



Our Personal Egypt

How long a journey was it between Egypt and the Promised Land?

Some historians say that 11 days was all that was necessary. After all, the distance was not really so great.

The actual fact is that the trek took 40 years. Forty is of course a good round figure, but in choosing such a lengthy itinerary the Almighty Author of the Torah must have had a special purpose in mind. That's the underlying issue that confronts us when we embark upon the final portion of the Book of Bamidbar, Mass'ei, which means "Journeys".

The Lubavitcher Rebbe sums up a well-known interpretation when he says that the Israelites needed a lengthy journey in order to "cast off the ever-fainter traces of the original Egypt".

It was a major moment to get the Israelites out of Egypt: it took much longer to get Egypt out of the Israelites.

Not only historically, in the sense that the grossness and "grobkeit" of Egypt had to be rejected by the people who had lived in Egypt so long that Egyptian values became their norm, but, as the Rebbe puts it, every Israelite needed "a liberation from some personal Egypt".

In today's world we all seem to be enslaved to a personal Egypt, whatever that personal Egypt happens to be.

We all need to take hold of ourselves and shake ourselves free from the habits and attitudes that prevent our free will from leading us to personal redemption.

Rabbi Apple served for 32 years as the chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney - Australia's oldest and most prestigious congregation. He was Australia's highest profile rabbi and held many public roles. He is now retired and lives in Jerusalem. Rabbi Apple is president of the RCA Israel Region. He blogs at www.oztorah.com

