

The Egyptian Exile Begins: A Quantum View

In this week's Parsha, Vayigash, Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and said, "Hashem sent me ahead of you to ensure that you survive in the land, and sustain you in a great deliverance. So now, it was not you who sent me here, but Hashem. He made me...ruler over all Egypt."¹ And he continues to tell them to tell their father, Yaakov, "This is what your son Yosef said: 'Hashem has made me master of all Egypt, come down to me, do not tarry.'"²

From Yosef's words to Yaakov, we understand that it wasn't just a good idea to come down to Egypt because Yosef was in charge of the place, and he was not just showing them Hashem's hand in the brothers' sale of Yosef, but even more than that, he was saying that it was time for the Egyptian exile to begin, therefore, "come down...do not tarry." And what was the proof? The proof was that Yosef was the "ruler of all Egypt."

We know that Avraham was told by Hashem that his children will be in a land that is not their own for four hundred years, and Yosef was certain that this was the sign that it is the time for it to begin. Why was he so certain that ruling over Egypt was the sign? And why would he be excited for the Egyptian exile to begin?

At the *bris bein habesarim* (the 'Covenant between the Parts'), Hashem told Avraham that his children will be in a land that is not their own, "and they will enslave them, and make them suffer" for four hundred years, "and after that, they will go out with great wealth."³ The promise that "they will go out with great wealth" isn't just a reward for their enslavement and suffering, but it is the purpose of their whole exile.

What is the proof that the whole purpose of the Egyptian exile is that "they will go out with great wealth"?

One of the reasons⁴ for the plague of darkness that descended upon the Egyptians was so that the Jewish People would be able to enter Egyptian properties and search out their valuables in order to know what they have, because Hashem commanded, "And they should borrow, a man from his friend, and a woman from her friend, silver vessels, and gold vessels."⁵ Rashi brings the words of the Talmud,⁶ explaining that this was in order that "after, they will go out with great wealth" – "So that the righteous one [Avraham] shouldn't say" that Hashem kept the part of His promise about, "they will enslave them, and make them suffer," but He didn't keep the part about, "And after that, they will go out with great wealth."

This doesn't make sense. No one wants to stay in bondage, in exile, even for one extra moment. As the Talmud⁷ tells us that when Hashem said, "And they should borrow, a man from his friend, and a woman from her friend..." The Jewish People said, "If only we could leave ourselves [empty-handed]." And the Talmud explains that it is like a person who is in jail, and he is told that tomorrow he will be set free, and he will be given riches. And he responds, "Let me free now and I will forgo the riches." The Jewish People would have rather left empty-handed than stay one more moment in Egyptian servitude. So why would Hashem keep them suffering in bondage longer than necessary, just for a payout?

And even Avraham would certainly forgo Hashem's promise, just to release his children from their suffering.

We must conclude that going out "with great wealth," in this case, was so important that it was worth staying in oppressive bondage for it, and even Avraham would agree to this, because it was the reason that they were there to begin with.

And this is what Yosef was saying to his brothers, when he said, Go tell our father, "Hashem has

¹ Bereishis, 45:7–8.

² Bereishis, 45:9.

³ Bereishis, 15:13–14.

⁴ Rashi to Shmos 10:22. Also see Shemos Rabba, 14:3.

⁵ Shmos, 11:2.

⁶ Talmud, Brachos 9a. Brought by Rashi to Shmos 11:2.

⁷ Talmud, Brachos 9b.

made me master of all Egypt” – because of that, the wealth of all of Egypt is under my jurisdiction, therefore, “come down to me, do not tarry,” because Hashem’s purpose in sending us to a land that is not our own has come to pass. The foundation is laid for us to “go out with great wealth.” This is especially poignant now, because of the great famine; the wealth of the whole world has made its way into Egypt, as it says, “And Yosef collected all of the silver [money],”⁸ and the Talmud⁹ explains that it means “All of the silver [money] in the world.”

Now we have to understand, what is so important about this wealth that made it the purpose of the Egyptian exile?

The Collection of Holy Sparks

The teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus tell us of a world that existed before this one, called *Tohu*. The light of that world was too great, it couldn’t withstand it, and it shattered. The pieces of that world were incorporated into our world, called *Tikkun*, in the form of 288 spiritual sparks that are hidden in the physical. Our job is to extract those great sparks, and raise them up to Hashem. We do this by using the physical for Torah and Mitzvos, and to serve Hashem. When we finish collecting all these sparks, Moshiach will be here, when all the lights of Tohu will be incorporated into the vessels of Tikkun.

Every one of us has a part in the world that we are meant to work on, to extract the sparks that are hidden therein. When we are done with the extraction, we come away with it in the form of physical possessions. We are all directed by Hashem to the exact time and place we need to be in, and we are given the physical objects that we need to work with, in order to complete our individual missions.

It is obvious that these sparks are very great, and it takes many of us and a lot of effort to extract even one of these sparks.

In Egypt there were 202 of these sparks¹⁰, and that is what the Jewish People took out with them; that is, in fact, why they were there to begin with. This was the “great wealth” that Hashem promised Avraham, and that was worth staying in oppressive bondage longer for. The physical manifestation of these sparks was in the form of gold, silver, etc.

The remaining 86 sparks are spread over the rest of the world, and we are spread across the globe to do the work of extracting the rest of the sparks. Because of our servitude in Egypt, we only have 86 left.

That is why Avraham agreed to the bondage, and that is why Yosef was excited for the Egyptian exile to begin. Because what we would come out with, the “great wealth,” would put us far ahead on the road to completing the Jewish mission, to make this world into a home for Hashem, Tohu in Tikkun.

This is also the reason that the money and the possessions of the Jewish People are very precious to Hashem,¹¹ because in them are found these holy sparks that we are meant to uplift.

It goes even deeper. Every one of our Neshamas is connected to a specific spark or sparks, and it is the essence of the Neshama that is connected to the spark. Even deeper: The reason that the Neshama was created was to extract its specific spark, and as long as the spark is not extracted, it remains in exile and the Neshama that is

¹⁰ Torah Ohr 60c learns it from “And also an *erev rav* [mixed multitude] went up with them” (Shmos, 12:38). ‘Rav’ has the numerical value of 202, in other words, 202 went up with them.

¹¹ The Baal Shem Tov teaches this (See *Ohr Hatorah* from the Maggid of Mezritch, *Remozer Hatorah*, beginning with the words ‘*Hatorah Chassa*’). He learns it from “The Torah has pity on the money of Israel” (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 27a), and when Yaakov crossed the Yabbok, he went back for “small jugs” (Talmud, Chulin 91a, brought by Rashi to Bereishis 32:25).

⁸ Bereishis, 47:14.

⁹ Talmud, Pesachim 119b.

connected to the spark remains in exile with it. So in order to free our Neshamas, we must each free our specific sparks. It was to the benefit of the Jewish People that they stayed longer, even in servitude, because it ensured that not only did their bodies go free, but also their Neshamas.

Where do we find these sparks?

Hashem said that we should borrow vessels of gold and silver, “a woman from her neighbor, and from the one who lives in her home.”¹²

“A woman” refers to the Neshama. And she should borrow “vessels,” which are holy sparks, “from her neighbor,” like a neighbor who she comes in contact with from time to time, meaning the people and things that we interact with only once in a while, “and from the one who lives in her home,” meaning the people and the things we interact with every day.

All these people and things that you come in contact with, it’s not by chance; rather, Hashem put them with you because they are your charge, they are connected to your Neshama. And you are meant to have a positive impact on them, an impact of Torah and Hashem’s ways. This way, you uncover the G-dly spark hidden within, and you uncover the wealth that is there.

A person may think to himself, “What do I need this for? I don’t want anything to do with the exile. I will ensconce myself in a place of Torah and Tefillah, and I won’t have anything to do with the world and this exile.”

This way of thinking is a big mistake for two reasons. First, although it sounds noble, since he is in a holy and spiritual atmosphere, it is all superficial. He might *feel* free of the exile, but he is actually prolonging it, because his part is not being accomplished, and the essence of his Neshama that is connected to his part, his mission, is stuck in the exile.

Second, what is all the holiness worth if he is not doing what Hashem wants, and he is not accomplishing what he was created to do?

The culmination of the Exodus from Egypt happened at the splitting of the sea. Our sages say,¹³ “Greater were the spoils of the sea than the spoils of Egypt.” The Egyptians would adorn themselves, their horses and their war chariots with gold, silver, etc. when they would go out to battle. And when they drowned in the sea, Hashem made a miracle that all the Egyptian valuables washed ashore. All the Jewish People had to do was pick them up. According to the Midrash, there were at least eighteen million¹⁴ Egyptians who went out to chase the Jewish People, so it was a lot of possessions. It was when they crossed the sea that the spoils of Egypt, that had been officially “borrowed,” became theirs, because the Egyptians drowned.¹⁵

May we merit to see the coming of Moshiach, when we will see the fruits of our labor, our struggles and our suffering in this exile. And we will once again go out with great wealth, greater than when we left Egypt, spiritual and physical, Neshamas and bodies. May it happen soon.¹⁶

¹³ Mechilta to Shmos 12:36. Rashi to Shmos 15:22.

¹⁴ See Midrash Tanchuma to Devarim 12:29: “Pharaoh took... Thirty men went out for every one of Israel.” That is the case if it is only counting the men from 20–60 years old, which was more than 600,000 x 30 = 18,000,000; however, if it is counting men, women, children and seniors, then the number is more than three times that.

¹⁵ *Lekutei Sichos*, vol. 3, p. 879, footnote 11.

¹⁶ Based on *Lekutei Sichos*, vol. 3, pp. 823–827.

¹² Shmos, 3:22.