

# When Iyov Left Egypt

In foretelling the fate of the Jewish people, Hashem pledged to Avraham that after generations of slavery, they would emerge with great wealth.<sup>1</sup> Commentators<sup>2</sup> explain that the windfall of Egyptian bounty was a form of restitution for centuries of slave labor. However, this great wealth did not restore the lives of Jews who had died in slavery, and it did not reverse their physical and emotional pain. In what sense were the Jews made whole by gold and silver?

The same problem presents at the end of the Book of Iyov. The protagonist endures the death of his children, the destruction of his fortune, abandonment by his friends, and an eruption of boils across his body. Then, at the end of his Book, “Hashem restored that which had been captured from Iyov.”<sup>3</sup> This restoration includes doubling the wealth he had possessed before, and giving him seven sons and three daughters, matching his number of children from the start of the story. However, it appears that these were not his original children,<sup>4</sup> and this certainly did not repeal his experience of physical and emotional pain. How, then, has Iyov been restored?

## Iyov and the Jewish Slaves: A Linguistic Association

As students in day school, long before most of us ever know Iyov’s name, much less open his book, we are taught to associate him with the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt. As taught by Rabbi Simai:<sup>5</sup>



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שלשה היו באותה עצה בלעם ואיוב ויתרו  
בלעם שיעץ נהרג איוב ששתק נידון ביסורין  
יתרו שברח זכו מבני בניו שישבו בלשכת  
הגזית.

*There were three counselors [in Pharaoh’s plot to drown baby boys]: Bilam, Iyov, and Yitro. Bilam counseled [to proceed with it], and was killed. Iyov was silent, and was punished with suffering. Yitro fled, and some of his descendants merited to sit in the Lishkat haGazit [as part of the Sanhedrin].*

Rabbi Simai’s association of these three figures with the counsel given to Pharaoh seems to be purely linguistic, based on the word עצה (counsel):

- Yitro advised Moshe, בקולי שמע אייעצך, “Listen to my voice, and I will counsel you.”<sup>6</sup>
- Bilam declared to Balak, לכה אייעצך, “Let me give you counsel.”<sup>7</sup>
- Iyov is introduced as living in “the land of עוץ,” a location that defies identification.<sup>8</sup> Rambam explains the word עוץ as a reference to counsel.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond language, though, there are meaningful parallels between Iyov’s arc and the arc of the Jews in Egypt. Perhaps we might use the story of Iyov’s restored plenty to shed light on the purpose of the wealth with which we left Egypt.

## Iyov’s Arc: From Riches to Rags to Riches

Rabbi Simai’s aforementioned contention notwithstanding, nearly all commentators understand that Iyov’s misery was not inflicted as retributory justice.<sup>10</sup> Iyov is described by Hashem at the outset of his story as, “unlike anyone else in the land: unblemished, righteous, revering Hashem, and avoiding evil.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, Iyov is slated to suffer specifically because of his great righteousness. He loses children, wealth, allies, and health in the name of a trial to determine the durability of human reverence for Hashem.

Not knowing the Divine plan, Iyov’s visitors interpret his suffering as evidence of his guilt. In their worldview, and despite the superlative greatness for which Iyov is known,<sup>12</sup> to them it is axiomatic that one who suffers must have failed to live up to Divine expectations.<sup>13</sup>

This indictment devastates Iyov. At the start of his travails Iyov expresses grief for his losses, but that quickly gives way to mourning for the loss of the esteem in which he had once been held. Iyov catalogues at length the shame he now experiences.<sup>14</sup> Further, Iyov complains that Hashem is now unreachably aloof, and will never

deign to respond to Iyov's allegations of injustice. Iyov's strongest complaints are reserved not for his filial, physical, and financial losses, but rather for his decline in the eyes of his world, and his inability to gain an audience before Hashem.

At the end of Iyov's saga, Hashem at last responds, delivering a multi-chapter lecture on the vast differences between Hashem and human beings. At the end, Iyov retracts his initial complaints, saying, "I had heard of You with my ear before; now, my eye has seen You. Therefore I reject and regret [my words], as [I am] dust and ash."<sup>15</sup> Hashem then defends Iyov before his visitors, "raising the face of Iyov."<sup>16</sup> Seeing a possibility for connection with Hashem, Iyov abandons his hostility and reaches out — and in the moment when he prays to Hashem, he is given wealth, he is blessed with children, and his community responds to him with new support.<sup>17</sup> Iyov's standing as a Man of G-d is fully restored.

In light of this arc, perhaps we may understand Iyov's newfound plenty as something other than material restitution. Wealth and family convey a message of Divine approval to Iyov's world. This is no longer a man who is rejected by Hashem; rather, Iyov is indeed the outstandingly worthy individual described in the beginning, "unblemished, righteous, revering Hashem, and avoiding evil."

### **The Jews in Egypt: From Riches to Rags to Riches**

Like Iyov, the Jewish people begin their painful sojourn in wealth, glory, and an aura of connection with Hashem. Three generations of good fortune sent by Hashem have been

kind to them, and Yosef's role as the savior of Egypt brings him and his family the respect of Egyptian society.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, they have a multi-generation reputation as protected representatives of Hashem,<sup>19</sup> a role cemented by Yosef when he credits Hashem for his success in Egypt.<sup>20</sup>

In another generation, the Jews' success and Divine protection dissipate — and as with Iyov's experience, this does not appear to be a response to sin. Several Talmudic sages do suggest that Hashem may have been punishing Avraham,<sup>21</sup> but the Biblical revelation to Avraham<sup>22</sup> states simply that the Jews must descend to Egypt as a step along a preordained path that is their destiny, regardless of their conduct.

Suffering creates that same sundering of the Divine relationship that Iyov experienced. The Jews endure generations of slavery without even crying out to Hashem; according to Yehoshua<sup>23</sup> and Yechezkel,<sup>24</sup> they even participate in Egyptian idolatry.<sup>25</sup>

As was true for Iyov, the moment of reunion with Hashem is what brings the Jews' suffering in Egypt to a close. Throughout slavery, the campaign to have midwives kill baby boys, and the casting of baby boys into the Nile, Hashem does not intervene. Only with our national appeal to Hashem does Hashem call to mind our ancestral covenant.<sup>26</sup>

At this stage, Hashem restores our status as a special nation, emphasizing repeatedly to Pharaoh that the Jewish people should not be viewed as a spiritually worthless tribe of slaves. Hashem calls them "My nation,"<sup>27</sup> "My son" and "My firstborn,"<sup>28</sup> identifying them as a people unique in its connection with the Divine. Perhaps, then, as with Iyov, Hashem

makes a point of awarding the Jews wealth as a demonstration that their relationship is still whole: they are still My firstborn children.

### **The Prosperity School**

In 2006, *Time Magazine* ran a cover story asking, "Does God want you to be rich?"<sup>29</sup> The stories of Iyov and the Jews in Egypt might lead to the conclusions of Prosperity Theology, which contends that wealth is a sign

Why was Iyov, who remained silent, punished specifically with suffering? R. Chaim Shmulevitz (1902-1979), *Sichot Mussar* 5733 no. 5, explains that the instinct of someone who is suffering is to scream even though he knows that screaming is not going to help the suffering. Iyov knew that screaming at Pharaoh wasn't going to help, but if he would have truly felt the suffering of the Jewish people he should have done so anyway or made some other statement of protest, similar to what Yitro did. Therefore, he was punished specifically with suffering so that he would realize the importance of being sensitive to the suffering of others.

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of Divine favor. On the other hand, remember that Iyov was loyal to Hashem when his children and wealth were taken, and the Jews in Egypt were as worthy at the start of their descent into slavery as they were at the end; clearly, net worth does not always match spiritual worth.

A more important question may be this: What are we to do when we are rich? Beyond restoring former fortunes, and beyond broadcasting a message of Divine favor, these gifts afford the newly recovered Iyov and the newly freed Jews the opportunity to apply their blessing for the benefit of others. The challenge for the Jew who is redeemed is to translate his personal good fortune into communal blessing. With this merit, the Exodus from Egypt can lead to receipt of the Torah at Sinai, and entry into Eretz Yisrael.

#### Notes

1. Bereishit 15:14.
2. Radak *ibid.*, for example.
3. Iyov 42:10.
4. *Daat Mikra* to Iyov 42, footnote 108, cites a midrash which does contend that these were his original children, who had not actually died, but this is difficult to understand in light of Iyov 1:19, "The wind struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the youths and they died." See Ibn Ezra and Malbim to Iyov 42:10, too.
5. *Sotah* 11a.
6. Shemot 18:19.
7. Bamidbar 24:14.
8. See *Bava Batra* 15a, *Yerushalmi Sotah* 5:6, and Rashi and Ibn Ezra to Iyov 1:1.
9. *Moreh haNevuchim* 3:22.

10. See Rava on *Bava Batra* 16a, and Rabbi Yehoshua on *Sotah* 27b, for assignment of some level of guilt to Iyov.

11. Iyov 1:8.

12. See Iyov Chapter 29 and 31.

13. Certain commentators read Bildad's metaphor of the tree in chapter 8 as a statement that apparent suffering might be a necessary prelude to improved circumstances, but the overwhelming majority of the visitors' speeches emphasize suffering as punishment.

14. See Malbim to Iyov 16:8 and *Metzudat David* to Iyov 19:13, for example.

15. Iyov 42:5-6.

16. Iyov 42:7-9.

17. Iyov 42:10-15.

18. Bereishit 47:5-6.

19. *Ibid.* 23:6 (Avraham); *ibid.* 26:29 (Yitzchak); *ibid.* 35:5 (Yaakov).

20. *Ibid.* 40:8 and 41:16, leading to 41:38.

21. *Nedarim* 32a.

22. Bereishit 15. Note that Rashi to *Avot* 5 includes this as one of Avraham's ten trials, adding another layer to the parallel with Iyov and the suffering that constituted his trial.

23. Yehoshua 24:14.

24. Yechezkel 20:7-9.

25. And see *Shemot Rabbah* 3:21, *Mechilta* to Shemot 12:6, *Yalkut Vaetchanan* 828. See as well Rashi to Yechezkel 20:7, Ramban to Shemot 12:42, Abarbanel to Shemot 12, Seforno's Introduction to Torah, and *Kli Yakar* to Vayikra 18:3, among others.

26. Shemot 2:23-25.

27. *Ibid.* 5:1.

28. *Ibid.* 4:22-23.

29. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1533448,00.html>.

The Gemara, *Berachot* 9a, states that the reason why the Jewish people asked for silver and gold utensils was so that Avraham wouldn't be able to say that God fulfilled His promise to enslave the Jews but didn't fulfill His promise that they would leave with great wealth. The commentators ask a very basic question: Does God not fulfill His promises? If not for the complaint of Avraham, God would have let them leave empty handed? R. Yehuda Tzedakah, *Kol Yehuda*, Pesach pg. 32, suggests that when God promised that the Jews would leave with great wealth, He was referring to the Torah. To that end, God fulfilled His promise. However, Avraham had an additional claim: If the Jews suffered physically while enslaved, don't they also deserve a physical form of great wealth? For this reason, God rewarded the Jews with physical wealth.

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