

## Geulas Yisrael #32

### Shemot

#### The Cloud and the Donkey

Moshe is unsure about accepting the great mission of redeeming the Jewish people. He is a simple and stuttering, intimidated by the task of facing down the greatest empire on earth. Additionally, he is perplexed by the challenge of introducing a monotheism to a band of slaves whose imaginations have been shuttered by two centuries of bondage. In addition to these reservations, he also wonders whether the people will actually believe him. Perhaps they will dismiss him as another false Messiah preying upon their hopes and vulnerabilities. How will he convince these jaded slaves that redemption has arrived?

Addressing this concern, Hashem instructs Moshe to gather the elders and convey a 'secret' message. More important than the content of this message are the words Moshe will speak. Somehow, by pronouncing the phrase פקד יפקוד, the elders will be swayed and public opinion will rally around Moshe. Something about this encrypted phrase will arouse redemptive trust.

In truth, this mysterious phrase of פקד יפקוד has a two-hundred year history. Yosef had already encoded this phrase as the pass-phrase of Jewish redemption. As he begged his brothers to bury his body in Israel, Yosef informed them that, one day, Hashem would liberate the Jews from Egypt. He described that day as the day of פקד יפקוד אתכם -repeating this iconic phrase twice. As Rashi elaborates, Yosef guaranteed his brothers that any person voicing this phrase is a certified

agent of redemption. What makes this phrase so iconic and so reverberant with redemptive promise?

The repetitive phrase of **פְּקֻדֵי יִפְקֹד** underscores that redemption will not occur immediately, but in stages. There will be an initial **פְּקֻדָּה** -or redemptive event, followed by a potentially lengthy process, culminating in a second and final **פְּקֻדָּה**. In between these two redemptive bookends the process can take many different shapes. This iconic double phrase sets a realistic timeline for geula.

Redemption arouses many unrealistic expectations. We often imagine redemption as a complete and total historical overhaul or as an apocalyptic upheaval of human history. By issuing this double-phrased password of redemption, Yosef reminds us of the protracted trajectory of geula. Mentioning this phrase, Moshe demonstrates "realistic" expectations of redemption. It is precisely this more "patient" view of redemption which lends Moshe credibility. Instead of enflaming radical Messianic expectations, Moshe announces **פְּקֻדֵי יִפְקֹד** , reminding redemption-starved slaves of "the process".

Moshe's prognostications of a staged redemption ultimately materialize. After his initial arrival and bold demands, Moshe is hooted out of Pharo's palace disgraced and humiliated. Worse, he is mocked by his own people, whose workload has now been multiplied in response to Moshe's failed ultimatum. This redemptive process appears to be stalling.

The midrash paints and even gloomier picture: a sullen and dispirited Moshe retreated to his father-in-law's estate in Midyan, defeated and deflated. He had been publicly humiliated by Pharo and spurned by his own people. To the average bystander witnessing Moshe's withdrawal, it appeared that the redemptive process had ground to a halt. A few

months later, however, the process is jump-started and Moshe returns to Egypt armed with 'makkot' designed to bring Pharo to his heels. In twenty-twenty hindsight this brief hiatus in Midyan was merely a blip on the radar. Historical redemption had begun!!

If the pace of the Egyptian liberation was slow and gradual, certainly the pace of our final redemption will not be immediate and uninterrupted. The geulah from Egypt is often characterized as "chipazon", since it occurred in lightning-fast fashion without time or wherewithal to process the rapidly unfolding events. By contrast, our final geula is described as the antithesis of chipazon. In chapter 52 Yeshaya writes:

לא בחפזון תצאו - unlike the Egyptian redemption our final geulah will not be swift. If the "chipazon redemption" from Egypt wasn't instantaneous we certainly shouldn't harbor unrealistic expectations for our own "non-chipazon" geula. It may take some time.

We have opened the door to the final chapter of history. The phrase ראשית צמיחת גאולתינו connotes that we have experienced a pre-redemptive or "preliminary" redemptive event, which has shifted history into its final chapter. However, this process may extend over decades or even centuries. It may also exhibit lags and even regressions. Setbacks to the process or pauses in the process do not signal failure or abortion of the process. Redemption requires patience.

Two events over the past 25 years caused many to question the redemptive nature of our return to our homeland. The Oslo accords of the mid-90's and the withdrawal from Azza in the mid 00's confused those who expected more immediate or unambiguous redemption. Sadly, many even debated the accuracy of the phrase ראשית צמיחת גאולתינו. The double

password of **ד'קפ' י'קפ'ד** reminds us that, more often than not, redemption isn't immediate and electric but staged and plodding.

In his prophecies, Doniel describes Moshiach as arriving on clouds of glory. Perhaps, there is a model of redemption which is as soft and elegant as a cloud.

By contrast, Zechariah describes Moshiach as arriving on a donkey. A donkey is slow and plodding, not light and aery. A donkey ride is bumpy and jerky and sometimes the rider falls off. The final ride of history is more likely to be rocky and bumpy than smooth and level. We may fall off the donkey from time to time. The donkey may reverse it tracks. But steadily we advance toward our destiny. By cloud or by donkey redemption is inevitable.