical portion concludes with the seventh plague, the plague of hail (barad). During the other plagues, Pharaoh seemed to relent for a brief period of time, but only because it appeared as if the strength and power of the Lord, G-d of Israel was greater than the strength and power of the gods of Egypt or at least of the Egyptian magicians. (ibid 8:18) The struggle seems to be the power of G-d versus the power of the idols.

Only after the seventh plague does Pharaoh declare to Moses and Aaron, "I have sinned this time; the Lord is righteous and my nation are sinners". (Exodus 9:27). Only at this point does Pharaoh realize that it is a moral struggle; a religious struggle, and not a power struggle. It is not might pitted against might, but rather might pitted against right; the Lord G-d of love, redemption and freedom for all against the Pharaonic gods of force and enslavement of all the weaker vessels.

And this is why the exodus from Egyptian bondage has been the clarion call for every oppressed people seeking freedom; from the American Revolution against England to the black struggle against white supremacy in the United States to the cry of the Soviet Jews behind the Iron Curtain, "Let us live as Jews or let us leave as Jews." © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Lord, so to speak, apparently is disturbed by Moshe's complaint against the treatment and continued oppression of Israel by the Egyptians. Moshe's complaint, voiced at the conclusion of last week's parsha, that no salvation has come to Israel as of yet does not receive a sympathetic hearing in the Heavenly court.

The Lord, so to speak, according to Rashi and the Talmud, longs for the previous generations of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel who seemingly bore their trials and difficulties without complaint even though G-d's revelation to them was in a lesser level than was the case with Moshe. Yet we do find that the patriarchs, Avraham and Yaakov did challenge G-d at moments of crisis.

Avraham says to G-d; "What can you grant me as I go childless?" And Yaakov says to G-d: "And You promised me that You would be good to me [and now Eisav threatens to destroy me.]" So why is the Lord disturbed by Moshe's statement that the lot of the Jewish people in Egypt has not yet been improved? Where do Moshe's words differ radically from those of Avraham and Yaakov?

And why does G-d, so to speak, long for the previous generations over the behavior of the current generation? And according to the aggadic interpretation of the verses in the parsha, Moshe is punished for asking that obvious question as to why the Jewish situation has shown no improvement even though Moshe is apparently fulfilling G-d's mission accurately and punctually. Where is the shortcoming that provokes such a critical response from Heaven?

I think that the answer perhaps lies in recognizing the difference between the individual Jew as an individual and the belief in the fate of the Jewish people as a nation and community. The individual Jew, Avraham, Yaakov, you and me, regularly face crises and difficulties in our lives as individuals. We have no guarantee that the Lord will extricate us from our difficulties.

As Yaakov put it; "Perhaps my sins will have canceled out any Havenly promises of success and aid." Avraham realizes that perhaps G-d's promises to him can also possibly be fulfilled through his faithful disciple and servant Eliezer. The doubts of the patriarchs are personal, not national. They never for a moment waver in their belief in the ultimate survival and triumph of the Jewish people, of the truth and justice of their cause and code, and of the validity of the mission of the Jewish people.

Moshe's moment of complaint is not only personal but it is national. Maybe this people will never leave Egyptian bondage. Maybe the Jewish people as a nation will not be able to come to Sinai and accept the

Torah and become a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Maybe they are not worthy of the grandiose promises made to them.

Moshe is forced to account for doubting the people and implying that G-d has not chosen well, for the troubles of that people have not subsided. One can doubt one's own place in the story of Israel. One can never doubt the validity of Israel and the Heavenly promises made to it itself. ©2011 Rabbi Berel Wein-Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The first mission that was given to Moshe was to go to the nation and tell the people that G-d had remembered them, and that they were going to be brought to a land of milk and honey. G-d promised Moshe that the people would listen to him, and that is indeed what happened. "And the nation believed... and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves" [Shemot 4:31].

In the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Moshe once again speaks to the nation but this time with a different result. "And they did not listen to Moshe, because of impatience and hard labor" [6:9]. What was the reason for this change of heart?

The act of leaving Egypt was not an obvious event. According to the prophesy of Yechezkel, the Almighty commanded the people in preparation for the redemption, "Let every man discard the abominable idols of his eyes... but they revolted against me and did not listen to me, no man discarded the abominable idols of his eyes" [20:8]. The Midrash comments as follows: "They did not listen to Moshe" - Is anybody who is sent to freedom by his master not happy about it? However, they found it hard to part from their idols, as is written, 'no man discarded the abominable idols of his eyes.'" [Mechilta, Shemot 12:6].

The Torah does not tell us that the people ever asked to go to Eretz Yisrael. Their only complaint was about the harsh slavery that they experienced. Therefore, when Moshe announced that G-d had remembered them and that He would take them out of Egypt and bring them to a land of milk and honey, they believed him and they were happy. And later on Moshe gave them the news of the full redemption, describing four successive stages that would lead to the final goal - "And I will take you to me as a nation, and I will be your G-d. And you will know that I am your G-d... And I will bring you to the land..." [Shemot 6:7-8]. Moshe told them the final goal of their redemption from Egypt in order to go to Eretz Yisrael, what was expected of them,

the true character of the nation of Yisrael, and what their mission is in the world.

At that point the people began to understand that they were not simply a nation freed from slavery, taken out of exile and brought to "a safe haven," but that they were given a difficult task. They were expected to be slaves of the Almighty, to abandon their idols and all of their customs, and to become a unique people - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. "And Moshe spoke in this way to Bnei Yisrael" [6:9]. When Moshe began to talk to them in an idealistic way, "they did not listen to Moshe, because of impatience." According to Or Hachaim, "Bnei Yisrael did not listen because they were not men of Torah, and this is what is called 'impatience,' for the Torah expands the heart of a man." They were willing to accept that they would leave exile and move to a land of milk and honey, but they did not want any obligations or difficult missions, they did not want to abandon their existing customs.

Our generation suffers from impatience too. We wanted to come to the land and to be a nation like all others, possessing a sovereign and free land. Although the dream was fulfilled, the accompanying vision has disappeared. But "without vision a nation will become wild" [Mishei 29:18]. But in spite of their reaction, Moshe was given a command: "And He commanded them to go to Bnei Yisrael" [6:13] - G-d commanded them to lead them in a calm way and to tolerate them" [Rashi].

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah teaches us a profound lesson in arrogance and self dependency. Hashem instructed the prophet Yechezkel to deliver a crushing blow to Pharaoh and his Egyptian empire and predict its total destruction. Hashem said, "Behold I am sending the sword after you that will decimate man and animal. Egypt will lay desolate and ruined... in response to your saying, 'The river is mine and I developed it.'" (29:8,9) Hashem held Pharaoh and Egypt fully accountable for their arrogant approach to prosperity crediting their sustenance solely to their technology.

The background for this is that Egypt relies upon the Nile River for her basic existence. Rainfall in Egypt is so scarce and infrequent that she must maintain an elaborate irrigation system for her basic agricultural needs. Over the years, Egyptians grew accustomed to their highly effective system and viewed themselves self sufficient. They viewed the Nile River as their sole provider and regarded its developer, Pharaoh their deity. He was, in truth, responsible for the system's efficiency and was therefore considered by all, their source of goodness. Pharaoh gladly accepted his title and lured his foolish nation into recognizing him as their deity. Hashem responded to this arrogance and informed Pharaoh that Egypt's days were numbered.

Her mighty empire would soon fall and her country would lay desolate for forty years.

Pharaoh's absurd status as Egypt's deity finds its parallel in the ancient Pharaoh of this week's parsha. Hashem repeatedly chose a special meeting place for Moshe and Pharaoh and instructed Moshe, "Go to Pharaoh in the morning; behold he is going out to the water." (Shmos 7:15) Moshe Rabbeinu was sent to meet Pharaoh far from his palace-at the foot of the Nile River. Rashi (ad loc.) explains that Hashem chose this auspicious site in response to Pharaoh's arrogant claim to the masses. He proclaimed himself as a deity without common bodily needs. In order to preserve this myth, he secretly traveled early each morning to the Nile River to relieve himself there. Hashem therefore chose this perfect moment to send Moshe to remind Pharaoh of his mortality and disclose his secret identity.

In truth, the parallel lines between the Pharaohs extends much further. In our haftorah Yechezkel states in Hashem's name, "Behold I am turning against you and your river... Neither man nor animal shall pass through the land for forty years." (29:10,11) The Sages place special significance on the number forty predicted here. They note the Biblical discussions between Yosef and Pharaoh wherein seven years of famine are mentioned six times. They explain that these refer to forty-two years of ordained famine for Egypt. (see Breishis Rabba 89:9) Tosfos explain that ultimately only seven years were decreed upon ancient Egypt. Yosef intervened on behalf of his household and asked Hashem to limit the famine to seven years. Hashem answered Yosef's request and Yosef subsequently limited Pharaoh's dream to seven years of famine. (see Baalei Tosfos to Breishis 41:27) Chazal add that, in reality, only two years of famine transpired. Soon after our patriarch Yaakov Avinu arrived in Egypt he blessed Pharaoh with prosperity and brought the famine to an immediate halt. (see Rashi Breishis 47:19)

Accordingly, forty years of famine remained to be seen. Those were reserved for a later period in history when Egypt would deserve Hashem's harsh response. In Yechezkel's days, the time finally arrived and the remaining forty years were decreed upon Egypt.

Chazal's powerful insight suggests that Egypt was presently suffering for her ancient fault committed one thousand years before. Apparently, this decree of Egyptian desolation was Heavenly ordained many centuries earlier for a similar fault of hers. It follows logically that the earlier Pharaoh must have possessed a similar approach to prosperity to that of the later Pharaoh. Indeed, this was the case and we discover a similar scenario in the earlier Egyptian empire. The Midrash notes a discrepancy in Pharaoh's dream when expressing it to Yosef. In Pharaoh's true dream, the Torah reveals him standing above the Nile River. Yet when informing Yosef of his dream Pharaoh conveniently referred to himself standing next to the river. Chazal explain that Pharaoh took full credit for

creating and developing his Nile River. In his dream he beheld himself standing above the Nile reflecting his position that, "the river was his and he developed it." He was, however, embarrassed to reveal this arrogance to Yosef and he carefully altered the truth. (Tanchuma Voeira 8)

We now see a direct corollary between the Pharaohs, both claiming to be the sole source of their prosperity. Hashem initially responded to this abhorrent arrogance and decreed forty-two years of Egyptian desolation. This decree would undoubtedly clarify to Pharaoh who controls prosperity and upon whom everyone must rely. The Nile River was soon to be of no use and Egypt would be forced to recognize Hashem as their ultimate provider. Pharaoh quickly learned his lesson. Mysteriously, once Yaakov came to Egypt and blessed Pharaoh the famine ended. This miracle convinced the ancient Pharaoh that Hashem controlled the world. Once Pharaoh learned his lesson the forty remaining years of famine were suspended. In the interim Egypt developed a hostile attitude towards Hashem and His people. On the heels of Egypt's recent lesson Hashem completed the process and destroyed the entire Egyptian Empire. It would take many years for Egypt to raise her head in pride and take credit, once again, for her accomplishments.

Now, nearly one thousand years later Egypt returned to her arrogant ways. After her massive devastating blows she finally rebuilt her empire. Pharaoh, in his height of success, began viewing his Nile River as Egypt's sole source of prosperity. He, like the earlier Pharaoh, maintained that he created the Nile and developed it. Hashem refused to tolerate this arrogance and when the first signs of this absurdity resurfaced Hashem responded harshly. The time had finally arrived for Egypt to experience her long awaited forty years of desolation. Through this, Hashem displayed to Mitzraim and the world over that He controlled the world and provided their prosperity.

The above lesson reminds us never to forget our limited role in our personal success. We must never forget that Hashem is our true provider and He develops and secures our efforts with their ultimate success. © 2011 Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Read the story of how the Jews became enslaved to Egypt in Parshat Vaeira, and having the benefit of knowing how the story ends, we can wonder why the Egyptians were punished for enslaving the Jews, when we know that the Jews needed to be enslaved, either as part of the decree, or as the process of becoming a cohesive nation.

The Ramchal explains that the answer lies in the Egyptian's intent, which became clear when it was time to let the Jews go. Had the Egyptians done it with

the intentions of merely doing G-d's will, they would have immediately let them go when the situation warranted it. The same is true of our lives and choices: We can sometimes justify not giving as much, not volunteering enough, or not learning enough Torah by claiming not to have time. The truth comes out, though, when we DO have money, time on weekends and vacations, or between jobs/school. If we do what we can WHEN we can, we will prove our appreciation for the Torah, and grow our appreciation OF the Torah in the process. © 2011 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

“He could have unleashed His power and destroyed you and your people with pestilence, exterminating you from the earth. However, He has allowed you to survive just to show you His power, and so His Name can be declared throughout all the earth.” (Shemos 9:15-16)

At least, this is what Moshe Rabbeinu told Pharaoh in advance of the seventh plague of hail. The only question is, what's the point? What's the big deal that Pharaoh needs to see how powerful G-d is? Isn't it good enough for us to see how powerful He is, by blowing up Pharaoh and his lowlife cohorts to smithereens?

Obviously not, or that is what G-d would have done. If so, then what was the reason to reveal G-d's greatest to Pharaoh if, in the end, he kept relenting and instead kept the Jewish people captive until he could no longer hold them? The answer to the question may have to do with human nature, and a not-so-well-known historical fact.

Regarding human nature, shock is rarely a positive educational tool. True, it can bring about some very important and crucial results quickly, which, sometimes, are necessary. However, it rarely results in positive behavioral change as a function of intellectual understanding and free-will, and that is what G-d desires the most.

In other words, G-d didn't just want to show Pharaoh how powerful He could be. He wanted him to learn how powerful He can be. He wanted Pharaoh to integrate the knowledge and make it a part of his consciousness, so that when all was said and done, and the Jewish people finally left Egypt, the message of G-d's greatness would remain with him.

As to why, that may have more to do with another story, one that we usually do not connect to the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

Then the word of G-d came to Yonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

Yonah obeyed the word of G-d and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Yonah began by going a

day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The people of Nineveh believed G-d. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When Yonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on G-d. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? G-d may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

When G-d saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened. (Yonah 3:1-9)

That was quite a reaction for a city on the brink of destruction after having earned Divine wrath for its immoral behavior. Usually cities so far down that path don't even believe in G-d, let alone take threats in His Name seriously. And yet, not only did the people instantly do teshuvah, the king of Nineveh even humbled himself and donned sackcloth and sat in the dust. What was his story?

It turns out that after Pharaoh watched the last and the best of his troops perish in the sea, he knew he couldn't return home. What was there to return home to? So he didn't, heading east instead, to Mesopotamia, and the great city of Nineveh, where he eventually became king.

That is why when Yonah came through the city and proclaimed in the Name of G-d that their end was near unless they did teshuvah, he believed him. It wasn't worth the risk, because the last time he stood up to G-d he lost everything but his life. This time Pharaoh, a.k.a. King of Nineveh, took nothing for granted, and took the prophet of G-d at his word, and called for national teshuvah.

Perhaps this is how Yonah knew in advance that he'd be successful, and declined the mission. Perhaps he knew that the king of Nineveh had firsthand experience with the wrath of G-d, and would instantly make amends, unlike his own brothers back in Eretz Yisroel. By comparison, the Jews of Eretz Yisroel would look bad.

What a strange twist of history. The Pharaoh who, as a result of his chutzpah, had been bent on defying G-d and destroying the humbled Jewish nation, became the king of Nineveh who, because of his humility and fear of G-d, was the reason for G-d to be angry at the Jewish people because of their chutzpah. There must be some important message in all of that.

Indeed, it is a message important enough that Sefer Yonah is read as the Maftir for Minchah on Yom Kippur. Apparently, it is a short story with a tall

message, one that had been born not in Nineveh, but back in Egypt as G-d was unleashing His power, and making clear to the Pharaoh of Egypt just how powerful He can be.

However, to understand that message it is not enough to understand who the king of Nineveh was, and where he came from. We also must understand who Yonah the prophet was, and where he came from.

It seems to me, the author, that the two of them reincarnated into Eliyahu of Binyomin. The level called the "Drop of Yosef" Eliyahu gave to Yonah ben Amitti HaTzarafis when he revived him (I Melachim 17:17-23). This is the sod of what is written in the Zohar (Vayakhel 197a): It was taught: Yonah came from the legion of Eliyahu, which is why he is called, "ben Amitti" ("son of Truth"), as it says, "and that the word of G-d in your mouth is truth!" (I Melachim 17:24). This is also the sod of what Chazal write: It was taught in the school of Eliyahu, "The boy that I revived was Moshiach ben Yosef." Since he came from a drop of Yosef he will therefore be Moshiach ben Yosef, may it happen speedily in our time. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 32)

As it is well known, for the Jewish people, the transition to the Messianic Era is a one-two punch, initiated by Moshiach Ben Yosef and completed by Moshiach ben Dovid. The Shem M'Shmuel explains:

"When the Jewish people are in exile, they are humbled, which is necessary for removing material baseness and bodily desires from them... This is the ability of Yosef, and this is what Moshiach Ben Yosef will do for them. Once the materialistic aspect and desires are removed from them, then the yetzer hara of pride and status gets stronger. It is against this that Moshiach Ben Dovid, which is Dovid HaMelech-the leader of those who humbled themselves- comes, to humble them for the service of G-d, may His Name be blessed." (Shem M'Shmuel, Parashas Vayishlach 5671)

This is very insightful. One might ask: Why are two Moshiach's necessary for redemption? The answer has to do with the process of redemption itself, and in particular, the mindset of the Jewish people historically. We say in the Shemonah Esrai: "The offspring of Your servant Dovid may You speedily cause to flourish, and enhance his pride through Your salvation, for we hope for Your salvation all day long."

The Hebrew word for offspring is tzemach, which means sprout, something that is planted in the ground and meant to grow. However, a seed can't be planted in hard land, because it won't take root, even if it is constantly watered.

It is the job of the ox to plow the ground and prepare it for the seed. Since, traditionally, Yosef is compared to an ox, It is Moshiach Ben Yosef's job to do the same thing to the Jewish people, to prepare them for the planting of the tzemach, or Moshiach Ben Dovid, so that the Messianic Era can take root and grow.

Hence, materialism is the first obstacle to overcome along the path to the Final Redemption.

Materialism leads to a less spiritual lifestyle, even if the money is used for the sake of Torah-like causes. Ultimately, it creates complacency, and removes any longing for Yemos HaMoshiach, resulting in an artificial sense of redemption instead.

Hence, Yonah's mission had not simply been one of inspiring the Jewish people of his time to do teshuvah, but of preparing them for redemption. It was his job to spiritually break them away from the materialism that was drawing them in the direction of exile, in order to make them eligible for Moshiach Ben Dovid.

Yonah knew that it was not an easy job, so he fled instead, rather than make the Jewish people look more unworthy than they already did. Because, knowing that the king of Nineveh was someone who took the threats of G-d seriously, he suspected that the people would drop their materialistic ways there, and repent instead, and avert a Divine decree of destruction. Yonah knew that his success in Nineveh would obligate the Jewish people to act likewise, so he took himself out of the equation.

The rest is history, or rather his story, the story of Yonah.

There are many points that could be discussed here, but one of the main ones is how, in the process of one redemption, G-d was already laying the foundation for another one, much further down the road. Furthermore, even more remarkable, is how G-d turned a great antagonist into a great protagonist, a lesson that makes it clear that the door to teshuvah is never really closed, just the people who don't use it.

Also, this shows how resources for redemption can exist where we least expect them to, and are available even when we can't see them. This is what bitachon-trust in G-d-says: Just because you can't see a way out of crisis at the moment doesn't mean that G-d can't. Just because you haven't found a solution to your problem doesn't mean that G-d isn't sending one, about to pop in your head any moment, if you'll let it.

And finally, for now, there is the original message. Too many people act contrary to the will of G-d, and have convinced themselves that they are getting away with it. Their rationale? They haven't suffered for it that much, or at all. They assume that either G-d looks away, or sees but just doesn't care that much, or has low expectations for them, and therefore allows them their weaknesses.

Though it is true that G-d does take into account our personal weaknesses when judging us, not only does He see what we do, but He cares very much as well. Why hasn't He let us, and the world know, in no uncertain terms that we need to do teshuvah, or just wipe us off the face of the earth instead? Because, as Moshe Rabbeinu tells Pharaoh in this week's parshah: G-d has His agenda.

Sometimes that agenda means swift and direct punishment for our spiritually-lax behavior, sometimes it

means being allowed to choose the path of sin in the meantime for the sake of a result in the future. It could simply be to allow our debt to accumulate until we become worthy of, G-d forbid, a severe punishment in this world, the next world, or both. Or, it can simply be because G-d, being all-merciful, holds out the hope that some day soon we'll wake up and do teshuvah while it is still possible.

Whatever the reason, we don't do right and avoid wrong out of fear of punishment. One thing is for certain, if we don't get our act together in time, it will come, and in a way that will make us wonder why we ever doubted that it would. Rather, we do the right thing because it is the right thing, even if, G-d forbid, we are suffering as if we are doing the wrong thing, as G-d told Iyov (Job).

G-d gave us the Torah so that we could learn what right is, and what it is not. Yes, there are promises of good for the right behavior, and threats of punishment for the opposite. However, history has proven that, especially during non-Temple times, it is not always so true, or at least not always so obvious, and therefore, a person can't measure the moral quality of his behavior based upon how successful or unsuccessful he or she is in life.

There is right, Torah-right, in this world, and there is wrong, Torah-wrong in this world. We measure up based upon on which side of the line our actions fall, and leave the Hashgochah Pratis-Divine Providence-to G-d.

G-d has His agenda, which can dictate how He deals with us at the moment. However, that has little to do with how well we learn Torah, and adhere to its laws and practices. © 2011 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG

Objectively Respectful

“Hashem said to Moshe, 'Say to Aharon...' (7:19) Hashem commanded Moshe to defer to Aharon the task of implementing the first plague, transforming the water of the Nile River into blood. Citing the Midrash, Rashi explains that since the Nile had protected Moshe when he was an infant, it would be a display of ingratitude to be the instrument through which the river is smitten. (7:19) What is the notion of expressing gratitude to an inanimate object?

The value associated with an inanimate object is generally determined by the manner in which it services mankind. This value increases when the object is used by a person of great distinction; the greater the persona being serviced the more elevated the object becomes. Much credence is given in society to objects or places that once serviced men of great distinction. The home of a past president becomes a landmark and a pair of glasses that were worn by him, a collector's item. An object does not possess intrinsic attributes that require a show of gratitude be made towards it. Rather,

showing respect and appreciation to an object expresses our reverence for the person who benefited by it. Consequently, man's obligation to respect himself makes it a requirement to show respect to those items which have benefited him. Failing to acknowledge the benefit that he received by lashing out at its source creates the perception that he does not consider himself worthy of this benefit. If he lacks respect for that which he has benefited from, he reveals that he lacks respect for himself.

This notion is true concerning all aspects of appreciating benefit we have received. If a person is unable or chooses not to express his gratitude for the benefit he has received, he is proclaiming that he is not worthy of receiving such benefit. Included in our obligation to appreciate what others have done on our behalf, is the obligation that we have to ourselves to acknowledge that we are worthy of receiving the beneficence of others. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Zweig & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand [i.e., swore] to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov; and I shall give it to you as a morashah / legacy-I am Hashem." (6:8) R' Shmuel Yehuda Katznellenbogen z"l (1521-1597; rabbi of Venice, Italy) writes: There is a difference between the word "morashah" / legacy and "yerushah" / inheritance, namely that one receives an inheritance, while he leaves a legacy. It follows that, in this verse, Hashem hinted to Moshe Rabbeinu that the generation of the Exodus would not enter Eretz Yisrael. They would never inherit the Land; they would only leave their rights to it as a legacy for their descendants.

R' Katznellenbogen continues: The word morashah also appears in the verse (Devarim 33:4), "Moshe commanded us the Torah, a morashah for the Congregation of Yaakov." This indicates that we are commanded to pass on the Torah to our children as a legacy. (Derashot Maharam Mintz no.1)

"Pharaoh sent and summoned Moshe and Aharon and said to them, "This time I have sinned..." (9:27) Why, after the plague of hail, did Pharaoh admit that he had sinned?

R' Raphael Emanuel Chai Riki z"l (1688-1743; author of Mishnat Chassidim and other works) explains: The hail destroyed the crops, which ultimately would cause famine. This reminded Pharaoh of the kindness that Yosef had done for the Egyptians, and that caused him to acknowledge that it was wrong to oppress Yosef's family. (Chosheiv Machashavot © 2011 S. Katz & torah.org)