

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future
Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

Yom Haatzmaut To-Go

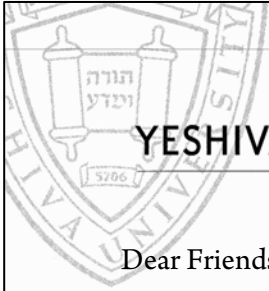
5771

Dedicated in honor of Vice President for University Life Rabbi Dr. Hillel and Rachayl Davis
and the thousands of Yeshiva University alumni who have made aliyah.
Their actions help to guarantee the future of our People and Medinat Yisrael.



Featuring Divrei Torah from

Rabbi Azarya Berzon | Rabbi Dr. Hillel Davis
Rabbi Binny Friedman | Rabbi Moshe Ganz
Rabbi Alan Haber | Rabbi Yonatan Kohn
Rabbi Moshe Dov Lipman | Mrs. Chana Lokshin Bob
Mrs. Tzippi Rimel | Mrs. Shira Smiles
Rabbi Moshe Chaim Sosevsky | Rabbi Yair Spitz
Rabbi Moshe Taragin | Rabbi Pesach Wolicki



YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Iyar 5771

Dear Friends,

Let us join together in thanksgiving to Hakadosh Baruch Hu commemorating a revealed miracle of our generation; 63 years since the modern State of Israel declared its independence. Together with the Jewish community, Yeshiva University celebrates this day with festivities, holiday prayer, dancing, and of course Torah study.

I am happy to present Yom Ha'atzmaut To-Go as part of our Holiday To-Go series. Contained in this To-Go publication are divrei Torah that will enhance your joy on this momentous day. It is my hope that this booklet will serve not only in individual learning, but will help study pairs or groups engage in facilitated learning. With this material we invite you to join our Beit Midrash, learning and celebrating together as part of the greater Yeshiva University family.

Sadly, this year we experienced the heartbreaking sacrifice of many of our brothers and sisters in the land of Israel. They died, for the sanctification of God's name, for their love for the Jewish State, and their dedication to our people. The transition from Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Remembrance Day, to Yom Ha'atzmaut, demands our attention to this loss of life, and then to celebrate what so many have made the ultimate sacrifice for, to help protect and defend.

May we merit this be a year of more complete redemption, a year of peace and of religious tolerance, striving towards a messianic era speedily within our time.

Byedidut,

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

The David Mitzner Dean, Yeshiva University
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On the Love for Zion

Rabbi Azarya Berzon

Co-Rosh Beit Midrash, Zichron Dov Yeshiva University

Torah Mitzion Beit Midrash of Toronto

R' Chiya son of Gamda would roll in the dust [of the land of Israel] as it says (Tehillim 102) 'Your servants desire the stones of the Land, and cherish its dust'

K'tubot 112b

ר' חייא בר גמדה מיגדר בעפרה, שנאמר
(תהלים ק"ב) כי רצו עבדיך את אבניה
ואת עפרה יחוננו.
כתובות קיב:

The Gemarah at the end of K'tubot describes the love of Rav Chiya for the Land of Israel. When he arrived at its shores, he alighted from his camel and wallowed in the dust of the Land, as the verse says in T'hilim, "Your servants desire the stones of the Land, and cherish its dust". In this declaration, *Dovid HaMelech* proclaims a two-fold love for the Land of Israel. The "dust" represents Eretz Yisrael as a means to an end; we can plant in the soil of the Land and produce grains and fruits with which we fulfill the special agricultural mitzvot that can only be observed in Eretz Yisrael. HaRav A. Y. HaCohen Kook zt"l taught that *Dovid HaMelech* added "stones" to demonstrate that our love for the Land is an end unto itself; after all, what can you plant in a stone?

Those who come to live in the Land are motivated by this powerful love for Eretz Yisrael. On a purely *halachic* level, most religious Jews who are established in *Chutz LaAretz* rely on one of a variety of legal reasons for which they are exempt from the obligation to settle in the Land. But the mitzvah of living in the Land, like the mitzvah of contributing for the building of the *Mishkan* in the desert, depends upon *nedivut ha'lev*, the prompting of one's heart. The Almighty *Shechina* invites man into His home, declaring, "if you desire a close relationship with me, build me a home. If you lack that desire, you and I can have a long distance relationship."

Eretz Yisrael is the abode of *HaShem*. If one craves an intimate relationship with the *Shechina*, he will settle in the Land. If however, one is satisfied with a long distance relationship with the Almighty, he will rely on whatever technical exemption he can and remain in *Chutz LaAretz*.

My rebbe, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, eulogized his uncle, the Brisker Rav, z"l, and spoke of the latter's love for Zion. "Love for Zion expresses itself in the desire to live in the Land, strike roots therein, love its soil and desire its stones. Whilst my Uncle separated himself from the secular Zionist ideology, he was a genuine lover of Zion. He lived in the Holy City [of Yerushalayim] and was totally committed to its destiny. He shared in the burden of a community under siege, and refused to seek refuge and emigrate to safe cities outside the Land of Israel."

Those who are privileged to dwell in Israel today face the great challenges of strengthening the security of the state, as well as building up its financial and social institutions. But perhaps the greatest challenge of all is in the arena of Torah and mitzvot. Generations of Jews from the four

redemption emerge everywhere, for those who will only open their eyes. The people are curious about, nay, thirst for Judaism, its wisdom and its values. We must ask ourselves, “are we there to fill the void? Are we teaching by word and by deed?” The glorious opportunity has been awarded, by Divine Providence, to our generation, to bring about the consolation our people have for two thousand years longed for, the *nechama* expressed by Zecharya HaNavi, and reinforced by Rebbe Akiva.

They sinned through the elders, as it says “and there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel ... every man with his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.” And they were punished through the elders, as it says “They sit upon the ground, and keep silence, the elders of the daughter of Zion;” and they were consoled through the elders as it is written “Once again old men and women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem”

Pesikta Rabti 33

R’ Akiva said to the sages “now that the prophesy of Uriyah [of Zion being plowed under] has been fulfilled, it is obvious that the prophesy of Zecharia will be fulfilled.” In this fashion the sages said to him “Akiva, you have comforted us, Akiva, you have comforted us”

Makkot 24b

חטאו בזקנים שנאמר (יהזקאל ה' י"א) ושבעים מזקני ישראל וכו' עומדים לפניהם ואיש מקטרתו בידו ועתר ענן הקטרת עלה; ולקו בזקנים שנאמר ישבו לארץ ידמו זקני בת ציון (איכה ב' י'); ומתנחמים בזקנים דכתיב עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחבות ירושלים (זכריה ח' ד'). פסיקתא רבתי [פיסקא לג]:

אמר להן ר"ע לחכמים עכשיו שנתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה [ציון שדה תחרש], בידוע שנבואתו של זכריה מתקיימת. בלשון הזה אמרו לו עקיבא ניהמתנו עקיבא ניהמתנו. מכות כד:

Connecting geulah to tefillah: A daily affirmation of the Religious Zionist

Rabbi Dr. Hillel Davis

Vice-President for Student Life, Yeshiva University

As religious Zionists we look back on the history of the State and appreciate the miracle of its creation, its survival, and its successes. At the same time we hope and pray that the State of Israel represents just the beginning manifestations of the ultimate redemption, and that Hashem in His infinite wisdom is directing us and the world on the path that will lead to Moshiach and the ingathering of exiles.

We differ with some of our colleagues in that secular Zionists do not necessarily see the hand of God in the events of these past 60 some years, and we differ with other colleagues who cannot support the State because they feel there should be no human participation in this Messianic process. We believe that the State of Israel represents an outgrowth of the partnership between God and man in shaping the destiny of the Jewish people and their ultimate connection to the land of Israel. At times we may feel lonely in this blended role as both religious and Zionist. Yet, our traditional sources have long alluded to the very set of issues we face as we both revel in and contend with the realities of an independent democratic Jewish state that thrives in the face of adversity – both the threats from our external enemies and the challenges we face from within our own community.

The Talmud discusses a dispute concerning the Maariv service and the practice of connecting geulah to tefillah. Perhaps it can shed light on our world view as we approach Yom Haatzmaut this year.

Mar said – one should say kriyat shema and then pray [the amida]. This supports [the opinion of] R' Yochanan, who said “who is destined to the world to come? One who connects geulah to the tefilla of Maariv.” R' Yehoshua ben Levi says “Tefillot were established in the middle”.

Berachot 4b

אמר מר: קורא קריאת שמע ומתפלל.
מסייע ליה לרבי יוחנן, דאמר רבי יוחנן:
איזהו בן העולם הבא? - זה הסומך גאולה
לתפלה של ערבית. רבי יהושע בן לוי
אומר: תפלות באמצע תקנום.
מסכת ברכות דף ד:

R' Yochanan says that at both the evening service and the morning service, the berachot of kriyat shema should immediately precede the saying of shemoneh esrei and there should be no interruption between the two. R' Yehoshua ben Levi says that the morning and evening amida

prayers are surrounded by the kriyat shema of shacharit and the kriyat shema of maariv, meaning kriyat shema at night comes after tefilla.

What are they arguing about? ... Possibly about logic, as R' Yochanan holds that geulah also happened at night, though the full geulah wasn't until morning, whereas R' Yehoshua ben Levi holds that since the full geulah didn't happen until morning, it wasn't a full geulah [at night].

במאי קא מפלגי? אי בעית אימא קרא, אי בעית אימא סברא. אי בעית אימא סברא, דרבי יוחנן סבר: גאולה מאורתא נמי הוי, אלא גאולה מעלייתא לא הויא אלא עד צפרא; ורבי יהושע בן לוי סבר: כיון דלא הויא אלא מצפרא, לא הויא גאולה מעלייתא.

There are two approaches to explaining the background of the dispute. If we, for our discussion, set aside the approach that is based on textual support, and instead focus on the attempt to explain their disagreement based on logic, then the dispute between R' Yochanan and R' Yehoshua ben Levi can be understood as a difference in the way they approach the notion of an incomplete geulah, a redemption that is still in process.

R' Yochanan would say that even though the actual exodus from Egypt did not occur until the next morning, the redemption was accomplished already on the night of the 15th of Nisan. R' Yehoshua ben Levi, on the other hand, would say that since the exodus did not occur until the morning, the evening does not constitute a geulah worthy of noting at all.

R' Yehoshua ben Levi believes that only a complete redemption can be considered truly geulah. Only a geulah that is visible in the light of day, when the world is illuminated and bright and clear, only when mankind can sense and feel total redemption, only under such circumstances is it appropriate to juxtapose geulah and tefillah and to praise God for the salvation He has provided. But short of a clear cut, unambiguous, clear as day redemption, there is no compelling reason to link tefillah to such an incomplete stage.

R' Yochanan, on the other hand, believes that even a nighttime geulah, despite its incomplete nature and still to be anticipated reality, despite being shrouded in the murky dark of night, is to be considered geulah and deserves recognition and acknowledgment through our prayer service. In such a circumstance one must be grateful to Hashem for the significance of what has occurred thus far and one should anticipate with thanks to Him His continued kindness and what we hope and expect is still to come.

The Rambam and Tosafot rule according to R' Yochanan, that even a nighttime geulah should be connected to tefillah. But even with that, we should recognize that the nighttime geulah is unique in that it is a prolonged geulah. It is, as we experienced then and are currently experiencing now, a long and drawn out process that can be both confusing and confounding. Even our tefilot suggest this fact, because after we say the bracha of ga'al Yisroel in the evening service, we add after that for Hashem to remove our enemies and the Satan from us, both in front and in back of us. These words should not detract from the bracha that precedes it; rather they should define the nature of the nighttime geulah that is both long and complex, and has its own ups and downs. Even though we can sense the Satan in front of and behind us, and we can sense our enemies with their swords drawn to our right and our left, we must recognize that we

are very much in the midst of the geulah process. It is a natural process of redemption we are experiencing and must be appreciated for what it is, rather than what it is not.

Later, the gemarah goes on to draw an important distinction between geulah, redemption, and yetziyah, freedom.

R' Abba said, everyone agrees that when the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt, they were redeemed at night, as it says 'Hashem took you out of Egypt at night.' And when they left, they left during the day, as it says 'After the Pesach the Jewish people left with an upright hand.'

Brachot 9a

אמר רבי אבא: הכל מודים, כשנגאלו ישראל ממצרים - לא נגאלו אלא בערב, שנאמר (דברים ט"ז) הוציאך ה' אלהיך ממצרים לילה, וכשיצאו - לא יצאו אלא ביום, שנאמר (במדבר ל"ג) ממחרת הפסח יצאו בני ישראל ביד רמה.
ברכות דף ט.

This statement seems to suggest that the exodus from Egypt occurred in two stages – first, from midnight on, when, according to R' Elazar ben Azarya, the Egyptians were trying to rush the Jews out, and then, second, in the light of day when R' Akiva says the word *chipazon* reflects on the haste of the Jewish people to actually leave the land of Egypt. This distinction is highlighted by the continuation of the gemara:

A supporting beraita: 'Hashem took you out at night' – Did they leave at night? Didn't they leave during the day, as it says 'And after Pesach the Jewish people left with an upright hand'? Rather, it teaches us that the geulah started at night.

תניא נמי הכי: הוציאך ה' אלהיך ממצרים לילה - וכי בלילה יצאו? והלא לא יצאו אלא ביום, שנאמר: ממחרת הפסח יצאו בני ישראל ביד רמה! אלא: מלמד שהתחילה להם גאולה מבערב

Redemption came at night; freedom came the next morning. Nighttime redemption is the first step – necessary but not sufficient; and as a result it is often not appreciated nor recognized. It may not be the ultimate freedom, but it is certainly geulah.

And nighttime redemption, the slow, complex often frustrating process of redemption, according to the gemara, has an advantage over daytime redemption, which is instantaneous and clear cut. For the fact is that the daytime redemption which occurred in Egypt, which occurred with haste, was not a result of the merits of the Jewish people. The miracles and supernatural events that propelled them out of Egypt were not due to their righteousness or their deeds of merit. Rather they resulted because Hashem recognized the moment had come, and further delay could do irreparable harm in the development of the nation and might even forestall their ever leaving Egypt. And so Hashem had to act with miracles and with haste and with clarity. He, as it were, had no choice – He had to act with a strong hand. But from that point on, the redemption could proceed more 'naturally', with an outstretched arm, with Hashem pointing out the way. But while He points out the way, in this next stage of the geulah process, we are to be the actors, the protagonists who propel the action forward.

Nighttime geulah, the sometimes maddeningly slow, frustrating, intricate and complex process, requires our effort – both physical and spiritual – to move the process forward. And yet at the same time, we must remain ever-conscious of the outstretched arm of God that directs us

through the darkness, a darkness that may keep us from seeing His hand in all its glory while keeping us on the path to the ultimate geulah. Back then in the land of Egypt, He acted and we acted and the result was redemption and freedom; in our own time, in the land of Israel, He acted and we acted and the result is and will yet be redemption and freedom.

For those of us who believe that we are currently in the midst of our own geulah process, and are engaged in a partnership with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the ultimate redemption, we need to ask what role we have individually and collectively in continuing to move the redemptive process further along. As Religious Zionists we recognize His hand in the establishment and continuing existence of the State. We see His hand; but as Religious Zionists we should also be considering what we need to be doing to help Him move the geulah process to the next stage.

For many, this question may imply the dilemma or opportunity of aliyah, but there may well be more for us to consider even before the challenges of aliyah. Consider the following:

Several years ago, on the 17th of Tamuz, I heard Rabbi Zevulun Charlop speak in the Beit Midrash about his daughter who had been a counselor in a summer camp. When she asked the girls in her charge what they thought about upon waking up on the day of the fast, they responded about anticipating being hungry or thinking about what they were going to wear that day or what they were going to do all day. Not one of them woke up that morning thinking about the Beit Hamikdash.

Recently, I listened to a shiur that Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein gave in which he discussed the unique nature of the city of Jerusalem in that it maintains a unique appeal both to the religious and the secular. He recalled that he once wrote that the famous line from the six day war when the old city of Jerusalem was captured by the IDF, 'Har Habayit is in our hands', some 45 years later should be rephrased to 'Har Habayit is in our hearts'. The hearts of the Jews around the world need to maintain a connection to the city of Jerusalem, its history and its spirituality.

Well before we consider taking on the challenges of aliyah or our role in the land, perhaps the first step is taking on the challenge of the role of the land in our consciousness. For those of us who choose to or need to stay in the Diaspora, do we at least dwell in Israel in our hearts? To paraphrase the old line, are we at least Zionists in our hearts? Have we integrated the kedusha of the land into our consciousness if not our physical presence? And is Yom Haatzmaut the day when we stop for a moment to take stock and assess where we are in this regard and what next steps we need to take both as individuals and as a community?

But we need not wait for Yom Haatzmaut to take stock. Beyond that we have the opportunity to weigh the issue every day. When we fulfill the requirement of connecting geulah to tefillah, we are recognizing and acknowledging His gift of redemption and thanking Him for the miracle of the geulah of our day. And because Chazal had the insight to create the same requirement of connecting geulah to tefilla at the Maariv service, we can take heart in realizing that while the geulah remains incomplete, while it still may be unclear and dark, it is a geulah nonetheless, well worthy of recognition and worthy of connecting to our prayers of thanks to Hashem.

Transforming the Pain of Yom Ha'zikaron Into the Joy and Challenge of Yom Ha'atzmaut

Rabbi Binny Freedman

Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta, and Director, Isralight

His name was Chaim; Chaim Avner, a name familiar to me for a long time, but I never really knew who he was, and I never had the chance to meet him, or to meet his very special family, until one Yom Hazikaron. I had seen them before, and even shared some of their most personal moments, but I never felt it was the right time and never wanted to intrude.

Chaim, you see, is close to a very close and old friend of mine. In fact, he is about as close as you can get; his grave lies next to Dani's on Mount Herzl, Israel's National Military Cemetery. Dani Moshitz of blessed memory, is still, and will always be to me, 20 years old, which is how old he was when he was killed in an ambush at the Kasmiyeh bridge in Lebanon, in 1985. He was killed just two days after Chaim of blessed memory, who was 27, doing a 16 day stint of reserve duty in Lebanon when a Hizballah terrorist drove his car bomb into their safari truck, killing him, along with eleven other soldiers on patrol in Southern Lebanon.

Every year, on Israel's national Memorial Day, at Yeshivat Orayta, the thought of staying isolated in our study hall in the Old City of Jerusalem while the entire country gathers in her cemeteries and memorials to remember those who fell in defense of the State of Israel, conflicts with the equally strong desire not to allow such a holy day to pass without the study of Torah, which after all, is the reason we had a home to come back to after 2,000 years. So we study Torah together at the entrance of the Mount Herzl Military Cemetery, after which I and some of the students go up to Dani's grave to pay our respects. At precisely 11:00 am a siren sounds, and the entire State of Israel grinds to a halt for a moment of silence. Radio and television broadcasts are interrupted, traffic stops and people get out of their cars, pedestrians on crowded streets all over Israel stand at attention and bow their heads, and even children stand in silence as an entire Nation takes a moment to remember the price we paid for the privilege of having a State and a homeland to call our own. And as the moment ends, and the siren

winds down, a very special Israeli Air force flight of four jets flying over Jerusalem crosses the airspace over the Old City, and one lone jet peels off and flies up into the sky until no longer visible, representing all the lonely soldiers who will never come home to the beloved arms of waiting mothers and fathers, spouses and siblings, children and close friends.

One year, in that moment, I found myself standing over the grave once again of Dani, my old and yet forever young friend who took me under his wing and remains ingrained in my memory, as one of those who helped to transform me from an American visitor to an Israeli.

I had a stone in my pocket I had brought back from Mila 18, the bunker which was the last stand of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and I decided to give it a home this year on Dani's grave. As I was standing there, I couldn't help noticing an older woman next to Chaim's grave who turned out to be his mother. What drew me to talk to her was the number tattooed on her arm.

Originally from Czechoslovakia, she lost her entire family, and survived Auschwitz at the tender age of sixteen. So what does a sixteen year old girl, with no-one and nothing in the world, do in 1945? She somehow managed to smuggle herself into Israel and build a beautiful family that is representative not only of her decision that life has to triumph over death, and good over evil, but as well, of the indomitable spirit of an entire people, that over two thousand years of pain and suffering refused to give up their dream of one day coming home, at last, to the land of Israel from whence they had been so cruelly exiled so long ago. And, together with her husband, changes their family name from Lichtenstein to Avner: Lichtenstein, licht, meaning candle or 'ner', and shtein, meaning stone, or 'even', hence the name Avner.

So how does such a woman continue after receiving, years later, that awful knock on the door from three Israeli Army Officers, coming to tell her she has lost her beloved son, Chaim, a name meaning life? And most incredible, how does she sit next to his grave, with her concentration camp number tattooed on her arm, sitting just inches from the Army I.D. number engraved on her son's grave, with a smile on her face? And how does she find the strength to smile and to say to me, with almost a grin, "yehiyeh tov", it will be good?

Indeed, this is the unasked question of the portions of *Acharei-Mot – Kedoshim*, which literally means 'After the death of holy ones': How does one follow such loss? From whence do we succeed in garnering strength and even hope, after such painful losses and challenging setbacks?

And of course, this is not just a question for individuals, but for an entire people as well. Where do the eight thousand Jews expelled from Gush Katif find the strength to continue, when it seems all their dreams have been shattered, and the land they loved and cultivated for over thirty years was turned over to the very terrorists who made their lives so difficult? What do you say to the mother who tells her son, Yochanan, an IDF soldier killed in combat defending the Jews of Gush Katif and the State of Israel, who was forcibly re-interred, his original grave ploughed over, and the spot where he was murdered handed over to the very terrorists responsible for his death?

Is the dream long gone? Is there a point to continuing?

There is a particular story in the Talmud which we studied together at Mount Herzl, which comes to mind:

*“Tanya: (a Beraita teaching us from the period of the Mishna): **Rabbi Yossi** said: Once I was walking along the way (**“Hayiti me’halech baderech**) and I went into one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray and Eliyahu (Elijah the prophet) came to watch over the entrance-way for me, until I finished my prayers. And when I finished my tefillah (my prayers) he said to me ‘peace unto you my teacher’ and I responded to him: ‘peace unto you my teacher and my master’, and he said to me: ‘my son, why did you enter this ruin?’ and I responded: to pray (le’hitpalel), and he said to me: “You should have prayed along the way (**baderech**)”, and I said: “I was afraid lest the wayfarers (the “ovrei’ drachim or passers along the way) would interrupt me (“yafsiku bi” literally: that they would stop in me”), and he said to me: “You should have prayed a short prayer”.*

“In that moment (said Rabbi Yossi), I learned from him (Eliyahu the prophet) three things:

- 1. I learned that one does not enter a ruin, and*
- 2. I learned that one prays along the way, and*
- 3. I learned that he who prays along the way should pray a short prayer ...”*

Given the fact that there are many great commentaries (the **Rambam**, the **Rashbam**, the **Ramchal**, and even the **Vilna Gaon**) who believe that these stories in the Talmud (known as the *Aggad’ta*) are not necessarily meant to be taken literally, but rather convey an important message, the question that begs response here is what, really, is the point of this story?

Rabbi Yossi, you see, lived in one of the most painful and challenging periods in Jewish History, the period during and immediately following, the Bar Kochba rebellion (131-135 C.E.).

Sixty some odd years after the Great Revolt (70 C.E.) which ended with the Destruction of the Second Temple, the murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews, and the tragic episode of Masada, the Jews had finally had enough. Led by Shimon Bar Kochba, one of the star students of Rabbi Akiva, the Jews rebelled against their Roman masters, determined to secure religious freedom. It made sense; after all, seventy years after the destruction of the first Temple (586 BCE), the Jews came home and built a second one, so after sixty years of pain, maybe it was finally time to rebuild the Temple for a third time? Especially given that the great Rabbi Akiva was a strong supporter, the Jews rallied to the fight.

But alas, it was not meant to be, and what followed was one of the darkest periods in all of Jewish History. Some historians believe that possibly as many as two million Jews were butchered over the next four years. And understand, there were no gas chambers or carbon monoxide vans, no machine guns and bullets, or even trains, they did all this with their hands. Imagine what savagery it must have taken to kill so many people.

And when it was over, Hadrian, the Emperor responsible for putting down the revolt, was determined to put an end to this spirit of independence that had ignited not one, but two revolts in less than seventy years, so he began to hunt down the Jews that remained, and forbade the study of Torah, the celebration of *mitzvot* and any expression of Jewish identity in public. And it was in this period, known as the Hadrianic persecutions, that Rabbi Yossi, one of the close disciples of Rabbi Akiva, taught Torah.

Can you imagine a more appropriate teacher to offer an opinion on this issue? How would Rabbi Yossi, who watched his beloved teacher, Rabbi Akiva, tortured and murdered before his very eyes, his skin flayed off his body with iron combs, deal with the struggle of keeping the dream of Judaism alive when it seems as though we have lost our way?

Indeed, the Jewish people entered a period of darkness, to the point that most Jews who survived in Israel went underground, living under conditions of near-starvation, in caves underground. (Over five thousand such caves, containing relics from the Jews of the post Bar Kochba era, have been discovered in the Elah and Beit Jubrin valleys west of Jerusalem).

Perhaps this vignette of Rabbi Yossi is meant to offer just such a response:

Rabbi Yossi represented, par excellence' the paradigm of the Jew 'walking along the way' ("*baderech*") : Studying Torah with no less than Rabbi Akiva, achieving high levels and struggling to become the best Jew he could be, he was clearly on the right *derech*, the road headed in the right direction.

And then tragedy strikes and all seems lost, and Rabbi Yossi 'enters the ruins', because in the face of such pain and calamity, how can you not be in ruins? And what do you do when you are in the ruins? What do you do when the path seems so long and so difficult, and you encounter the world of ruins? You take a break in order to pray, and to ask Hashem for help, right?

So why does Eliyahu, the prophet, seem to take issue with this? Why does he not even enter the ruin, instead remain standing watching by the doorway? And of course why is it specifically Eliyahu who shows up?

It is no accident that in Jewish tradition it is Eliyahu who symbolizes redemption, to the point that the prophet (*Navi*) **Malachi** tells us:

"Behold I will send to you Eliyahu the prophet, before the coming of the great day of Hashem... and he will return the hearts of fathers on the children and the hearts of children on their fathers..."
(Malachi 3:23-24)

So it is only natural that the response to the prayers of Rabbi Yossi is the arrival of the same Eliyahu, because the essence of Rabbi Yossi's question is: how long must we wait? When and from whence will the redemption come?

Indeed, prayer (a Christian word meaning to entreat or to beg) is not really a Jewish word nor does it reflect the same idea as the Hebrew word '*palel*'. When Ya'acov is on his deathbed and Joseph comes to visit him, he says (to Joseph, the son he thought he had lost for twenty two years):

"Ra'oh phanecha' lo' philalti"

"I never imagined, (I never dreamed) I would ever see your face again."

Ya'acov, who has been told his son was killed by a wild animal, never dreamed he would ever see him alive again. (See Rashi in Genesis (*Bereishit*) 48: 11)

So tefillah is all about dreaming, and the act we mistakenly call prayer is all about struggling with our dreams, which leads us to wonder whether this was precisely Rabbi Yossi's struggle: what

happened to that magnificent dream? How could it all have gone so wrong? And what do we know? Were we just dreaming a pipe dream? Are we fooling ourselves?

And make no mistake about it: this is precisely our struggle today and a struggle in every generation. What do you say to your students and to yourself, in the Warsaw ghetto? How did, nay, how could the Piazechna Rebbe have filled his students' heads and hearts with dreams of redemption and the joy of being Jewish just a few short years earlier? And how could Rabbi Yossi, and his role model, Rabbi Akiva, have done the same thing in the year 131 C.E.?

Maybe this is why Eliyahu does not enter the *churvah* (the ruins), because that is the secret: the world around you may be ablaze, but that does not mean you have to enter the ruins. It is no great accomplishment to stay the course and fill your heart with dreams, when the road lies open before you. In June 1967, after the paratroopers took back the ancient Jewish city of Jerusalem, everyone was a dreamer. The question is whether you can keep dreaming when you are surrounded by ruins.

And this is the message of Eliyahu: you have to stay on the path. And even more, you have to keep dreaming along that path. And you have to, as well, be willing to meet the wayfarers along the way.

I remember how a particular friend of mine tried very hard to dissuade me from going to the officer's course when I was in the army. 'After all' he said, 'you will be the only one with a *kippah* (yarmulke or skull cap) in your whole unit, and maybe even in your whole base; you'll be making *kiddush* alone, on *Shabbat* praying alone in the mornings and with no-one else to learn with; so what will happen to all your dreams?'

And there are so many who believe it is too risky; better to stay isolated, to maintain a certain level of sanctity and purity in the synagogue or the yeshiva, or even in the exile, than to risk mixing with or encountering those who will 'interrupt me' or, quite literally: cause in me an interruption of the spirit. But, says Eliyahu, you have to be willing to take that risk, and you have to make sure that even though that spiritual growth (or *tefillah/prayer*) may be shorter, it will be for all of us, and even for the wayfarers.

For me, that is the message of the wistfully smiling mother of Chaim Avner, a woman of valor in every sense of the word. In all the ruin that surrounded her, and even when the road seemed so unclear, she stayed the course, whether as a sixteen year old girl, or sitting alongside the grave of her holy son, buried in a military cemetery in Jerusalem, and kept up her journey, and continued to impact everyone she met along the way.

With the pain of that summer and all those special families uprooted from their homes still fresh in our hearts, and when it sometimes seems like we may have lost the way, we need to remember how important it is not to let ourselves enter the ruins, instead choosing to focus on the fact that in the end we are all on the same path, and we are all one: one people, and one family.

As we celebrate the blessing that Hashem has given us the privilege to witness, the return of the Jewish people to their homeland, let us be blessed, as well, with the strength to grow our dreams, along the way, making a difference to all those we meet.

The Meaning of Yom Ha'atzmaut

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We are about to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut – Israel Independence Day. This day is the climax of the efforts made by recent generations to free the Jewish people from the tribulations they suffered in the lands of the Gentiles. It is clear that the day on which we merited the founding of the State of Israel in the Land of Israel, on which we escaped the subjugation of other nations and were given the opportunity to run our lives as we see fit in the Land of Israel, should be a day of great thanksgiving to the Master of the World.

But there is much more to Yom Ha'atzmaut! It is not only a day to give thanks; it is a day of profound faith. G-d promised to bring us back from exile but we spent almost 2,000 years in exile! Beaten, depleted and persecuted, we went through pogroms, an inquisition and a horrific Holocaust. The exile was a terrible desecration of G-d's name. As the Prophet said: "And they desecrated My holy name among the nations to which they came, where they said of them: These are the people of the Lord and they have left His land!" The Gentiles who saw the Jews said: "If the people of G-d are in such dire straits and G-d is offering them no salvation, 'where is their G-d'?"

But then a great miracle occurred! The Jewish State was established and the Jewish people gathered from the four corners of the Earth! Millions of Jews – Moroccans and Yemenites, Ethiopians, Europeans and Americans – have gathered together to build the Holy Land and dwell in it! The Divine promise from thousands of years ago – "Even if your exiles be at the furthest end of Heaven, the Lord your G-d will gather you from there and from there He will fetch you, and the Lord your G-d will bring you to the land which your forefathers inherited, and you will inherit it" – is coming true before our very eyes! From the first this promise sounded dubious, and so much more so after 2,000 years of exile. But we are witnessing its fulfillment!

Ezekiel the Prophet uses the analogy of dry bones which approach one another, grow flesh and sinew, then skin, and they come back to life! And in fact when we look at what's happening to us now, we see a true resurrection!

The incredible miracle we have seen in recent generations certainly deserves to be considered a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy: "No more will they say 'By the Lord who brought Israel up from Egypt' but 'By the Lord who brought Israel from the North and from all the lands into which I exiled them'." And as the sages said: "Not that the Exodus from Egypt will be totally

uprooted, but the latter exiles will be considered more significant than the Egyptian exile." The latter exiles more significant!

What should the Jews do as a result of these events? Isaiah the Prophet says (Isaiah 40:6): "Go up a high mountain, O bringer of good tidings to Zion, and raise your voice, fear not, and say to the cities of Judah: "*Hinei Elokeichem!*" Behold your G-d!" Don't see these events as ordinary political developments. Call out proudly: We are seeing the works of G-d before our very eyes!
Behold your G-d!

And this cry – Behold your G-d! – is the heart of Yom Ha'atzmaut!

Superficial people are liable to read the events of recent generations as one reads a newspaper. They see how things have developed "normally and naturally" from day to day, from year to year. Here a small group of immigrants arrives, some of them give up and return to their native land; there is an important discussion between an Israeli diplomat and an English MP; through the convolutions of politics promises are made and broken; and so on and so forth.

But here we need an inclusive, comprehensive overview of what is happening to us. Then faith bursts out of its own accord – **Behold your G-d!**

I once asked, during a class before Yom Ha'atzmaut, what the most important part of the Yom Ha'atzmaut service is. At the end I gave my opinion: the recitation of the Sh'ma! Not only because reciting the Sh'ma is a Torah commandment, but because the recitation of the Sh'ma on this day should be heard much more profoundly than on any other day! The founding of the State, which represents everything that's happening to us in this era, is our amazing encounter with the Master of the World!

If we were worthy, this cry of faith would be heard from every mouth of every Jew who believes in G-d, calling every Jew's attention to the deep significance of the establishment of the State, which would have a profound influence on the general mood in Israel and bring about a tremendous fixing in our spiritual condition.

This country, which came into being through G-d's kindness, should be "the foundation of G-d's throne in the world." The Jewish people was chosen by

G-d to be a priestly nation and a holy people. A nation which manifests the acceptance of G-d's kingship through its actions. Our purpose, to be a light unto the nations, will be truly fulfilled not through the righteousness of individual Jews but by being a priestly **nation**. Only a priestly nation can demonstrate an entire lifestyle based on G-dly ideals. Thus it is written of King Shlomo: "And Shlomo sat as King on the Lord's throne"!

The truth is, we are far from this ideal. There are many Jews who have not yet enjoyed the benefit of the light of Torah. Clearly they don't know who the Jewish people really are and what we should aim to achieve. Some of them don't even know that there is a value and importance to being a Jew. Among the G-d-fearing, too, there is much fixing to be done. Needless to say, this is why the State doesn't manifest the G-dly ideals as it should.

We also have to deal with many worldly issues. Israel is constantly at war. Sometimes it is a military war, sometimes "only" a difficult diplomatic battle. Our political situation is unbearably complicated. Socially, too, we have much to fix.

Nonetheless we celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut with great joy.

We celebrate and are joyous on Yom Ha'atzmaut not because we think everything is as it should be. We see the difficulties. But we don't let them blind us to the most important thing! Here we are in the Land of Israel, the land of our forefathers. G-d has gathered us from the four corners of the Earth and given us the opportunity to run the State of Israel as it should be run. We are thankful for the past and we pray for the future.

The Hallel, which the prophets of Israel instructed us to recite over every trial and tribulation from which we are rescued, also includes a prayer for the future: "**Please, O Lord, save us.**" Until the final and complete Redemption when everything is as it should be, we will always have a need to pray for the future. But recognition of the great difficulties doesn't ruin the Hallel. And after we say "Please, O Lord, save us" we say "Praise the Lord for He is good, for His kindness is eternal"!

Is This the Final Geula?

Rabbi Alan Haber

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Walking the streets of Israel, it is almost impossible to ignore the extent to which today's wondrous reality conforms to the predictions of the Biblical prophets and the Talmudic rabbis. 150 years ago, the Land of Israel was a desolate wasteland (as it had been for untold centuries), and the Jewish people were scattered around the world and powerless. Today, by contrast, millions of Jews live in our national homeland, which is a sovereign independent state with a powerful army, impressive agriculture and industry, and a thriving economy. Whether one sits in the study hall of a Yeshiva in Jerusalem, rides a tractor through fields in the Jezreel Valley or vineyards in the Golan Heights, or strolls past gleaming skyscrapers in Tel Aviv's financial district, the words of the prophets and the rabbis come alive.

In the Torah itself, Avraham Avinu was assured, "I have given the land of your inhabitation – all of the land of Canaan – to you and your descendants after you as an eternal estate"¹. Later in the Torah, we are promised, "If your banished ones reach the far ends of the heavens, from there shall Hashem gather you and from there shall He take you. And Hashem your God will bring you to the land your forefathers inherited, and you shall inherit it."² The prophet Zecharia foresaw a simple life of normalcy in rebuilt Zion: "It shall yet happen that old men and women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one holding his cane because of old age, and the streets shall be filled with children playing in the streets."³ The rabbis of the Talmud⁴ told us that there is "no greater indication of the End of Days" than the fulfillment of the verse⁵ "And you O mountains of Israel, give forth your branches and produce your fruit for [the benefit of] My people Israel – who are coming soon." All of these verses, which just a few generations ago seemed like impossible dreams, are today simple realities that we sometimes take for granted.

For this reason, many Religious Zionists⁶ view the State of Israel as the beginning (and perhaps more than that) of the messianic redemption that we have been awaiting for all of history. In fact, as a movement that sought to bring about the ingathering of Jewish exiles and their return

¹ Bereishit 17:8

² Devarim 30:4-5

³ Zecharia 8:4

⁴ Sanhedrin 98a

⁵ Yechezkel 36:8

⁶ As a political movement, Zionism began in 1897. However, the roots of Zionist ideology began to form in Europe at least several decades earlier, during a period sometimes known as "proto-Zionism". Already from this early stage, religious leaders were divided in their attitudes towards the emerging movement. Some were opposed, and some in favor (with the majority seemingly undecided). Thus "religious Zionism" is as old as Zionism itself. And religious Zionism has never been simply "Zionism by people who happen to be religious" – it has always been a separate movement which shared similar goals to secular Zionism, but always maintained its own unique terms of reference and ideology.

to the ancient homeland of *Eretz Yisrael*, even secular Zionism could not ignore the profound parallel between their plans to create a Jewish State in Palestine and the biblical prophecies of redemption. Herzl himself – an avowed secularist and agnostic – made explicit reference to this in a number of places.⁷ Certainly, Torah scholars who formulated opinions on Zionism could not ignore this connection. They were, however, divided on its significance.⁸

Among those Torah thinkers who can be described as “Religious Zionists”, there have always been two schools of thought⁹ regarding the nature of the Zionist project. One group, which we will refer to as the “messianic” school of thought, sees the State of Israel as the beginning of the process of redemption. According to this view, the initiative to form a Jewish State brought about the partial fulfillment of Biblical prophecies, including those regarding the physical rebirth of the land, the ingathering of exiles and the restoration of Jewish sovereignty. This is viewed as the initial stages of the final redemption. According to this point of view, the Biblical prophecies have already been partially fulfilled, granting our generation a unique status that has been variously referred to as ¹⁰אתחלתא דגאולה or ¹¹ראשית צמיחת גאולתינו. While setbacks and delays are possible, this view maintains that the process is essentially irreversible, and that we can declare with certainty – as a matter of religious faith backed by nothing less than the Torah itself – that the State of Israel will exist forever, and will continue to progress and develop until the final messianic vision of the prophets emerges organically from it. Among other things, adopting this view requires one to take certain positions regarding the nature of the ultimate redemption – including the idea that it can happen slowly and in stages, and that it can come about through a natural historic process, as opposed to a miraculous supernatural one.

Since the earliest days of Religious Zionism, however, there has always been an alternate viewpoint that denies, or at least questions, a messianic role for the State of Israel. The State of Israel is viewed as a positive development insofar as it has saved Jews who were in distress and danger, allowed Jews to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*¹² and has allowed Torah study and religious observance to flourish. However, this analysis is limited to the here and now. All of these things can be cherished and valued without declaring that this has anything to do with the ultimate redemption.

⁷ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, Jacob M. Alkow, trans., New York: American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946, pp. 96, 155-156. See also *Altneuland*, Herzl's 1902 utopian novel depicting his vision of a future Jewish State in Palestine, which draws heavily on Biblical imagery.

⁸ As explained below, some Religious Zionist leaders built their ideologies around these connections, while others distanced themselves from them. Among the opponents of Zionism, there were also different camps. Some (most notably Rav Yoel Teitlebaum, the late Satmar Rav) based their opposition on this very idea, believing that the *Mashiach* must come as a Divine miracle with no human involvement. Others, however, focused on more practical issues, chiefly the secular nature of the State and the non-religious character of secular Zionist leaders.

⁹ Of course, as in any attempt to group great thinkers together, these camps are not monolithic, and there are numerous variations and nuances among the different thinkers. Still, two general lines of thought can be discerned.

¹⁰ Megillah 17b.

¹¹ “The first flowering of our redemption”. This phrase is part of the standard edition of the *Tefillah Lishlom HaMedina*, the prayer for the well-being of the State of Israel, which is attributed to Rav Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog.

¹² The *mitzvah* to live in the Land of Israel. See Ramban, *Additions to Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 4*. See also Rambam, *Hilchot Melachim* 5:9-12.

Adherents to this view are not necessarily less “Zionistic” than the messianic Zionists. They support efforts to create and sustain the State of Israel, and view its successes as miraculous Divine gifts worthy of rejoicing and gratitude. They may issue strong calls for Aliya, place a priority on strengthening the State and its religious character, can celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut (and even recite Hallel), and speak passionately of the miraculous gifts that Hashem bestowed on us and our responsibility to express gratitude.

However, according to this school of thought, we cannot ascribe messianic significance to these events. Those who hold this view may symbolically express this by either omitting or altering¹³ the phrase “ראשית צמיחת גאולתינו” in the prayer for the State of Israel, and they will avoid making any statements (and certainly any decisions) that express certainty about how the future will unfold. They are generally more cautious and tentative in their worldview.

In the coming pages, we’ll briefly trace the existence of these two schools by referencing a few of the many notable leading figures in each camp, from the middle of the 19th century until today. We’ll also discuss how historical events have had their own impact on the debate, with different viewpoints achieving dominance in different time periods in response to the events of the time. Finally, we’ll try to at least tentatively suggest a new, “middle of the road” approach that is both rooted in traditional sources and perhaps ideally suited to the situation we find ourselves in today.

The Messianic School of Religious Zionism

In the year 1862, Rav Zvi Hirsch Kalischer¹⁴ published a small book with the title *Drishat Zion*. In this book and in further writings and letters over the coming years¹⁵, he developed the idea that the long-awaited *geula* of the Jewish people would not happen spontaneously and miraculously; rather, it would require a this-worldly effort to raise funds, organize immigration to *Eretz Yisrael*,¹⁶ rebuild the land¹⁷ and even build a *mizbeach* on the Temple Mount and reinstitute the offering of *korbanot*.¹⁸ While he knew his positions were unconventional, he expressed hope that other Torah scholars would come to agree with him,¹⁹ and corresponded with a number of them on the topic. He was also an ardent supporter of the immigration group *Hovevei Zion*, putting his theoretical ideas into practical action.

¹³ Some people omit the phrase, praying for the well-being of the State but not connecting it with the redemption in any way. Others modify it to say something like גאולתינו ראשית צמיחת גאולתינו, turning the phrase into a prayerful wish, as opposed to a descriptive declaration.

¹⁴ 1795-1874. Born in Prussia, he studied under the great Rabbi Akiva Eiger. For more than 40 years he served as the rabbi of Thorn. Kibbutz Tirat Zvi, located in the Bet Shean valley, is named in his memory.

¹⁵ Both the original book and the later writings have been reprinted multiple times over the past century. A recent edition, in modern typeface and with additional notes, references and photos, was published by Mosad HaRav Kook in 2002. References in footnotes in this article refer to that edition.

¹⁶ *Drishat Zion*, pp. 37-41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-98.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

For Rav Kalischer and some others of his generation²⁰, it was clear that the redemption of the Jewish people required a program of action similar to that which eventually became known as Zionism. In his generation, of course, many of these ideas remained primarily theoretical.

Several decades later, though, waves of immigration had brought tens of thousands of Jews to the land, agricultural and urban settlements had been founded and political Zionism was a reality. Talk of a future Jewish State was in the air. In this environment, Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook wrote extensively about the messianic nature of what was happening.²¹ Rav Kook spoke in mystical terms of the rebirth of Am Yisrael that he perceived in his generation. For many centuries, he taught, the Jewish people had been in exile, and as such could be compared to a soul without a body. For this reason, Jews in exile had focused mainly on the spiritual aspects of Torah – study and prayer. As important as these are, Rav Kook said, they represent only part of the totality of service of God that is demanded of us. In returning to our land and restoring our national existence and political sovereignty, the “body” of the Jewish People was being revived. Rav Kook saw great significance in all aspects of the emerging country – the agricultural revival, the development of cities, of a political system and army, and all other aspects of national existence. To him, these were all part of the approaching redemption of Am Yisrael.

Rav Kook passed away in 1935 and thus was unable to relate to the actual State of Israel. But his son, Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook, lived through the establishment of the State in 1948 and the miracles of the Six Day War in 1967. He further developed his father’s ideas and formulated a vision that equated the modern State with the messianic redemption in very clear and precise terms.

According to Rav Zvi Yehuda, it is absolutely clear that the redemption will take place in a gradual fashion, and that the first step in this process is the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty, which was achieved in 1948.²² He said that this is not a matter of interpretation, a hope or a wish – it is as clear as day and an absolute certainty.²³ Although at the end of the process we will be ruled by the *Melech HaMashiach* who will be a descendent of King David, the present democratic government of Israel represents the beginning of his reign.²⁴

According to Rav Zvi Yehuda, the *Ymot haMashiach* have already begun. Although the process is not complete, it is well underway²⁵ and anyone who doubts this demonstrates a lack of faith.²⁶ As a result of this, he ruled that all of the wars fought by the IDF have the halachic status of *milchemet mitzvah*.²⁷ When the IDF captures territory, this is a fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of

²⁰ Such as Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai of Sarajevo, who had written similar ideas (though with a Kabbalistic orientation, and without including the idea of reinstating *korbanot*) as early as 1834. Other rabbis who expressed similar ideas included Rav Eliyahu Gutmacher and Rav Shmuel Mohilever.

²¹ This theme is found in many of Rav Kook’s extensive writings. For example, see the book *Orot* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1949), especially the first two sections.

²² *Sichot HaRav Zvi Yehuda: Eretz Yisrael*, edited by Rav Shlomo Aviner, Yeshivat Ateret Kohanim, 2005, p. 163.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁵ *Sichot Harav Zvi Yehuda: Moadim II*, p. 130 and 138 and many other places.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

²⁷ An obligatory war. Assigning our reality to this halachic category carries a number of ramifications, including making universal military service a halachic obligation.

Kibbush Eretz Yisrael (conquering the land), and thus it is forbidden to subsequently relinquish this land, even in the context of a peace treaty.

As we will explain later on, in the decades following the Six Day War, these views achieved dominance in Religious Zionist circles, at least in Israel. Many – indeed most – of the rabbinic leadership of Religious Zionism²⁸ spoke in these terms, leading many people to think that being a Religious Zionist requires accepting all of the above concepts. There has, however, always been another point of view.

Non-messianic Religious Zionism

Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Reines²⁹ was a member of the pre-Zionist *Hovevei Zion* movement, and one of the first Rabbinic supporters of Herzl's Zionist movement. While most of the rabbinic leadership of the time was opposed to the Zionist movement (largely because of its secular character), Rav Reines founded the Mizrachi party – the first institutional body of Religious Zionism.

There were a number of reasons why Rav Reines supported Zionism. Firstly, he identified with Herzl's idea that Jewish nationalism and an eventual Jewish state could protect Jews against anti-semitism.³⁰ Beyond this, he believed that a Jewish state could provide a “spiritual center”³¹ for the Jewish people, where Torah learning and *mitzvah* observance could thrive. He felt that the Zionist movement would first and foremost be a fulfillment of the mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*³², and would also encourage the Jewish people and help revive their faith³³, restore their pride and enthusiasm,³⁴ would protect them from assimilation and constitute an essential element of the process of *teshuva*.³⁵ However, he was careful to never categorize these positive developments as the final redemption, or even its beginning. He viewed all of this as part of the long historical development from *churban* to *geula*, but not as the redemption itself.³⁶

Several decades later, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik articulated very similar views. The Rav was a Zionist, a member of Mizrachi and honorary president of the Religious Zionists of America. He spoke many times about his love for the Land of Israel and support for the State, and addressed it in a number of places in his writings. He marveled at the intense opposition that Israel faces from the nations of the world, and reasoned that this can only mean that the State is endowed with intense holiness and spiritual significance.³⁷

²⁸ Rav Shlomo Goren and Rav Avraham Shapiro are two of many notable examples.

²⁹ 1839-1915

³⁰ Rav Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, *Or Chadash Al Zion* (written in 1901), New York, 1946, pp. 7-8, 21.

³¹ The name “Mizrachi” is an acronym for *Merkaz Ruchani*, “spiritual center”.

³² *Or Chadash Al Zion*, pp. 33-60.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-204.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁶ See Aviezer Ravitsky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 33.

³⁷ Rav Hershel Schachter, *Nefesh HaRav*, Jerusalem: Reishit Yerushalayim Press, 1994, p. 86.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of his reasons for this support can be seen in the well-known passage in his landmark essay *Kol Dodi Dofek*,³⁸ in which he articulated the “six knocks”, the six great miracles that he saw in the establishment of the State of Israel: 1) the almost supernatural political development in which a majority of nations of the world voted to support Jewish independence, 2) the miraculous military victory of the out-numbered, poorly trained and poorly equipped Jewish army against their numerous Arab enemies, 3) the historic repudiation of Christian theology regarding the rejection of the Jews, 4) the re-awakening of Jewish spirits as an antidote to assimilation after the Holocaust, 5) the ability of Jews to defend themselves and avenge their martyrs, and 6) our newfound ability to save Jews in distress and protect them from danger.

Noticeably absent from this list is anything having to do with the coming of the Mashiach. Whereas for Rav Kook, the metaphysical entities of *Klal Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* – and thus by extension of *Medinat Yisrael* – occupy central roles, the Rav placed these values into halachic contexts that bring them into line with many other halachic concepts, values and principles.³⁹ For Rav Zvi Yehuda and others of his school of thought, the State of Israel has *intrinsic* significance and holiness, but for the Rav its significance lies in its ability to actualize and facilitate the *mitzvah* of settling the land.⁴⁰

In a number of cases, the Rav was explicit about his opposition to attributing a messianic character to the State. This cannot be the ultimate redemption, he said, since the Jewish people have not yet achieved real independence and sovereignty – as demonstrated, for example, by the fact that the Secretary of State of the United States can summon the Israeli Prime Minister to Washington at will. “Under such circumstances,” the Rav once explained, “there is no real independence, no real sovereignty. [Only] with the arrival of the Mashiach, the Jewish people will reappear [on the stage of history].”⁴¹ In a 1957 letter, the Rav succinctly summarized his approach to Zionism as a “third halachic approach” in between that of the non-Zionist haredim “whose eyes are shut and reject [the significance of the State]” and the messianic Zionist “dreamers” who “adopt a completely positive stance to the point where they identify the State with the [fulfillment] of the highest goal of our historical and meta-historical destiny.” His own approach “would be positively inclined toward the State and would express gratitude for its establishment ...but would not attach excessive value to the point of its glorification and deification”.⁴²

The difference between the Rav’s approach and that of Rav Zvi Yehuda is not merely theoretical. There are ramifications in the halachic and public policy spheres, such as regarding the question

³⁸ Based on a speech given at Yeshiva University on Yom HaAtzmaut 1957, it was originally published as a pamphlet in 1977 by the Israeli Ministry of Education, and later reprinted in *Ish HaEmunah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1986).

³⁹ Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, “Al Yachso shel ha-Grid Soloveitchik za”l LaZionut”, *Alon Shvut Bogrim* Vol. 17 (2003), pp. 164 and 168.

⁴⁰ *Nefesh HaRav*, pp. 86-87.

⁴¹ August 28, 1974 address in Boston, recorded in Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Volume 2, Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1999, p. 132.

⁴² Letter to Mr. Moshe Meisels, editor of the Hebrew weekly *Ha-Do'ar*. Published in Nethaniel Helfgot, ed., *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, Jersey City, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2005, pp. 163-166. I am indebted to my friend and neighbor Rabbi Reuven Zeigler for directing me to this source.

of relinquishing land in the context of a peace treaty. As noted above, Rav Zvi Yehuda ruled that this would be forbidden under any circumstances, since this would represent a repudiation of the historic mission of *kibbush HaAretz* and a reversal of the messianic process. For the Rav, however, if the continued existence of the State would require relinquishing land, this would be both permitted and required.⁴³

Beyond this, there are ramifications also on the national, communal and personal levels, regarding the relative weight one assigns to supporting and developing Medinat Yisrael and encouraging Aliya, as opposed to other Torah values. If this is, as Rav Zvi Yehuda held, the advanced stages of the coming of the Mashiach, then it is more important than almost anything else. Conversely, if one ascribes to Rav Soloveitchik's view, then Medinat Yisrael is a very important Torah value – but it is not necessarily more significant than other Torah values. Indeed, the Rav has been invoked (rightly or wrongly) in support of the idea that American Jews – at least those involved in the community's leadership – should support Israel from afar, but not necessarily make Aliya.⁴⁴

History's Pendulum

Until 1967, the majority of the Religious Zionist rabbinic leadership was careful not to speak in definitively messianic terms about the State of Israel, reflecting the caution inherent in the classic approach of Mizrachi and Rav Soloveitchik. However, following the Six Day War, Rav Zvi Yehuda's messianism became much more popular, and as noted above, ultimately achieved dominance. There can be little question about the role of historical events in this ideological shift. The miraculous military victory and subsequent resettling of our ancient homelands in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (a movement which was initially led by Rav Zvi Yehuda's students) seemed to leave little room for doubt that the process of the final redemption was reaching an advanced stage.

This view occupied center stage for at least two decades, and is still quite dominant in the Religious Zionist community here in Israel. However, over the past twenty years the pendulum has begun to swing back in the opposite direction, largely due to additional historical developments. First in the 1978 Camp David agreement and subsequently in the Oslo Agreements of the 1990s, land that was captured in the miraculous wars was in fact relinquished to the Arab countries and the Palestinian Authority. These facts led many to question whether Rav Zvi Yehuda's assessments of the messianic character of the State were in fact correct.

More recently, the traumatic 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and consequent destruction of Gush Katif and expulsion of its residents from their homes and towns has caused a genuine ideological crisis within the community. The crisis is particularly acute because these events were brought about not as a result of a military defeat, but rather by decision of the Israeli

⁴³*Nefesh HaRav*, p. 98. While the question of relinquishing land is not by necessity linked to the question of the messianic nature of the State, it is certainly related to it and influenced by it.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Rabbi Reuven Spolter, "In Search Of Leaders", *Jewish Action* Volume 64, No. 3 (Spring 2004 – accessible online at <http://www.ou.org/publications/ja/S764/S764spr/INSEARCH.PDF>), and this author's response in the "Counterpoint" section of the Fall 2005 issue (<http://www.ou.org/publications/ja/S765/S765fall/COUNTERP.PDF>). See also *Nefesh HaRav*, pp. 98-99.

government as implemented by the IDF. Thus, the very entities which Rav Zvi Yehuda saw as the embodiment of the redemption became the vehicles for the apparent reversal of some of the steps towards this redemption.

As a result of this trauma, some elements in the Religious Zionist community have ceased to identify with classic Zionism and have loosened their identification with the State and the government. Other elements within the community – alarmed by these developments – have called for a return to the classic approach of Mizrachi, which emphasized the importance of building the State for all that it accomplishes in the present, and downplays or removes connection with the future redemption.⁴⁵ It seems that time and history have demonstrated both the limitations and inherent dangers of excessive messianism. This is driving the return to a more cautious approach that focuses on the here and now, and leaves the process of history largely in God's hands.

At the same time, I believe we must be careful not to swing too far in the opposite direction. As I write these words in my home town of Alon Shevut in Gush Etzion – glancing out the window at beautiful mountain vistas dotted by Jewish towns and farms in the very hills where the *Avot* walked and the *Maccabim* fought, with the Jerusalem skyline visible in the valley below – the observations mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this essay still seem very significant. Looking around my *shul* as I sometimes do, realizing that I have the privilege to pray in this unique location with a congregation of Jews who have gathered together and come back home from tens of different countries on every continent on earth, it seems impossible to deny that we are literally living and walking inside a prophetic vision. If we downplay the significance of all of this and view Medinat Yisrael as nothing more than an important tool to fulfill *mitzvot*, we run the risk of tragically missing an historic opportunity. Indeed, Rav Soloveitchik himself warned against this very danger in *Kol Dodi Dofek*.⁴⁶ It seems, therefore, that the events of our generation urgently call for a third, nuanced approach that lies somewhere between those of Rav Zvi Yehuda and the Rav.

B'chezkat Mashiach

Perhaps the source for just such an idea can be found in the Rambam. When discussing the *Melech HaMashiach*, the Rambam takes the position that we are not to expect him to perform any supernatural acts or miracles:

Do not think that the messianic king must perform signs and wonders, create new elements in the world, revive the dead or things of that nature. This is not the case, [as can be proven by the fact] that Rabbi Akiva was among the great scholars of the time of the Mishnah, and he was a supporter of the king Ben Koziva (Bar Kochba), and he and all the other

ואל יעלה על דעתך שהמלך המשיח צריך לעשות אותות ומופתים ומחדש דברים בעולם או מחיה מתים וכיוצא בדברים אלו, אין הדבר כך, שהרי רבי עקיבא חכם גדול מחכמי משנה היה, והוא היה נושא כליו של בן כוזיבא המלך, והוא היה אומר עליו שהוא המלך המשיח, ודימה הוא וכל

⁴⁵ For example, see also the recent *Jerusalem Post* opinion piece “The Struggle for the Soul of Religious Zionism”, April 2, 2011, by Rabbi Yosef Blau (accessible online at <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=214872>).

⁴⁶ *Ish HaEmunah*, pp. 74-77, 83-86.

scholars of his generation saw him as the messianic king – until he was killed due to sins. [Only] when he was killed did they determine that he was not [the Mashiach], but they never asked him for signs or wonders.

Hilchot Melachim 11:3

חכמי דורו שהוא המלך המשיח, עד שנהרג בעונות, כיון שנהרג נודע להם שאינו, ולא שאלו ממנו חכמים לא אות ולא מופת,
רמב"ם הלכות מלכים יא:ג

Since Rabbi Akiva considered Bar Kochba to be the Mashiach even though he had not done any miracles, the Rambam deduces that an ability to perform miracles is not an essential quality for the Mashiach.⁴⁷ This proof is fascinating, since, as the Rambam notes, Rabbi Akiva himself eventually realized that this ruling had been incorrect. How, then, can the Rambam quote this as the source for a halacha?

The answer is provided in the next paragraph, where the Rambam discusses the criteria for evaluating a potential Mashiach:

*If a king shall arise from the House of David, who is learned in Torah and observant of mitzvot like his ancestor David – following both the written and the oral Torah – and he compels all of Israel to follow it and strengthens its observance, and he fights wars on behalf of God, then this [king] is to be **presumed** to be the Mashiach. If he is successful in his endeavors, defeats all of the nations surrounding him, builds the Bet HaMikdash in its correct location and gathers the remotely dispersed exiles, then he is **definitely** the Mashiach. But if he does not succeed in all of that or is killed, it is clear that he is not the one to whom the Torah's promises referred, but rather he is among all the other good and proper kings from the house of David who died.*

Hilchot Melachim 11:4⁴⁸

ואם יעמוד מלך מבית דוד הוגה בתורה ועוסק במצוות כדוד אביו, כפי תורה שבכתב ושבעל פה, ויכוף כל ישראל לילך בה ולחזק בדקה, וילחם מלחמות ה', הרי זה בחזקת שהוא משיח, אם עשה והצליח ונצח כל האומות שסביביו ובנה מקדש במקומו וקבץ נדחי ישראל הרי זה משיח בודאי. ואם לא הצליח עד כה או נהרג בידוע שאינו זה שהבטיחה עליו תורה והרי הוא ככל מלכי בית דוד השלמים הכשרים שמתו.
רמב"ם הלכות מלכים יא:ד

The term “*b’chezkat Mashiach*” – “presumed to be the Mashiach” – is a halachic concept. In Jewish law, there are certain assumptions that one is allowed – and in fact obligated – to make, even though one does not know for certain that they are true. For example, a *mikveh* that was measured and determined to contain a sufficient quantity of water is considered kosher and is assumed to contain the correct amount of water until proven otherwise, unless there is reason to be concerned that some of the water has escaped. One may use the *mikveh* and rely on this assumption, even though we know that it is possible that it no longer has enough water to be kosher.⁴⁹ The *chazaka* – the halachic assumption – remains valid unless proven otherwise.

It is clear from context that the Rambam’s ruling regarding *b’chezkat Mashiach* is based on Rabbi Akiva’s decision regarding Bar Kochba. In the end, it turned out that Rabbi Akiva’s ruling was

⁴⁷ Later on, in 12:1-2, he implies that there will be no miracles at all in the *Ymot HaMashiach*.

⁴⁸ Parts of this passage are missing from the standard editions of the Rambam due to Christian censorship, but can be seen in several contemporary editions based on earlier manuscripts.

⁴⁹ *Shulchan Aruch*, YD 201:62-65.

not correct, but he still acted according to the halacha by making this assumption⁵⁰. Therefore, if such a situation were to arise again in the future, we are to act exactly as Rabbi Akiva did and make the same assumption, even though we realize that it may once again turn out to be incorrect!

If the king in question succeeds in his mission, then we will know with certainty that he is, in fact, the Mashiach. But if he ultimately fails as Bar Kochba did, then we will know retroactively that he was not the Mashiach. Nevertheless, once he has met the requirements for being considered the presumptive Mashiach, we are obligated to follow him, support him and assume that he is the Mashiach, even as we realize that this assumption may later turn out to be false.

Today's reality does not directly fit into the Rambam's category of *b'chezkat Mashiach* as we do not have a king who meets the criteria. However, perhaps this category can provide a model for a contemporary, revised Religious Zionist ideology. We can recognize, as Rav Zvi Yehuda did, that we are witnessing the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies, and that this very much appears to be the final redemption. In fact, we will assume that it is and act accordingly. At the same time, we can also maintain the Rav's caution and recognize that we don't absolutely know this to be the case. This possibility will remain in our minds even as we contemplate events through the prism of messianic redemption.

We will view our generation as something that we might call *בחזקת אתחלתא דגאולה*, *presumed to be* the beginning of the *geula*. We will exercise caution and not base any decisions on assumptions regarding the future, since we have not yet reached the stage of certainty regarding future fulfillment of prophecies. But in the meantime, we will continue to view this as the redemption, express boundless gratitude to Hashem for bringing this development in our generation, and do everything within our power to continue to advance the process until we reach the point when all of the Rambam's conditions are fulfilled. May it happen speedily in our days.

⁵⁰ Some commentators suggest that Rabbi Akiva was not completely wrong in his assumption and that Bar Kochba had the potential to be the Mashiach or even was some sort of a precursor of the Mashiach.

The Beginning of the Beginning

Rabbi Yonatan Kohn

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Much has been made over the phrase in the popular “Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel” that refers to the State as *reishit tzmihat geulateinu*, the beginning of the blossoming of our Redemption. Even among those congregations and *minyanim* in which a prayer is indeed recited for the Jewish State, the hesitance to commit to the theological position of such a phrase causes many to alter or omit this phrase or to choose a different prayer altogether. It goes without saying that this is not simply a matter of an extra second spent in *shul*; the handling of the phrase reflects the most basic attitudes to the religious significance of the founding of the State.

The arguments in favor of the Messianic significance of the State are more or less clear. The Prophets speak of the ingathering of the exiles⁵¹ and the blossoming of the Land’s produce and natural bounty,⁵² both in the context of the ultimate Redemption. Israel’s propitious population growth, anchored by the immigration of Jews from every corner of the globe, is undeniable. And there is no questioning Israel’s agriculture is in boom, as attested by any trip to an Israeli supermarket or a survey of Israel’s international produce exports. The advocates of this position see in the pulse and flow of daily life and current events a divinely ordained drama that sets the stage for the arrival of *Mashiach* and the rebuilding of the *Mikdash*.

But others are less visionary in their appraisal of the State. In a public lecture at Yeshiva University’s Gruss Campus in Jerusalem, Rav Meir Lichtenstein, shlit”a, explored the nuanced approach of his grandfather, Rav Joseph Baer Soloveitchik, z”l.⁵³ Underscoring citations from works published in the Rav’s lifetime, Rav Lichtenstein emphasized that his grandfather was not a religious Zionist in the mold of the Mercaz Harav school. Rav Soloveitchik saw significance and profound opportunity in the founding of the State, but he did not see it with prophetic and Messianic overtones, with the promise that the State’s founding was a herald for the imminent Redemption. The Rav was consistent in his cautionary stance that we mustn’t presume to know what God is thinking.

This does not mean that Yom HaAtzmaut is only a holiday for those of the Messianic school. Even without ascribing to the belief of *reishit tzmihat geulateinu*, many have found developments

⁵¹ Isaiah 11:12.

⁵² Yechezkel 36:8.

⁵³ www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/724719

worthy of thanksgiving and celebration in the advent of the modern State. For the first time since the destruction of the second *Mikdash*, Israel is the largest Jewish community in the world. If demographic trends continue, most of the Jewish people will be living in the Holy Land in the foreseeable future. There has been a revival of the widespread observances of the agricultural *mitzvot*, including *shemittah*. Immigrating Jews have found a home free of religious and physical persecution, and a militarily formidable Jewish army protects the Jews from hostile enemies. Finally, and very significantly, the Jewish government provides infrastructure and financial support for broad *mitzvah* observance. The government widely protects *Shabbat* and *kashrut*, builds *mikvaot*, and funds thousands of *yeshivot*, *kollelim*, and institutions of Torah learning.

Whence, therefore, is the resistance to observing Yom Ha'Atzmaut?⁵⁴ It would seem that there are three considerations on which to oppose the celebration of Yom Ha'Atzmaut. First, the essential nature of the State alone may not be enough to demonstrate the inherent greatness of the 5th of Iyar, particularly during the mourning season of the *sefirat haomer*.

More substantively, the enumerated religious triumphs linked to the State tell only an incomplete story. It is the same government whose very structure is founded upon the legal norms and principles of secular legal systems, some of which have roots in ancient pagan cultures. As such, a secular majority continues to lead lifestyles ignoring the authority of the Torah in the Land of Israel. The government continues to introduce legislation that passively (and sometimes actively) opposes or confounds Torah observance. Most frustratingly for some, the same government whose mandate is to protect Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel has found itself removing Jews from their homes.

But finally, there is yet another consideration that may be invoked in opposition to the observance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut. And as we will see, this consideration should serve as the key to bridging the gaps on this conflicted issue and inform a renewed purpose on Yom Ha'Atzmaut. Even if the modern State of Israel constitutes the beginning of the Messianic processes, why should the beginning mandate its own holiday?⁵⁵ More pointedly, so long as the process is incomplete, the greatest factor is prominently absent, and the theoretical beginning remains inconclusive.

Yom Ha'Atzmaut: Opportunity and Challenge

No one in the *reishit tzmihat geulateinu* camp will argue that *Mashiach* has already come and that we do not await his arrival. This obvious but startling acknowledgment should have immediate implications for understanding the significance of Yom Ha'Atzmaut. Firstly, the process of Redemption has not completely unfolded. Secondly, Jewish inheritance of the land is subject to the approval of *Hashem*. The land is His, and we do not (yet) have a permanent hold upon it.

⁵⁴ The anti-Zionist position of *Vayoel Moshe* is explored at length elsewhere and is not within the parameters of the current discussion.

⁵⁵ Arukh HaShulhan, Orach Chaim 430:2, mentions matter-of-factly that there is no special observance or commemoration of the day on which Yehoshua led the nation across the Jordan River, under miraculous circumstances.

Overstating our claim to the Promised Land of Israel can have disastrous criminal consequences. In the Torah's description of the dispute that separated Avraham and his nephew Lot, there is little indication as to what is the root cause of their conflict.

There was an argument between the shepherds of the cattle of Avram and between the shepherds of the cattle of Lot, and the Kena'anite and Perizite were then settling the land

Bereshit 13:7

ויהי ריב בין רעי מקנה אברם
ובין רעי מקנה לוט והכנעני
והפרזי אז ישב בארץ
בראשית יג:ז

Noting the emphasis on the role of the shepherds in the dispute, as well as the conspicuous mention over the other peoples living in Kena'an, Chaza"l understood that the conflict here surrounded the issue of entitlement to the land.⁵⁶ Lot's shepherds allowed their animals to graze freely from all the fields in Kena'an, arguing that Lot was the rightful heir to the land promised to Avraham. But Avraham's shepherds insisted that such a practice was stealing; so long as the other nations remained in the land, the land had not yet been given to Avraham.

This approach tightly complements Rashi's observation at the beginning of Bereishit (1:1) "All of the earth belongs to the Holy One blessed be He. He created it and gave it to whoever was fit in His eyes." Ultimately, the Land of Israel remains Hashem's own property. Our inhabitation of the land is ever provisional and contingent.

Do not become defiled in all these, for in all these were defiled the nations that I send from before you. And the land became defiled and I accounted its sin upon it, and the land purged its inhabitants. You observe my statutes and laws and do not commit any of these abominations, the citizen and the stranger among you. For all these abominations [they] did, the people of the land that were before you, and the land became defiled. And the land shall not purge you in your defiling it, as it purged the nation that was before you.

Vayikra 18: 24-28

אל תטמאו בכל אלה כי בכל אלה נטמאו הגוים אשר אני משלח מפניכם: ותטמא הארץ ואפקד עונה עליה ותקא הארץ את ישביה: ושמרתם אתם את חקתי ואת משפטי ולא תעשו מכל התועבת האלה האזרח והגר הגר בתוכם: כי את כל התועבת האל עשו אנשי הארץ אשר לפניכם ותטמא הארץ: ולא תקיא הארץ אתכם בטמאכם אתה כאשר קאה את הגוי אשר לפניכם:

ויקרא יח:כד-כח

Ramban, in his commentary on the Torah, expands at great length upon this special aspect of the Land of Israel.

Behold, He sanctified the nation living in His land with the sanctity of forbidden relationships and the multitudes of commandments so that they should be for His sake. And therefore [Scripture] says (Shemot 20:22) "Observe all My laws and all My statutes and perform them, and the land will not purge you," and it is written (20:24) "And I said to you, 'You will inherit their earth and I will give it to you to inherit it, I am Hashem your God Who has separated you from the nations.'" That is to say that He separated us from all the

...והנה קידש העם היושב בארצו בקדושת העריות וברובי המצות להיותם לשמו, ולכך אמר (להלן כ כב) ושמרתם את כל חוקותי ואת כל משפטי ועשיתם אותם ולא תקיא אתכם הארץ, וכתוב (שם פסוק כד) ואמר לכם אתם תירשו את אדמתם ואני אתננה לכם לרשת אותה אני ה' אלהיכם אשר הבדלתי אתכם מן העמים, יאמר כי

⁵⁶ Bereishit Raba 41:5, also relayed by Rashi in his comments on Bereishit 13:7.

nations, [in] that He placed upon them ministers and other gods, in His giving us the Land that He blessed be He should be a God for us, and we would be singled out for His sake. And the Land which is the portion of the honored Name will purge all who defiles it and will not tolerate the idolaters and exploiters of forbidden relationships.

הבדיל אותנו מכל העמים אשר נתן עליהם שרים ואלהים אחרים, בתתו לנו את הארץ שיהיה הוא יתברך לנו לאלהים ונהיה מיוחדים לשמו. והנה הארץ שהיא נחלת השם הנכבד תקיא כל מטמא אותה ולא תסבול עובדי ע"ז ומגלים עריות...

Ramban goes on to explain that numerous offences were exacerbated by the fact that they were committed in the Holy Land, that their having been committed would be more readily excused on foreign ground. But the Land does not have a high tolerance for rebelliousness. Moreover, Ramban argues, the primary observance of commandments is specifically and exclusively in the Promised Land. Observing the Torah in the Exile is an exercise in preserving the commandments for their primary function more than meaningful for its own purposes.

From this perspective, the advent of Jewish governance in the Promised Land of Israel assumes a completely different role. For other nations, the luster of independence lies in the inherent value of freedom, of release from oppressive, corrupt, or incompetent authority. Independence is meaningful as such, even without visions or goals regarding the application of that independence. But that cannot be the case when it comes to Jewish rule in the Land of Israel. The great meaning behind our freedom is freedom to protect our covenant with Hashem unmolested by hostile host countries; it is freedom to firmly establish the ideal kingdom of which our ancestors dreamed, a kingdom whose governance and maintenance reflect the glorious name of God.

In this light, we may suggest that Yom Ha'Atzmaut should not be cast in a light of enraptured and fantastical Messianism. Even if we have seen the fulfillment of some prophecies, it is clear that we have not seen the fulfillment of them all. And we need not be complacently satisfied, to cease to yearn for more, with that which we have seen. It should be emphasized that Yom Ha'Atzmaut represents a *reishit*, a point of departure.

Yom Ha'Atzmaut is not merely a reflective celebration of events past, of a joyous moment in 1948 when the flag was raised and the people danced in the streets. No doubt, the events of the 5th of Iyar were watershed events. Their import has proven profound, and it would seem a religious imperative to show our gratitude in an exceptional manner. But Yom Ha'Atzmaut is also a day that renews demands upon us, to further vision and to act with more dedication. The day calls upon us to make of the modern State a true *reishit*, a starting point, for the fulfillment of sacred visions and promises. May we merit seeing them speedily in our days.

The Redemption Process Has Begun⁵⁷

Rabbi Dov Moshe Lipman

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I recently went for my morning run in Bet Shemesh against the backdrop of the hills where Shimshon used to roam and where the Aron returned from the Plishtim. I absorbed the scene as I watched Jews from Morroco, Russia, Ethiopia, North America, and other places around the world prepare to start their day. It struck me then that, without a doubt, I was witnessing geula. Despite the lack of a Beit Hamikdash, we live in our independent homeland with millions of other Jews, raising our children freely as we choose. This could be nothing other than redemption and a step closer to the ultimate geula.

What do the Torah sources teach about a free and independent Jewish state existing in Eretz Yisrael? In Sefer Devarim, Moshe's final and everlasting message to the Jewish people of all generations, mentions Eretz Yisrael more than **fifty times!** (This does not include the numerous descriptions of the mitzvot of the land such as maaser, orlah and ir miklat.) Chazal is replete with statements about the greatness and importance of a Jew living in Eretz Yisrael. For example, our Sages teach that *"One who lives in Eretz Yisrael is like one who has a God, one who lives outside of Eretz Yisrael is like one who has no God."*⁵⁸ The Ramban⁵⁹ maintains that making aliyah is a Torah level positive commandment. Many contemporary poskim agree including the Pischei Teshuva (EH"E 75:6), the Avnei Neizer (Y"D 454-456), the Chazon Ish (Igros, 1:175), and the Tzitz Eliezer (Vol. 7, 48:12). In addition to the commandment to make aliya, the Ruach Chayim on Avos (5:4) comments that it is actually built into our genetic makeup from Avraham Avinu to be people who make aliyah. The Chatam Sofer (Sukkah 36) teaches that working at any

⁵⁷ Most of the sources contained in this essay come from [A Question of Redemption](#), Rabbi Moshe Lichtman's translation of [HaMedinah HaYehudit](#) by Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Bergman.

⁵⁸ Kesuvos 110b. Other examples include: **Keusvos 110b**: "A person should live in Eretz Yisrael – even in a city with a majority of idolaters and not live outside of Eretz Yisrael even in a city with a majority of Jews." **Vayikra Rabba Chapter 24**: "All good blessings which God will give the Jews in the future are only given from Zion." **Esther Rabba Chapter 1**: "Ten parts of Torah were given to the world – nine to Eretz Yisrael and one to the rest of the world." **Pesachim 113**: "Three are from the inheritors of the World to Come and these are them – one who lives in Eretz Yisrael..." **Midrash Shochar Tov Chapter 5**: "Praiseworthy are those who live in Eretz Yisrael for they do not have sin – not while alive and not in death." **Sifri Haazinu**: "Whoever lives in Eretz Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael atones for him."

⁵⁹ Addendum to Sefer Hamitzvot of the Rambam, Positive Commandment #4

occupation in Eretz Yisrael is a mitzvah since it contributes to yishuv Eretz Yisrael. Our tradition is clear about the importance and spiritual benefits of living in and building Eretz Yisrael.

With the State of Israel, every Jew, especially those living outside of Israel, must ask themselves whether or not we are now experiencing geula. For if, in fact, we are witnessing and living through major steps in the redemption process, the responsibility for Jews to return to Israel en masse would seem to be that much stronger, if not absolutely obligatory. This brings to mind the words of Rav Yehuda HaLevi, the author of the Kuzari, who teaches (2:24) that those who pray about the redemption but do not take advantage of the opportunity which God provides to return to the Land of Israel “*are like the chirping of the birds...*”

Sources throughout the Torah elucidate the signs of geula. The most convincing of these is the flourishing of the fruits of Eretz Yisrael. The Chumash, itself, relates (Vayikra 26:32) that while the Jews are in exile, the Land of Israel will remain desolate. The obvious implication, taught outright by Rabbeinu Bachya, (Bereishit 17:8) is that the undoing of that desolation indicates the end of the exile. This sign is stated clearly in Navi where, regarding the era of the geula, Yechezkel (36:8) states, “*But you, O mountains of Israel, will give forth your branch and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for they are soon to come.*” Yeshaya (51:3) similarly relates “*For Hashem will comfort Zion... He will make her wilderness like Eden and her wasteland like a garden of Hashem...*” The Navi, Amos, teaches this point even more clearly (9:13-15): “*Behold, days are coming – the word of Hashem... I will return the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild desolate cities and settle them; they will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will cultivate gardens and eat their fruits. I will plant them upon their land and they will never again be uprooted from their land that I have given them, said Hashem, your God.*”

Turning now to Chazal, Rav Abba states (Sanhedrin 98a) that the clearest sign of the redemption is the fruits of Eretz Yisrael growing once again. The Gemara (Megilla 17b) teaches that the order of the blessings in Shemoneh Esrei teaches that the Geula begins with the ingathering of the exiles, followed by the fruits of Eretz Yisrael flourishing once again, followed by the arrival of Moshiach and the Beit Hamikdash. All of the above certainly served as the basis for Rav Akiva Eiger’s teaching⁶⁰ that if we succeed in growing fruit in Eretz Yisrael then this is the sign that the final redemption is imminent.

No one can deny the **fact** that Eretz Yisrael was desolate throughout the exile as the Torah “predicted” nor can anyone refute the **fact** that it is now flourishing and producing fruits. If we are to accept the words of the Chumash, Yechezkel, Yeshaya, Amos, and our Sages, then this is a sign that we are currently experiencing the redemption process. Perhaps this is what led Rav Zvi Pesach Frank, a judge on Rav Shmuel Salant’s Beit Din and the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, to call the creation of the State of Israel, “*the beginning of redemption.*”⁶¹

A number of other traditions indicate that the formation of the State of Israel is a significant step on the road to the final Geula. The Ramban (Shir Hashirim 8:12) writes that our return to Eretz Yisrael at the time of the redemption will come through the “*permission of the kings.*” This, in

⁶⁰ As related by his student, Rav Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, Shivat Zion, volume 2, pp. 51-52

⁶¹ Kuntras Har Zvi in Drishat Tzion, p. 48

fact, occurred with the Balfour Declaration (as was pointed out by Rav Meir Simcha in Shivat Tzion Vol. 2 p. 101) and through the United Nations vote in 1947. The Ohr Hachayim (Bamidbar 24:17) explains that the Moshiach will arise like a regular leader within the framework of a regular government. Certainly, an independent government is necessary for this to take place and the establishment of the State of Israel accomplished the creation of this framework. Finally, the Tzitz Eliezer (7:49) writes that the ingathering of the Exiles alone, something we have certainly witnessed in our time, is the sign of the beginning of the final redemption. All of the above could be the reason why Rav Chatzkal Sarna, Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach signed a document on 20 Tevet 5709 (1949) thanking God for granting them the privilege of witnessing “*the first buds of the beginning of the redemption through the establishment of the State of Israel.*”⁶²

The information presented above is clear. The creation of an independent Jewish government in Israel with the permission of the world, the ingathering of the Exiles and the re-flourishing of Israel all indicate that we are currently experiencing the geula. The counter argument often mentioned relates to the fact that the country is led by secular Jews who do not follow the guidelines of the Torah in the running of the government and in their personal lives. People claim that there is no way that secular and even anti-religious leaders could play any role in the geula. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

We begin by noting the spiritual level of the Jewish people at the time of our other redemptions. Bnei Yisrael were steeped in idol worship and had no mitzvot to serve as a merit for them⁶³ at the time of our redemption from Egypt. The Second Beit Hamkidash was constructed at a time when the masses married foreign wives (Ezra 9:2), were not observing basic mitzvot like Sukkah (Nechemia 8:14), and were involved in promiscuous relationships (Kiddushin 69a). As the Gemara (Sanhedrin 98a) teaches, even the final redemption can come if the nation is completely corrupt.

While it is obvious that the people can be on a low level and still experience redemption, many will ask how the Geula can occur if the leaders do not observe the Torah? After all, the previous redemptions were led by very righteous people such as Moshe, Aharon, Ezra and Nechemiah! A quick review of some perakim in Nach, especially in Sefer Melachim, reveals that God performs great miracles and brings salvation even through terrible sinners. For example, King Achav married a non-Jew (Melachim I 16:31), encouraged idol worship (ibid. 32), stood silent while his wife killed our prophets (ibid. 18:4) and has no portion in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 90a). He, himself, doubted that any Jewish victories and miracles could come through him (Melachim I 20:13-14). Nevertheless, the Navi told him that he would be the leader of the troops during a great miracle. The Midrash Tanchuma (Chukat 4) teaches that he merited this because he and his people were careful about slander.

While we have no idea what merits the current leaders of the State of Israel do or do not have, the fact that they are helping to rebuild Eretz Yisrael should be enough of a merit to give them great success and a role in the Geula. Omri was a king of the Jewish people who was identified (Melachim I 16:25) as a greater sinner than all the wicked kings before him. Despite this, his

⁶² This proclamation is referenced by Rav Ovadia Yosef on p. 139 of Yabia Omer Orach Chayim Volume 6 Section 41

⁶³ See Rashi Shemos 12:6

dynasty lasted for four generations. Our Sages (Sanhedrin 102b) teach that he merited this because he added a city to Eretz Yisrael, even though his intent was to eliminate Yerushalayim as the focus of the Jews. Certainly, our current secular leaders have surpassed this merit, especially since they have more positive intentions than Omri did in their rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael.

It is important to note that even if the leader has absolutely no merits, God could still use him as the vehicle for salvation. Yeravam ben Yoash was another terrible sinner who caused others to sin as well (Melachim I 14:24). Despite his sins he led the Jews to victory in restoring the borders of Israel (ibid. 25). The Navi (ibid. 26-27) explains that the time came for this “redemption” and God had to use whoever the leader was at the time – even if he was as evil as Yeravam.

Let us not forget that a similar occurrence took place at the beginning of the redemption from our first exile. The impetus for that salvation came through a gentile king, Cyrus, who was inspired by God to allow us to return to Israel and to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash (Ezra 1:1). The Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:4) relates that the people were astounded and questioned how the redemption could come through a gentile king. Yet, it happened! We see that when the time for redemption arrives, God uses whoever is available and up to the task to make it a reality, regardless of their level of righteousness and spirituality. The Chafetz Chayim’s son, Rav Aryeh Leib Kakohen Kagan, relates (Kitzur Toldot HaChafetz Chaim p. 74) that his father seemed to concur with his theory in the context of secular people leading the charge to return to Israel. He suggested that God grants success to non-believers if this success will lead to more Torah and mitzvot among the believers. This has certainly transpired through Jewish control over Israel and, as Rav Kagan explained, is a fulfillment of the passuk in Iyov (27:17), “*He may prepare clothing but the righteous will wear it.*”

We will now take this issue one step further. Not only is it possible for redemption to come through leaders who are sinners, but there is a strong basis to say that God’s plan is to specifically redeem us through non-observant leaders. Rav Eliezer Waldenberg writes in the name of the Toldot Yaakov: “*Had Torah scholars initiated this movement (the formation of the State of Israel), people would have said that they did so because they desire and yearn for the Holy Land in order to fulfill the mitzvot that depend on it... Then we would have denied that this spirit came from Heaven. But now that the initiative came from people whom we never would have thought would advocate such an idea, it must have emanated from Hashem.*” (Tzitz Eliezer 7:48:12)

This connects to a lesson that I learned from my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Weinberg, zt”l, in relation to the final geula. Many of the relationships leading up to the Geula were immoral, inappropriate, and/or sinful. The Davidic dynasty leading to Moshiach comes from the relationships of Lot and his daughters, Yehuda and Tamar, Rus and Boaz, and Dovid and Batsheva. Rav Weinberg taught that this unusual string of “negatives” associated with the ancestry of Moshiach must be God’s way of clarifying that He is the one directly behind the events leading to Moshiach. It cannot be coincidence if it happens in this unusual way. Thus, the secular founders of the State of Israel fall right into place with this line of thought. The miracle of our return to Israel, led specifically by secular people, indicates that God is behind this and it is, in fact, the Geula.

The Maharal (Gevuros Hashem, 18 p. 28) teaches that there is a general concept in Judaism that great things must emanate from an inferior source. That is why, for example, Moshe Rabbeinu grew up in Pharaoh's house. So, too, regarding the final redemption, the Maharal writes: "... *the Messianic King will establish a new kingdom, which will emerge from the first kingdom that will precede it. This is so because the holy kingdom of Israel, which has an inherent, divine status, sprouts from an unsanctified kingdom. For this befits a kingdom that has a divine and inherent nature.*"

Thus, according to the Maharal, there has to be a government devoid of spirituality and holiness such as the current one in the State of Israel, as a precursor to the arrival of Moshiach. Specifically, a government of secular leaders and non-believers must exist to pave the way for complete Geula.

Finally, we must consider the words of the Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the rosh yeshiva of the famed Volozhin Yeshiva in the late 19th Century. He writes, "*We must not speculate that this great matter (the resettlement of Eretz Yisrael) should have occurred differently, as people visualize in their mind's eye... Indeed one must not express his opinion to God as the prophet Yeshaya says, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways...' We must not be overly wise and say that it has to happen in a different way.*" (Shivat Tzion sec. 1, p. 17-18)

In conclusion, the "negative" of secular founders and leaders is a non-issue and, if anything, strengthens the position that the State of Israel is a major part of the geula. Since this is the case, and given that the other signs of the Geula have been fulfilled through the existence and the experience of modern day Israel, how can a Torah observant Jew not explore making aliyah? The people in Bavel made a tragic mistake by remaining in the comforts of Exile in the time of the Geula of Ezra. The Tanach (Ezra chap. 2) seems to accentuate this point by actually listing, for all eternity, the names of every family that made the tough decision to join Ezra in that first aliyah. Rav Yaakov Emden writes (Commentary to the Siddur) that "... *every Jew must resolve in his heart to settle in Eretz Yisrael as soon as he has the means to finance his move and to be able to eke out a meager livelihood by means of a trade or business...*" How much more so since we are experiencing Geula!

Based on all of the above, we can understand the harsh words of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the "Rav of Yerushalayim," who said (Ha'ish Al Hachoma, volume 2, page 149), "... *anyone who has the ability to come to Eretz Yisroel and doesn't, will have to account for his failure in the future world.*" Since this is Geula, how can we turn our backs? May we all be inspired to, at the very least, explore the option of making aliyah and, at long last, leaving what has been a long and bitter exile to become active participants in the Geula process.

Two Torah Stories (that might be) About Eretz Yisrael

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Although Eretz Yisrael is of central importance in the Torah, most of what happens in the Torah takes place outside of Eretz Yisrael. Of course a story can take place outside of Eretz Yisrael and still be about Eretz Yisrael. I would like to examine two stories from the Torah and their history of interpretation: one of them seems to not be about Eretz Yisrael, but is often interpreted to be about it. The other one seems to be all about Eretz Yisrael, but is mostly interpreted to not be about it.

Avraham Travels to Egypt

Sefer Breishit contains three stories in which one of the Avot travels to a new place and says that his wife is his sister. The first of these three stories, in Breishit 12, takes place in Egypt. The other two, in Breishit 20 (with Avraham) and in Breishit 26 (with Yitzchak), take place in Gerar, which is within the borders of Eretz Yisrael. Yitzchak stays in Gerar rather than going to Egypt because God tells him to remain within Israel, so in that story Eretz Yisrael is clearly an important factor. But in the two Avraham stories, the fact that one is outside the borders of Eretz Yisrael and one is inside those borders seems irrelevant. The purpose of the two stories about Avraham seems to be to show God's active role in saving Avraham from trouble. In fact the first story, in Egypt, is the first time we actually see God acting as Avraham's protector, so it carries an important theological message. The stories may also come to explain how Avraham gained his great wealth and his good relationship with the people around him. While there are definite differences between the two Avraham stories – mainly in that Avimelech the king of Gerar seems like a more moral person than Paroh king of Egypt – their similarities seem most significant.

Midrashim on the story of Avraham in Egypt mostly see this story as a test of Avraham's faith in God despite the delay of the Divine promise. This experience is listed in Pirkei Derabbi Eliezer as one of the ten tests that Avraham passed. However, Midrash Rabbah also quotes opinions that in a famine, as long as any food is available to buy, even at exorbitant prices, one must remain in the Land of Israel, thus presenting a possible criticism of Avraham (only possible, as the Midrash does not elaborate on whether there was food available to buy or not). One other

Midrash also relates to the specific fact that this takes place in Egypt by describing this story as a paradigm of the future exile of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt:

God said to Avraham, 'go and conquer the way for your children'. You find that everything that is written about Avraham is written about his children, by Avraham [the Torah] states 'and there was a famine in the land,' and by Yisrael 'for there was a famine for two years in the land.' By Avraham 'And Avraham went down to Egypt to dwell' and by Yisrael 'and our ancestors went down to Egypt'. By Avraham 'to dwell there' and by Yisrael 'we came to dwell in this land.' ... By Avraham 'they will kill me and leave you alive' and by Yisrael 'all the newborn babies shall be cast into the river.' By Avraham 'Avram was laden with livestock' and by Yisrael 'and they were taken out with silver and gold.'

Bereishit Rabba Lech Lecha 40

אמר הקב"ה לאברהם אבינו צא וכבוש את הדרך לפני בניך, את מוצא כל מה שכתוב באברהם, כתיב בבניו, באברהם כתיב, (בראשית יב) ויהי רעב בארץ, בישראל כתיב (בראשית מה) כי זה שנתים הרעב בקרב הארץ, באברהם כתיב (בראשית יב) וירד אברם מצרימה לגור שם, ובישראל כתיב (במדבר כ) וירדו אבותינו מצרימה, באברהם כתיב לגור שם, ובישראל כתיב לגור בארץ באנו... באברהם כתיב (בראשית יב) והרגו אותי ואותך יחיו ובישראל כתיב (שמות א) כל הבן הילוד היאורה תשליכוהו... באברהם כתיב (בראשית יג) ואברם כבד מאד במקנה, ובישראל כתיב (תהלים קה) ויוציאם בכסף וזהב...

בראשית רבה לך לך פרשה מ

Just as Avraham goes down to Egypt because of a famine, is oppressed there, and is saved by God and leaves with great wealth, his descendants will have the same experience.

Rashi on this story follows the general direction of the Midrash but makes the Land of Israel figure more prominently. He, too, sees the famine as a test of faith for Avraham, but links that directly with Eretz Yisrael: God has only just told Avraham that he must go to Canaan, and now he must immediately leave it due to the famine.

Ramban, however, criticizes Avraham for leaving Israel in the time of famine. He insists that Avraham should have stayed in Israel and trusted in God. Ramban even asserts that the entire exile of the Jewish people in Egypt was in fact a punishment to the descendants of Avraham for Avraham's lack of faith in leaving Eretz Yisrael to find food. Although Ramban's approach is not widely adopted, it is widely addressed among later commentaries. Abarbanel defends Avraham leaving Israel, arguing that Avraham understood correctly that the command to come to Israel meant that it should be his permanent home, not that he should never leave. Furthermore, he argues, this was a case of Pikuach Nefesh. Maharam Alshech claims that Avraham actually left Israel for the purpose of foreshadowing the exile to Egypt that his descendants would experience, in order to give them hope when they were enslaved in Egypt. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch invokes the principle of not relying on miracles to defend Avraham's departure. Although each of these parshanim rejects Ramban's judgment of Avraham, they accept Ramban's premise that a central issue in this story is Avraham's departure from Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Yoel Bin Nun, in his article "פרשיות יצחק," sees Avraham's trip to Egypt, as contrasted with Yitzchak's staying in Eretz Yisrael, as reflective of Avraham's entire way of life and relationship to Eretz Yisrael. Rav Bin Nun shows that although the Torah describes Avraham as a shepherd, there are references to his riches and property that suggest that he also amassed wealth as a travelling merchant. Thus Avraham's leaving Israel in the time of famine was part of his lifestyle

and livelihood. He contrasts this to Yitzchak, who not only stays in Eretz Yisrael but actually farms the land. Rav Bin Nun points out that Yitzchak's commitment to working the land leads to some negative consequences: greater strife with neighbors, as he can't just move elsewhere if people aren't getting along, and possibly times in his life in which he experiences poverty. (This is based on the commentary of the Ibn Ezra on Breishit 25 who suggests that Yitzchak was poor at times.) It is difficult to read Rav Bin Nun's contrast between Avraham and Yitzchak without thinking of his contemporary context, in which choosing to permanently settle in Israel often requires some material sacrifice and entering a more tense security situation. So Rav Bin Nun views Avraham's entire relationship with Eretz Yisrael in light of his trip to Egypt.

Avraham's journey to Egypt, which at first glance is a story about faith in God and about God's power to save, is interpreted, especially beginning with Ramban, as a story about the negative consequences of leaving Eretz Yisrael. Perhaps, we could argue, the parshanim simply like to insert Eretz Yisrael whenever they can. But that is certainly not the case in the next story we will discuss.

Moshe Yearns for Eretz Yisrael

As Moshe leads Bnei Yisrael through the desert towards Eretz Yisrael, it seems clear that he is quite excited about entering the promised land. When he sends spies to check out Eretz Yisrael, his questions go far beyond the normal reconnaissance questions asked of spies (which are the questions that Bnei Yisrael themselves asked in the Devarim version of the spies story). He asks them explicitly to find out whether the land is good or bad and various other questions related to the quality of the land. He even asks them to bring back the fruit of the land. Parshanim assume that Moshe was trying to generate enthusiasm among the people, but it also seems that he is quite enthusiastic about this himself.

Moshe's personal enthusiasm about Eretz Yisrael comes through in some of the most emotional passages in the Torah, in which he begs to be allowed to enter the land, his request is denied, and he is shown the land from afar.

And I prayed to the Lord at that time, saying: O Lord God, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness, and Your strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth that can do according to Your works and mighty acts? Let me go over, please, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill-country, and Lebanon.' But God was angry with me for your sakes, and did not listen to me; and God said to me: 'Enough; speak no more to Me of this matter. Go up into the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold with your eyes; for you shall not go over this Jordan.

Devarim 3:23-27

ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההוא לאמר: אדני ה'
אתה החלות להראות את עבדך את
גדלך ואת ידך החזקה אשר מי אל
בשמים ובארץ אשר יעשה כמעשיך
וכגבורתך: אעברה נא ואראה את הארץ
הטובה אשר בעבר הירדן ההר הטוב
הזה והלבנון: ויתעבר ה' בי למענכם ולא
שמע אלי ויאמר ה' אלי רב לך אל תוסף
דבר אלי עוד בדבר הזה: עלה ראש
הפסגה ושא עיניך ימה וצפנה ותימנה
ומזרחה וראה בעיניך כי לא תעבר את
הירדן הזה:

דברים ג:כג-כז

On two other occasions in Sefer Devarim, in chapters 32 and 34, these themes appear again. Each time the irony of Moshe looking but being unable to cross over and enter is emphasized. Also, especially in the last passage, God shows Moshe the whole land, and the psukim seem to

linger lovingly over every detail of the land that God shows him, emphasizing Moshe's great desire to experience Eretz Yisrael directly. This story seems to describe a deeply committed Jew who longs to enter Eretz Yisrael but cannot, a proto-Zionist episode.

According to the Midrash, however, the main issue in this story is not Eretz Yisrael at all! Different Midrashim offer many different explanations of this story, but the most common one is that Moshe's request here is not really to enter Eretz Yisrael; it is to not die. His debate with God is in fact a debate about his own mortality, in which Moshe begs to continue living forever and God refuses.

Another explanation that appears in a few different collections of Midrashim gives a parable of a king who punishes two of his servants by forbidding them to drink wine for a month. The servant who does not love the king says that this is not a big deal, that he could even go without wine for a year or two, all in order to make light of the king's decree. The one who loves the king complains loudly that he cannot last even a moment without drinking wine, all to give honor to the king's command. According to this Midrash, Moshe had no particular longing to enter Eretz Yisrael at all. He simply begs, pleads, and repeats his sadness about not entering the land as if he did care, just to give respect to God's decree.

Perhaps still more shocking is a passage in the Gemara (that also appears in a few Midrash collections) that directly rejects the simple meaning of the Torah:

R' Simlai expounded: Why did Moshe desire to enter the land of Israel? For did he need to eat of its fruit, or satisfy himself with its goodness? Rather, this is what Moshe said: There are many mitzvot that the Jewish people received that can only be fulfilled in the land of Israel. I shall enter the land so that they are all fulfilled by me.

Sotah 14b

דרש רבי שמלאי: מפני מה נתאוה משה רבינו ליכנס לא"י? וכי לאכול מפריה הוא צריך או לשבוע מטובה הוא צריך? אלא כך אמר משה: הרבה מצות נצטוו ישראל ואין מתקיימין אלא בא"י, אכנס אני לארץ כדי שיתקיימו כולן על ידי.
סוטה דף יד.

What Rabbi Simlai presents as an absurd proposition, that Moshe wished to enjoy the fruits and goodness of Eretz Yisrael, actually sounds a good deal like the Moshe we know from the psukim themselves, the Moshe who asks the spies to bring back fruits of the land, inquires about the goodness of the land, specifically asks to enter "the good land", and looks over the country in great detail from the mountaintop. Instead, the Midrash says that Moshe is looking for rewards for mitzvot, which he thinks he can only receive in Eretz Yisrael. This passage goes on to say that God assures Moshe that he will receive a reward as great as if he had entered Eretz Yisrael. So according to this Midrash, Moshe's request is granted even though he does not enter Eretz Yisrael.

Finally some Midrashim do see this request as being about Eretz Yisrael, but limit it to the spiritual aspects of the land, for example, interpreting הלבנון as the Beit Hamikdash. Rashi follows this approach in his interpretation. So too does Rav Menachem Leibtag, who infers from the fact that God instructs Moshe to look west, north, south, and east, that God virtually places Moshe in Jerusalem, where he can look over the whole land and specifically see the Temple Mount.

Other parshanim mostly follow the lead of the Midrash, and reject the possibility that Moshe simply wanted to enjoy the good land, all seeing that motivation as far beneath the high level of

Moshe Rabbenu. Abarbanel adds one psychological factor, Moshe's desire to complete his mission and see its resolution, which still has little to do with Eretz Yisrael itself.

In one other form of "parshanut", however, this story is about Eretz Yisrael: modern Zionist poetry. A number of Zionist and Israeli poets, including Yaakov Fichman, Avraham Shlonsky, and Rachel Blobstein all wrote poems about Moshe's frustrated desire to enter Eretz Yisrael. The contemporary poet Yehuda Amichai even puts the words of Yehuda Halevi, לבי במזרה ואני בסוף, into the mouth of Moshe as he stands on Har Nevo. For these poets Moshe is a proto-Zionist and this story is about Eretz Yisrael.

Conclusions

Why does the story about Avraham, which seems to not be about Eretz Yisrael, get interpreted as being about Eretz Yisrael, while the story about Moshe, which seems to be about Eretz Yisrael, get interpreted as being about anything but Eretz Yisrael? I would like to propose one possible answer, which is the different goals of the Torah, on the one hand, and the Midrash and Parshanim on the other. The Torah focuses on the material benefits of Eretz Yisrael: it lists them at great length (milk and honey, the seven species, etc) and uses them as the motivation for Bnei Yisrael's journey out of Egypt from start to finish. The Midrash and Parshanim, on the other hand, focus on Eretz Yisrael's spiritual status as the Holy Land.

Since the Torah focuses on the material benefits of Eretz Yisrael, Avraham's leaving Eretz Yisrael in a time of famine is not worth mentioning. It goes without saying that when the bountiful land lacks bounty, leaving is appropriate. Also it makes sense for the Torah to elaborate on Moshe's desire for the goodness of the land and on all the physical beauty that Moshe was missing out on by not entering the land.

However, the Midrash and Parshanim's focus is elsewhere, on the holiness of Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael's holiness remains "for richer or poorer", so it is problematic in that worldview for Avraham to leave just because there was not enough food. And since the holiness of Eretz Yisrael is paramount, Moshe could not have been begging simply to enjoy the material benefits of the Land.

For much of Jewish history, the spiritual benefits of Eretz Yisrael have been extolled and portrayed as far more important than the material benefits. However, since the founding of the State of Israel, and especially in the last few decades with massive aliyah from North America, religious Jews are beginning to talk seriously again about the material benefits of Eretz Yisrael, whether it is the beautiful landscapes, free Jewish education, or other benefits. Often the spiritual reasons, though compelling, are not enough to keep people motivated to make such a major life change as aliyah. As James Kugel humorously explains in his book "On Being a Jew:"

"So if they ask you why you wish to stay [in Israel], you must tell them it is because of the tomatoes. They are very tasty there, not at all like the durable, tasteless variety that is sold in New York... in my experience it is the Zionists who return to America and only the tomato lovers who stay."

As a recent immigrant to Israel, this rings true to me. Of course, coming from the plenty of America, the material benefits of Israel alone are insufficient motivation and the spiritual benefits have to be part of the attraction. But what gets us olim through the day-to-day realities of moving here and adjusting to life here is the fact that indeed, טובה הארץ מאד מאד.

מדינת ישראל: התחלת התגשמות חזון הנביאים

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ב"ה אנו זוכים לחגוג את יום העצמאות ה-63 של מדינת ישראל ופינו מלא שירה והודיה לקב"ה שזיכנו להגיע ליום הזה.

רוב האנשים בעולם כבר נולדו לתוך מציאות קיימת שבה מדינת ישראל היא מדינה לגיטימית המתקיימת לצד שאר אומות העולם. מתוך ההרגל והשגרה אנחנו לא מצליחים להבין ולתפוס את גודל הדבר שהקב"ה העניק לנו ומקבלים את מדינת ישראל כדבר המובן מאליו ומתוך כך מסתכלים רק בפגמים ובדברים הרעים שבה.

אנו זוכים ביום הזה, לראות את נבואת זכריה מתגשמת אל מול ענינו ממש:
כה אמר ה' צ-באות: ע'ד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברח' בות ירושל'ם, ואיש משענתו בידו מר' ב ימים.
ורח' בות העיר ימלאו ילדים וילדות משחקים ברח' ב' תיק' (זכריה ח', ד-ה).

לנביא זכריה היו נבואות רבות. כמה מן הנבואות היו על ניסים גדולים וגלויים. אך הנבואה הזו אינה מדברת על ניסים ונפלאות כי אם על שגרה יומיומית. חיים רגילים ברחובות ירושלים כאשר ילדים וילדות משחקים לצד אנשים מבוגרים שנחים בצל. נבואה זו מדברת על זמן הגאולה אך האם כך נראית הגאולה? האם הגאולה שלה אנחנו כל כך מצפים ומייחלים תהיה כל כך "משעממת" ורגילה?

גם הנביא ירמיה מדבר על הגאולה כזמן של מציאות יומיומית שאינה מרגשת במיוחד:
כה אמר ה': עוד ישמע במקום הזה... בערי יהודה ובתצות ירושל'ם... קול ששון וקול שמחה, קול חתן וקול כלה... כי אשיב את שבות הארץ ככראש' נה אמר ה' (ל"ג, י-יא).

והנה זכיתי אני, הקטנה, לקיים את הנבואה ממש, כאשר נישאתי לבעלי בארץ ישראל וזכינו לשמוע קולות של שמחה וששון. אך האם עד לכאן מגיעה הגאולה? האם זוהי התגשמות חזון אחרית הימים ותו לא?!

בהגדה של פסח מסופר:
...ואפילו כולנו חכמים כולנו נבונים כולנו זקנים כולנו יודעים את התורה מצוה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים.
וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח:

מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושוע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבא ורבי טרפון שהיו מסובין בבני ברק. והיו מספרים ביציאת מצרים כל עוד אותו הלילה עד שבאו תלמידיהם ואמרו להם רבותינו הגיע זמן קריאת שמע של שחרית:

הרב אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק זצ"ל בפירושו על ההגדה מקשה על הכתוב ומעלה את השאלה: אם נאמר שעיקר סיפור יציאת מצרים הוא כדי להבין את גודל הטובה שהביא לנו הקב"ה, הרי אדם חכם, שמבין ויודע את סיפור יציאת מצרים, אינו חייב לספר את הסיפור?!

אלא שמסופר על אותם חכמים ונבונים שישבו בבני ברק בראשותו של רבי עקיבא וסיפרו על יציאת מצרים ואף האריכו בדבריהם כל אותו הלילה. מכאן אנו מבינים שעיקר המצווה הוא לא בסיפור עצמו אלא עיקר המצווה הוא להרבות ולהעמיק בסיפור.

מוסיף הרב וכותב: הסיפור הוא על יציאת מצרים ולא על גאולת מצרים. שאם לא היו בני ישראל נגאלים והיינו נשארים במצרים, אפילו החכמים והנבונים שבינינו לא היו מצליחים לגבור על טומאת מצרים והיו

נשארים במ"ט שערי טומאה. ההגדה מביאה לנו חיזוק לקיומה של המצווה גם מהחכמים שישבו במשך כל הלילה והאריכו בסיפור יציאת מצרים ואפילו שהיו חכמים וצדיקים גדולים, אינם היו פטורים מהמצווה. ההגדה מציינת את מקום ישיבתם של החכמים - בני ברק. ומדוע חשוב לנו לדעת היכן ישבו אותם חכמים והתפללו?

אלא שכתוב במסכת כתובות קי"א:

רמי בר יחזקאל איקלע לבני ברק, חזנהו להנהו עיזי דקאכלן תאיני, וקנטיף דובשא מתאיני, וחלבא טייף מינייהו ומיערב בהדי הדדי, אמר היינו זבת חלב ודבש.

על פי הגמרא, בבני ברק היה קל להבחין בכל טוב הארץ, בפרותיה המשובחים ובחלבה המתוק. ודווקא שם הם יושבים ומספרים ביציאת מצרים. מתוך שהם זוכים לראות את הארץ - "ארץ זבת חלב ודבש" הם הרבו לספר בטובת ה' על הטובה אשר הוא מכיר להם בהשגחתו על הארץ **ארץ אשר ה' אלוקיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני ה' אלוקיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה:** (דברים פרק י"א פס' י"ב).

מסופר בגמרא על עוד קבוצה של תנאים בראשות רבי עקיבא, בסוף מסכת מכות (דף כד):

וכבר היה ר"ג ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי יהושע ורבי עקיבא מהלכין בדרך ... שוב פעם אחת היו עולין לירושלים, כיון שהגיעו להר הצופים קרעו בגדיהם. כיון שהגיעו להר הבית, ראו שועל שיצא מבית קדשי הקדשים, התחילו הן בוכין ור"ע מצחק. אמרו לו: מפני מה אתה מצחק? אמר להם: מפני מה אתם בוכים? אמרו לו, מקום שכתוב בו: (במדבר א') והזר הקרב יומת ועכשיו שועלים הלכו בו ולא נבכה? אמר להן: לכך אני מצחק, דכתיב: (ישעיהו ח') ואעזדה לי עדים נאמנים את אוריה הכהן ואת זכריה בן יברכיהו, וכי מה ענין אוריה אצל זכריה? אוריה במקדש ראשון וזכריה במקדש שני! אלא, תלה הכתוב נבואתו של זכריה בנבואתו של אוריה, באוריה כתיב: (מיכה ג') לכן בגללכם ציון שדה תחרש [וגו'], בזכריה כתיב: (זכריה ח') עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלים, עד שלא נתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה - הייתי מתיירא שלא תתקיים נבואתו של זכריה, עכשיו שנתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה - בידוע שנבואתו של זכריה מתקיימת. בלשון הזה אמרו לו: עקיבא, ניהמתנו! עקיבא, ניהמתנו.

רבי עקיבא וחבריו עומדים אל מול הר המוריה ורואים שועל היוצא מבין חורבות קודשי הקודשים. רבי עקיבא צוחק וחבריו בוכים. רבי עקיבא מסביר להם שהמחזה הנגלה אל מול עיניהם מבשר בשורות טובות לקראת הבאות. המחזה מבשר על קיומה של נבואת זכריה שכבר הזכרנו: "עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות..." אלא שכדי שתתקיים נבואת זכריה המתארת את ימי הגאולה חייבת להתקיים תחילה נבואתו של אוריה הנביא בספר זכריה על כך שירושלים תחרב והר הבית יהפך לבמות יער. מתוך המצב שנראה לכאורה רע, מכיר רבי עקיבא בטובה שעושה הקב"ה עם ישראל ומכיר בהשגחתו הפרטית של הקב"ה, דבר הגורם לו שמחה גדולה ורצון לשחוק. "אז ימלא שחוק פינו ולשוננו רינה" (תהילים קכ"ו) "אז" - כאשר נראה את הנבואה של חזון אחרית הימים מתגשמת מול עינינו, נכיר טובה לקב"ה ונשורר לפניו שירות ורננות.

רבי עקיבא וחבריו יושבים כל הלילה ומספרים ביציאת מצרים שמצווה עלינו לספר את הסיפור דווקא בלילה, ליל הסדר. "להגיד בבוקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות" (תהילים צ"ב) שדווקא בלילה בשעות חשוכות כאשר ישנה אפילה גדולה, מצווה עלינו להרבות באמונה ולהתחזק בה על ידי הכרת הטוב לקב"ה ובעז"ה נזכה לחסדיו ממש כאשר יעלה הבוקר ו"איילת השחר" תגיע.

ב"ה זכיתי לתרום שנתיים מחיי למען עם ישראל בעת השרות הלאומי שעשיתי לאחר לימודי התיכון. את שתי שנות השירות העברתי בירושלים קרוב מאוד להר המוריה ולכותל המערבי. במסגרת השירות הדרכתי קבוצות תלמידים וחיילים ב"במנהרות הכותל". שם פגשתי באדם מיוחד בעל סיפור חיים מופלא.

אותו אדם, יהודי קשיש הגיע למנהרות הכותל זמן לא רב אחרי שהן נפתחו לציבור, וביקש לעבוד במנהרות. האנשים האחראים במקום, אמרו לו בנימוס כי העבודה כאן אינה מתאימה לאדם בגילו ואין להם עבודה שתוכל להתאים לו.

אותו אדם התעקש והסביר שהוא חייב, פשוט חייב לעבוד כאן ולא אכפת לו אם זה עבודה קשה או קלה, הוא רוצה לעבוד כאן!

כיוון שההסברים שלהם לא שיכנעו את הקשיש והוא המשיך להתעקש, נמצאה לו עבודה. עבודתו של אותו קשיש היתה לנקות את אבני הכותל. בכל יום הגיע ובעזרת מטלית, ניקה את אבני הכותל. הימים חלפו והקשיש התייצב בכל יום לעבודתו ועבד במרץ ובמסירות רבה. יום אחד ניגש אליו אחד מהמנהלים של "מנהרות הכותל" וביקש ממנו להסביר את פשר ההתעקשות שלו לעבוד דווקא בכותל.

הסביר הקשיש ואמר:

אני ראיתי בחיי מראות קשים. עברתי את שבעת מדורי גיהנום בשואה האיומה. בכל יום כשהוצאנו למסדר במחנה העבודה, כדי שיוכלו הנאצים לספור אותנו, עמד מולנו קצין נאצי אחד וקרא לעברנו: "יהודנים טיפשים! אתם ממשיכים להתפלל ולקוות שתגיעו לישראל? לירושלים? אתם תמותו פה! לעולם לא תגיעו לירושלים! התפילות שלכם לא יעזרו לכם.

ואנחנו שהיינו רעבים, חולים ותשושים לא הפסקנו לרגע אחד להתפלל ולקוות שבעזרת ה' נגיע לארץ ישראל ולירושלים.

וכעת, אני, היהודי שהיה בגיא צלמוות עומד ניצב מול אבני הכותל שריד בית המקדש ומראה לכל הנאצים ימשו"ז ולכל העולם שתפילותיי נענו ואני אוהז באבני הכותל וכולי תודה לקב"ה שזיכני."

מאותו היום, ניתנה לו עבודה אחרת. מאז, הוא אינו מנקה את אבני הכותל יותר. הוא עומד גאה וזקוף בפתח מנהרות הכותל ומקבל את רבבות, רבבות היהודים המבקשים לראות, לחוש ולהתפלל במקום הזה. הוא אחראי על קבלת הקבוצות והקבלת פניהם לשלום.

המציאות היומיומית שבה יכול יהודי להגיע אל הכותל המערבי להתפלל, מציאות שבה ילדים וילדות משחקים ברחובות העיר כשלצדם יושבים זקנים וזקנות אשר משענתם בידם מרוב ימים, אותה מציאות יומיומית ואולי "משעממת" היא תחילת הגאולה!

לא כאשר קורים דברים לעם ישראל, אלא כאשר עם ישראל יושב במדינת ישראל ומקיים מציאות שבה יהודי יכול להגן על עצמו ולא להיות מושפל. כאשר לעם ישראל יש צבא חזק ומתוחכם, אוניברסיטאות ובתי ספר טובים, מדענים, אנשי רוח ותלמידי חכמים המרבים לספר ביציאת מצרים. המודים לקב"ה בכל יום על ההשגחה הפרטית והשפע שהוא מעניק לנו בכל יום והזכות לטעום מפרותיה הטובים של הארץ. קיום חיי השגרה בעולם, כוללים הקמת מדינה והפיכתה העם היהודי בארץ ישראל לחלק ממשפחת העמים והמדינות ולא רק לאוסף של אנשים בעלי זהות משותפת.

זוהי תחילתה של הגאולה שלה אנו עדים וזוכים היום. יש לזכור כי זוהי ההתחלה ועדיין יש קשיים בדרך. עלינו להשתדל ולשאוף לקראת הגאולה השלמה. כאשר החוט המשולש מורכב כמעט במלואו: עם ישראל בארץ ישראל, על פי תורת ישראל. עתה, נשאר לנו לבנות את בית הבחירה ולזכות להשראת שכינה. אך כיצד נוכל להביא את הגאולה במלואה?

רבי יהודה הלוי חותם את ספרו "הכוזרי" במילים הבאות:

גם מי שמעורר בלב בני אדם אהבה למקום הקדוש הזה ראוי לשכר בלא ספק והוא מקרב עת בוא תקותנו כמה שנאמר אתה תקום תרחם ציון כי עת לחננה כי בא מועד כי רצו עבדיך את אבניה ואת עפרה יחננו זאת אומרת ירושלים לא תבנה כי אם כאשר ישתוקקו אליה בני ישראל תכלית תשוקה עד אשר יחוננו את אבניה ואת עפרה:

עלינו להסתכל על הדברים הטובים ועל יופיה של הארץ ולרצות בתכלית הרצון לבנותה, לכונן את אבניה ואת עפרה ולהשתוקק אל ארץ ישראל.

Creating our Connection to the Land of Israel

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Transcribed by Deena Klein

When we talk about Yom Haatzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, the question we need to ask ourselves is where we are in our relationship to Eretz Yisroel. It's a day we can celebrate in various ways, but it behooves us to make it a day of introspection.

We all know and believe that the mashiach can come at any time and is just around the corner, but how do we react to that? The gemara (Shabbat 31a) writes that on the yom hadin, we will all be asked if we longed for the salvation. The Aderet v'Haemunah explains that this question means to ask if we put longing for the salvation as the single focus of our lives, and how we applied our individual lives to achieving this national goal. Are we only caught up in our individual lives and our development, albeit our spiritual development, or are we able to focus on a cosmic vision of our nation as a whole? We must ask ourselves if we are trying to move history forward and bring the conclusion of the exile. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that this question is something in which most of us fall very short. We all believe in the coming of the mashiach, but do we really believe?

The question is, where are we in terms of our connection to the land of Israel? How close are we in our desire to learn, to live and to settle in the land of Israel that will ultimately be the dwelling place in the coming of mashiach? Rav Moshe Wolfson writes that the centrality of the land of Israel is clear from the beginning of time, as Chazal teach us that the world was created from the land of Israel and the rest of the world spread out from there. In addition, Adam, the first of humanity, was created from the earth of the land of Israel. We have a magnetic pull towards the land.

While this reflects a general human tendency towards Israel, the Jewish people's connection goes further. The first command given to the first Jew was the commandment to Avraham "lech lecha," to the land of Israel. Furthermore, all the commandments and promises that were given to our Avos are related to the land of Israel because that is the place where Torah can be upheld in its fullest sense. Do we really feel this sense of connection?

And of Zion it shall be said "Man and man was born in her, and [God] will establish her. R' Maiysha, the grandson of R' Yehoshua ben Levi, says, both those born there and those who long to see her.

Ketuvot 75a

ולציון יאמר איש ואיש יולד בה והוא יכוננה עליון - א"ר מיישא בר בריה דר' יהושע בן לוי: אחד הנולד בה ואחד המצפה לראותה. מסכת כתובות דף עה.

During the British rule of Palestine, there was a quota of how many Jews could come from each nation into Israel. There was a group of Jews from Romania who wanted to emigrate to Israel but the quota from Romania had already been filled. They asked Rav Chaim Sonnenfeld if they could lie and create papers that said they were from Czechoslovakia, whose quota had not yet been filled, and he said they could not, because it would be dishonest. They then asked if they could create papers to say that they were from Palestine, and he responded that it was permitted, and it wasn't dishonest, based on this gemara that anyone who desires to see Israel is considered to have been born there. Every Jew is intrinsically connected to the land of Israel, even without having ever set foot there.

Rav Aaron Soloveitchik, in his book "Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind" in an essay called "The State of Israel, a Torah Perspective," points out that at the end of the chapter in Tehillim, quoted in the gemara, Dovid HaMelech writes that both the singers and the dancers have their thoughts there [in Israel]. Rav Soloveitchik interprets this to mean that the singers refer to religious Jews who know the words to sing, and the dancers refer to those that can only dance and don't know the words to sing, namely non-religious Jews, and Dovid Hamelech writes that both have their close connection to the land of Israel. Every Jew feels that Israel is our homeland, and that is where we belong.

And the daughters of Reu'el (Yitro) came to their father and he asked them "Why are you back so quickly today?" And they said "an Egyptian man (Moshe) saved us from the shepherds.

Shemot 2:18-19

ותבאנה אל רעואל אביהן ויאמר מדוע מהרתן בא היום: ותאמרן איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרעים שמות ב:יה-יט

(Yosef said to the wine steward) Please do this kindness for me and remember me to Pharaoh to take me out of this house. For I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews.

Bereishit 40:14-15

ועשית נא עמדי חסד והזכרתני אל פרעה והוצאתני מן הבית הזה: כי גנב גנבתי מארץ העברים בראשית מ:יד-טו

The Midrash comments that one who refers to himself as being from Israel will merit being buried in Israel, and one who does not refer to himself in that way will not. Yosef connected himself to the land and therefore his bones were carried for 40 years in the desert and buried in the land. Moshe identified himself as an Egyptian, and therefore did not merit to be buried in Israel. Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, in his Oznayim Latorah, questions this Midrash, since Yosef was born in the land of Israel and so of course he said he was from there, whereas Moshe was born in Egypt, so why would he say he was from Israel? He answers that from the moment Hashem promised us that we were going to inherit the land of Israel, it belonged to us, no matter where we were. When you ask any Jewish person what land he or she is from, the

answer must be from the land of Israel, irrelevant of whether the person ever even stepped foot in Israel or not. It's not just a question of whether you are an American Jew or a Jewish American, but rather we need to recognize that our core is intrinsically connected to the land of Israel. We may temporarily be physically from somewhere else, but our roots are in that place where we desire to come to and be.

The Torah in Parshas Re'eh (11:12) describes the land of Israel as a place that is constantly under God's scrutiny. It's the difference between a parent who only desires to speak to a child once a year to one who desires to speak to his or her child every day, a few times a day. The Siftei Chaim writes that the Divine providence is much stronger in Israel, because of this deep closeness He has with us there. It's a connection of the love and closeness between the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

The Nesivos Shalom writes that just as in time, the Shabbos gives light and meaning to the whole week, the land of Israel animates the rest of the world. Israel is the land where we can have prophesy and where we can feel and tap into the feeling of closeness and specialness to Hashem.

Rav Yaakov Emden, in his siddur Beit Elokim, writes that it's not enough just to face Jerusalem in prayer and go through lip service of the centrality of Jerusalem, but rather we have to have the intention to bring it to the world of actuality. It behooves every Jew to declare in their heart to make aliyah to Eretz Yisroel. When we think about a retirement home, it shouldn't be a condo in Florida but rather an apartment in Israel. It can't just be a hope, but rather it demands action.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, in his Kol Dodi Dofek, writes that when the Torah (Vayikra 26:33) says that Hashem will bring the land into desolation, chazal interprets this as a good thing, because our enemies will not find any gratification in the land since it will be desolate of all its inhabitants. We know that throughout history, none of the nations that conquered the land of Israel were able to settle the land, as the agriculture refused to cooperate with them. Had there been an actual sustained presence there, strangers would have consumed its goodness and food and the rights and claims of the Jewish people would have been nullified. Therefore, the land of Israel did not betray its people. She remained faithful to them and awaited her redeemer. When the possibility came to return to the land that withheld its treasure from strangers and guarded them for us, how could the Jews not fulfill the commandment and run with joy and enthusiasm to build and settle there?

This Yom Haatzmaut, we must come in contact with the land, hear its song, and remember that Eretz Yisroel has been waiting for us. We need to see and understand what a blessing Israel is for us. The challenge from a distance is to open ourselves up beyond falafel, blue and white, and a dollar commitment. We must connect to Israel emotionally and spiritually, so that while we may be living elsewhere, we feel the reality that our true home is only in Israel and that we are truly its citizens. By doing so, we will truly have a handle on longing for the redemption which should come speedily in our days.

Staking our Claim to the Land

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Sosevsky

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Ohr Yerushalayim

Perhaps the most well-known comment of Rashi among all his writings is his first comment on the Torah.

R. Yitzchak said: The Torah should have begun with [the verse] "This month shall be for you [the first month]," it being the first precept the Israelites were commanded. Why, then, does it begin with "In the beginning..."? This is because "He declared the power of His actions to His people in order to grant them the inheritance of nations (Psalms 111:6)" For, should the nations of the world say to Israel, "You are robbers, for you have taken by force the lands of the Seven Nations" they will respond to them: "All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He, He created it and gave it to whomever He saw fit. It was His will to give it to them and it was His will to take it from them and give it to us."

Rashi Bereishit 1:1

אמר רבי יצחק לא היה צריך להתחיל [את] התורה אלא (שמות יב ב) מהחודש הזה לכם, שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו [בה] ישראל, ומה טעם פתח בבראשית, משום (תהלים קיא ו) כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים, שאם יאמרו אומות העולם לישראל לסטים אתם, שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים, הם אומרים להם כל הארץ של הקב"ה היא, הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו, ברצונו נתנה להם וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו:
רש"י בראשית א:א

In its most simple form, Rashi is establishing that the Torah was not intended as a record of history, but as a compendium of mitzvah obligations. Hence, the Torah should logically have begun with the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people, that of the sanctification of the New Moon in Parshat Bo.

There is, perhaps an alternate understanding of this statement of R. Yitzchak. Perhaps what he is trying to say is that there are two distinct beginnings of the calendar. There is "Bereishit barah" which describes the first moments of the very first day of God's creation, which marks the beginning of the Universal calendar. There is, however, another calendar, that of "Hachodesh hazeh lachem" which marks the beginning of the Jewish calendar. Hence, one may understand R. Yitzchak's question as: Why did the Torah choose to commence with the time frame of "Breishit barah" when it ought to more appropriately have begun with the Jewish calendar of "Hachodesh hazeh lachem." His answer is that the narrative of Sefer Bereishit helps us stake our claim to Eretz Yisrael.

While this seems like it should be an obvious selling point, we know that we have attempted to deliver this message to the nations of the world for millennia without any positive results. In what way, we may ask, has Sefer Bereishit helped us legitimize our claims to the land of Israel?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik⁶⁴ writes that there are two fundamental dimensions of kedusha, of holiness, that of time and that of place. With regards to time, the Rav determines that there is a critical fundamental distinction between qualitative and quantitative time. There are some people and cultures who live in quantitative time, measuring time by the clock and the calendar. Every day is like every other. Time moves along, but is not dynamic. The contrast to this perspective is those who live in qualitative time, measuring it not by minutes and hours but by meaningfulness. Hence, the statement of Rabbeinu Hakadosh,⁶⁵ upon witnessing a man who died in a highly heroic fashion, that “there are those who acquire their world in but a single moment.”

Viewed in this light, we can well comprehend R. Yitzchak’s statement. The time frame of Hachodeh hazeh lachem, which speaks of the holiness of time,⁶⁶ is far more suited as the starting point of the Torah than the time frame of the beginning of creation, where man wasn’t even yet created to vest the world with meaning. Its quantitative time frame is effectively captured in the closing verse of each day of creation: There was evening and there was morning, one day. There was evening and there was morning, day two, etc.

What, then, is indeed the function of the narratives of Sefer Bereishit? R. Yitzchak, in essence, suggests that there is yet a second dimension of holiness, that of place. The purpose of Sefer Bereishit is to establish the holiness of place of the land of Israel. If we were thieves who had acquired the land unlawfully, the holiness of Israel, so central to Judaism, wouldn’t possibly be viable.

There is, however, far more at stake in establishing the holiness of the land of Israel than simply being the rationale for the mitzvot hatluyot ba’aretz. As Rabbi Soloveitchik points out in his essay, civilization is primarily the product of landed people. The nomad who lacks a mental bond to his land also lacks the necessary motivation to properly cultivate it. Only the established resident of the land enjoys a symbiotic relationship with it that motivates him to till and cultivate it properly, to pray for its rain, and to combat all the elements that seek to drive him from his land. He alone can experience true holiness of place.

Even in those moments of history when God had chosen to remove us from the land of Israel, our sense of kedushat makom, or the lack of it, will determine our mental state in exile. Will we see ourselves, as Haman did, as a people spread and dispersed amongst the nations, hardly worthy of existence? If so, we will perceive our task as having to integrate not only culturally, but

⁶⁴ “Sacred and Profane: Kodesh and Chol in World Perspective” (Gesher 3:1, June 1966; Hatzedek, June 1945)

⁶⁵ Avodah Zarah 18b

⁶⁶ It is the qualitative nature of kedushat zman that allows man to extend the sanctity of Shabbat prior to and after Shabbat. From a quantitative time perspective, this would be impossible since Shabbat marks the precise beginning and end of the Seventh Day of creation. Similarly, it is the Beit Din that sanctifies Rosh Chodesh as the beginning of the new month, even if their declaration doesn’t match up, due to error or conscious intent, to the actual beginning of the new month.

even spiritually with our host nations. If, however, we retain our appreciation of the holiness of the land of Israel, we can stand proud in exile and retain our identity as a nation, feeling assured that our exile is but a temporary, even if prolonged, state of existence. Even if we are left incapable of performing the mitzvot hatluyot ba'aretz, identifying with them by incorporating them into our study and prayers will effectively replace the oxen (sacrifices) we used to offer in the temple.

Our attitude towards the holiness of place will also determine our attitude towards our present-day return to our land. When the nations of the world do indeed, as R. Yitzchak said they would, accuse us of robbing the land, will we react with suppressed guilt, or will we confidently stand vindicated of such claims, knowing that we have an innate right to our land, because it is God who has chosen to reunite us with the land he had long ago picked out for us?⁶⁷

Moreover, if Eretz Yisrael is ours as an expression of God's will, we may choose to ask if we have the right⁶⁸ to give up any portion of it? What the nations of the world claim must not determine our attitude. If we believe in our destiny, then we must be ready to state the ultimate truth regarding Israel, even if it falls on deaf ears. Just read the Bible. Is it not clear that the same God who, in the Bible's opening verses, created the world, also granted the land of Israel to us in the ensuing narratives?

Clearly, there is much at stake in our belief in the holiness of the land of Israel. It certainly serves to establish the kedushat hamakom framework for much of the body of mitzvot which have no validity without it. Equally important, it helps shape our identity even in exile, and determines our ethical validity and national consciousness throughout all of history.

Hence, argues R. Yitzchak, the Torah's opening with the calendar of "Bereishit barah" is most appropriate. Surely, without it there can be neither the holiness of place nor of time that helps provide not only the framework for mitzvot, but forms the basis of our national psyche throughout the ages.

⁶⁷ Of course, our argument has little bearing on the nature of our obligation to ease the plight of those who suffer as a result of our conquests.

⁶⁸ Except for possible issues of pikuach nefesh, as determined by halachik authority.

The Religious Significance of the State of Israel

Rabbi Yair Spitz

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Dictionaries⁶⁹ tend to define the words 'state', 'nation' and 'religion' in the following fashion:

State: A set of institutions that possess the authority to govern the people in a society, having internal and external sovereignty over a definite territory.

Nation: A grouping of people who share a common history, culture, language or ethnic origin.

Religion: A set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

In the year 70 CE, in the aftermath of the burning of the second temple, Jerusalem was left in ruins and the Jewish people was dispersed amongst the nations of the world. These events marked the end not only of the Temple as a religious center but also the end of Jewish statehood and nationality. No longer were the Jewish people sovereign over a defined territory. No longer did it possess any form of self governance. Jewish communal culture, language and history began to lose coherence, to gradually grow apart and differ. This clear and simple understanding of the term *Galut*, i.e. exile is adopted by the Maharal of Prague in his work *Netzach Yisrael* (chap 1). He defines *Galut* as possessing three central characteristics: the physical displacement of the Jewish people from the land of Israel, dispersion and finally subjugation to other nations. As these facets of statehood and nationality were lost, the only element remaining to define and sustain Jewish peoplehood throughout the darkness of exile was religion, or more specifically, a pattern of life revolving around *Halacha* and observance. According to Maharal, this is what the sages of the Talmud mean when they say:

Since the day of the destruction of the Temple, all that God has in this world is the four cubits of halacha.

Brachot 8a

מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין לו להקדוש ברוך
הוא בעולמו אלא ארבע אמות של הלכה
בלבד.
מסכת ברכות דף ה.

⁶⁹ See wordnetweb.princeton.edu

This is not a maximalist statement, one that expands the scope of the God-Israel relation, but rather a minimalist one, one that narrows the scope of the Jewish people's relationship with God. Whereas formally the Jewish people's covenant with God encompassed all facets of individual and national life, it was now confined to the smallest possible realm of individual life and observance – four cubits.

The events of the past three generations have placed the Jewish people in a fundamentally different situation. The State of Israel is now the home of the single largest Jewish community in the world, and enjoys full sovereignty over both its internal and external affairs. The fate of the Jewish people as a nation no longer lies in the hands of foreign nations and rulers, but rather in its own. An apparently dead, or at least comatose, language has come back to every day life and a unified culture and history is being created anew by a highly diverse group of Jews who have returned to Israel, or descend from Jews who have returned to Israel from various locales around the world.

The obvious centrality of the State of Israel to Jewish identity in the modern era is by no means confined to the citizens of Israel. Indeed, the existence of the State has transformed the communal identity of Jews the world over. With the decline of the status of *halacha* and adherence to observance of the commandments that has occurred over the course of the last two hundred years, the State of Israel now serves as the most fundamental common denominator of Jewish identity.

These events and developments have led to the widespread intuitive understanding that the return to a national life in Israel in our time constitutes a shift of Biblical proportions in Jewish history which deeply impacts our perspective and understanding of Jewish identity and life; in short, that the exile has ended and is no more. This orientation, in varying degrees, is shared by most of world Jewry today and dominates Israeli society in particular.

It is surprising therefore, to find that many religious authorities oppose these conclusions and claim that nothing fundamental has changed. The most common arguments against the idea that the exile has ended can be grouped into four categories:

1) Time – the end of the exile is supposed to be sudden, going from the depths of darkness to perfection instantaneously. 2) Setbacks – the setbacks and difficulties experienced by Israel in the past few decades prove the exile has not ended. 3) Spiritual level - tradition teaches that the exile will end only when the entire Jewish people return to full observance. 4) Leadership and Expectations – the personalities leading the historical events or the events themselves do not fit with our expectations.

As a counterargument, I suggest examining these arguments through the prism of the first and second redemptions, the Exodus from Egypt and the Second Temple period. Hopefully, this will reveal recurring patterns in the processes of redemption in the past and illuminate the developments of the modern era. I will present the relevant sources 'as is' with only slight remarks where clarification is necessary.

First Redemption – The Exodus

Time:

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt... that he built the house of the Lord

I Kings 6:1

ויהי בשמונים שנה וארבע מאות שנה
לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים ... ויבן
הבית ה':
מלכים א' ו:א

The 480 years refer to the full span of the First Redemption, from the Exodus until the peak of the redemption – the completion of the First Temple by King Solomon.

Setbacks:

And Moses returned to the Lord, and said, Lord, why have You done evil to this people?... For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You saved Your people at all.

Shemot 5: 22-23

וישב משה אל ה' ויאמר אדני למה
הרעתה לעם הזה ... ומאז באתי אל
פרעה לדבר בשמך הרע לעם הזה
והצל לא הצלת את עמך:
שמות ה:כב-כג

This was only the first of many setbacks during the 480 year time period. Others were the sin of the golden calf, the sin of the spies as well as most of the period of the Judges.

Spiritual Level:

The angels said to God what did you see to spare them (the Jewish people) and plague them (the Egyptians)? These are idol worshipers and these are idol worshipers.⁷⁰

Yalkut Har'uveni, Beshalach, 82

Leadership and Expectations:

At the time Moshe came to the people and told them 'this month you will be redeemed, they said to him 'how can we be redeemed? God said to Avraham 'thy seed... shall serve them four hundred years' and only two hundred and ten have gone by! Moshe answered them when God desires your redemption He does not look at your calculations"⁷¹

Shir Hashirim Rabba, Parsha 2, Sidra Tanina 1:8

בשעה שבא ואמר לישראל בחדש זה אתם
נגאלין אמרו לו משה רבינו היאך אנו
נגאלין והלא אמר הקב"ה לאברהם
(בראשית ט"ו) ועבדום וענו אותם ארבע
מאות שנה, ועדיין אין בידינו אלא מאתים
ועשר שנה, אמר להם הואיל והוא חפץ
בגאולתכם אינו מביט בחשבונותיכם
שיר השירים רבה (וילנא) פרשה ב

⁷⁰ Also see Jeremiah 7:25-26: "Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt until this day I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, from early in the morning: Yet they did not listen to me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck; they did worse than their fathers"

⁷¹ See as well: Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 8a regarding the original evaluation of King David.

Second Redemption – Second Temple Period

Timeframe:

365 BCE- Proclamation of Cyrus; return of the exiles and building of Second Temple begins⁷²

165 BCE- Chanukah; Jewish independence and sovereignty⁷³

From the beginning of the redemption to its peak took two hundred years.

Setbacks:

And the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build (The Temple); And hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia: And in the reign of Ahasuerus, they wrote to him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem... Then ceased the work on the house of God which is in Jerusalem

Ezra 4:4-6

ויהי עם הארץ מרפי' ידי עם יהודה ומבהלים אותם לבנות: וסכרים עליהם יועצים להפר עצתם כל ימי כורש מלך פרס ועד מלכות דריוש מלך פרס: ובמלכות אחשורוש בתחלת מלכותו כתבו שטנה על ישבי יהודה וירושלם:

עזרא ד:ד-ו

These events took place after the return of many Jews from the Babylonian exile in compliance with the charter of Cyrus the Great, allowing the Jews to build the Second Temple.

Spiritual Level:

In those days I saw in Judah men treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading them on donkeys; and also wine, grapes, and figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day... Also in those days I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And half their children spoke in the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah.⁷⁴

Nechemia 13: 15, 23-24

בימים ההמה ראיתי ביהודה דרכים גתות בשבת ומביאים הערמות ועמסים על החמרים ואף יין ענבים ותאנים וכל משא ומביאים ירושלם ביום השבת ... גם בימים ההם ראיתי את היהודים השיבו נשים אשדדיות עמניות מואביות: ובניהם חצי מדבר אשדודית ואינם מכירים לדבר יהודית...

נחמיה יג: טו, כג-כד

Leadership and Expectations:

Ten genealogical classes went up from Babylon to Israel; Kohanim, Leviim. Yisraelim, disqualified Kohanim, converts, freed slaves, Mamzerim (born from forbidden relationships), Nesinim, Shtukim (whose father is unknown), Asufim (both

עשרה יוחסים עלו מבבל: כהני, לויי, ישראלי, חללי, גירי, וחרורי, ממזירי, נתיני, שתוקי, ואסופי ... לא עלה עזרא מבבל -

⁷² Rashi on Ezra 1:1

⁷³ Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Kriat Megila 1:1

⁷⁴ Another example can be found in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Megila 12a "The students asked Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai: why did the Jewish people of that generation deserve extermination? ... because they derived pleasure from the feast of that wicked one Achashverosh... because they prostrated themselves to the golden image in the days of Nebuchadnezzar"

parents are unknown)... Ezra did not go up from Babylonia until he made it like fine sifted flour.

Kiddushin, 69a-b

עד שעשאה כסולת נקיה ועלה.
מסכת קידושין דף סט. – סט:

The majority of Jews at the time did not heed the call of King Cyrus and chose to remain in Babylon. Most of the 42,300 people who did join the movement were the outcasts of Jewish society; those who had little to lose by leaving and everything to gain.

It is evident from these examples that the four arguments presented earlier do not hold true of the known and acknowledged processes of exile and redemption. Therefore they should not limit our interpretation of the events of our times.

What difference does it make whether or not the exile has ended? Is there any religious significance to this question? Shabbat is still Shabbat, kashrut is still kashrut, etc... in what way does religious life change based on the answer to this question? I would like to point to three areas or aspects of religious life which I believe are profoundly impacted by the outcome of this question.

Truth and Historical Perspective.

First and foremost, is the question of truth itself. The understanding that something fundamental has changed in our communal religious identity changes one's entire perspective on our times, yielding a recognition of God's involvement in the historical developments of our time. It is God's providence that has brought the fulfillment of the words of the prophets regarding the ingathering of the exiles, the return of sovereignty, military success and economic growth. One of the practical implications of this point is the attitude towards Israel Independence Day; is it a civil celebration alone or a religious holiday to be observed with *Hallel* and expression of gratitude to *Hashem*?

Broad and Proactive Halachic Decision Making

Throughout exile, *halacha* was primarily reactive; dealing with the many internal and external challenges faced by Jewish communities with the primary goal being maintenance of the status quo. A Jewish state raises questions that necessitate a proactive halachic approach. For example, how can the State maintain a modern economy while still observing the laws of *Shmita*? For the first time in 1800 years non-Jews are a minority and Jews a majority. What should be the status of and attitude towards non-Jews in Israel? Given the fact that hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens are not Jews according to halacha, what should be the conversion policies of the State of Israel and the Jewish community?

Attitude Towards the Mundane.

The understanding that there is once again a Jewish nation-state should translate into a positive attitude towards academic studies, a modern thriving economy, a strong army and a vibrant civic culture. These become not only a necessity for the physical maintenance and success of the state, but part and parcel of a renewed comprehensive Jewish identity. In turn, this should impact such questions as the religious value of army service, the relationship of Torah study with work and academic studies, and the question of relations, cooperation and partnership with non-observant Jews in both the private and public realms.

Conclusion

The opposing conflicting opinions in the religious community regarding the State of Israel, that which views the state as no more than a mere random historical occurrence and that advocated here, which views the State as a fundamental change in the course of Jewish history, can be compared to the difference between a person's attitude towards purchasing a new appliance and becoming a parent. A refrigerator is an appliance which certainly possesses pragmatic and instrumental value. The historical occurrence of their invention may even spark *halachic* discussion, such as opening the refrigerator door on Shabbat. But by no means does our possession of refrigerators penetrate to our inner religious experience or impact our beliefs. There is no difference between Judaism with a refrigerator and Judaism without a refrigerator. On the other hand, we may view the coming into being of the State of Israel and its significance as similar to that of having a child; not merely a technical addition to our religious lives, but the development of a new facet of our identity that impacts us on the deepest and most profound levels. The birth of a child changes the way in which a parent defines himself. This is how we should relate to the State of Israel, as redefining our religious identity and experience. We are home. We are together. Our fate as a people is in our own hands once again, and we are better able to discover our capabilities and realize our full potential. In this sense the State of Israel is the child of the Jewish people.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize those voices in the Jewish and halachic community that relate to the State of Israel as no more than a mere instrument. Those opinions have value as well; they serve as a constant reminder that though we have come a significant way in the redemptive process, there is still much to amend, to perfect and to strive for.

An Ancient Echo

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

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Redemption is an arduous and confusing process. It is arduous because, as history convulses and lurches, our reality is often violently toppled. The turbulence and furor of redemption is reflected in the statement of both Ulla and Rav Yosef (Sanhedrin 98b) "let the redemption arrive but let me be spared from the experience."

Redemption is confusing because its terms and conditions are hidden and untraceable. Two great visionaries, at two critical historical junctures, each attempted to decode the redemptive riddle. As the first exile began in Egypt, Yaakov attempted to uncover the course of geula and his efforts were thwarted by the Ribono shel Olam:

Yaakov determined to reveal the redemption but the details were concealed from him.

Bereishit Rabbah 96

שבקש יעקב אבינו לגלות את הקץ ונסתם ממנו
בראשית רבה צו

As the second exile unfolded, Daniel, uniquely positioned to track the historical trajectory, sought the same vision. Twice in the book of Daniel, an angel instructs him to seal the details of future Messianic events "until the final chapter of history will arrive and knowledge will increase" (Daniel 12; 4, 9). Without direct prophecy about these events, we are left to our own imagination and the collective yearning of a nation thirsting for its renewal.

Indeed, previous models of geulah serve as precedent for our final redemption, so that we can identify the process once it commences. However, those models only provide general templates rather than precise graphs. The first *geula* from Egypt is referred to as 'ליל שימורים' – a night and an experience 'reserved' for future recurrences. Without question, the liberating events in Egypt will both shape our final geulah and verify its redemptive nature. Yet, as the angel instructed Daniel, the exact details of our geulah remain veiled. We wait! With unswerving faith in one hand and absolute commitment in the other, we wait!

Yet, as we wait, we are haunted by uncertainty. The return to our homeland and the repopulation of our ancestral country has whetted our appetite for full redemption. But we are baffled by so many unanswered questions and so many unyielding enigmas. To so many, these questions are more than nagging mysteries; they seem so unanswerable that the entire process is rejected and Divine authorship denied. If this were clearly the hand of Hashem, it would not be riddled with so many question marks. Undeniably though, even to those who embrace the State of Israel as the start of our redemption, these disquieting questions haunt our consciousness.

Chief among these questions is the secular nature of our redemption. Not only were the great leaders of this renaissance secular, but the very movement was premised on secular principles. To

make matters worse, the values of Secular Zionism were proposed as a *replacement* for traditional religious values. Zionism, in its inception, was never secular in merely an *incidental* manner; it effectively sought to, and, true to its plan, succeeded in, replacing and displacing religion to so many millions of Jews. The State of Israel is primarily a secular organism, generally driven by secular institutions and maintained by a majority which is either completely secular or, at most, traditional in their religious practice. How can this process be deemed redemptive or even Divine?

Understanding this enigma and decoding the mystery of Secular Zionism demands a broader understanding of the general trends of the 19th century, the period so pivotal in hatching the Zionist ideal and jump starting the return to our mother land. The 19th century witnessed the collapsing of conventional or institutional religion. During the previous four centuries, man had succeeded in rising from the suffering and backwardness of the feudal period and repairing the world. The Renaissance restored faith in the human spirit and emancipated human resources which were dormant for millennia. As mankind looked back at the stagnancy and suffering of the past thousand years, one obvious culprit emerged and one force was held responsible for so much persecution. Organized religion was seen as the great criminal of human history, wreaking death and abuse upon humanity. Mankind hurled an accusatory finger at organized religion, and humanity quickly lost interest in a world which was exploited for so long. The fortress of religion began to cave in, leading to our reality of life in the modern secular city; in which religion has either entirely regressed or has been dramatically attenuated.

As organized religion retreated, an intellectual vacuum emerged; mankind no longer looked to religion to provide meaning and direction. Nature abhors a vacuum and the nature of human experience is no different. During the 19th century, many new systems sprouted up to define man's existence. This was the century of the "isms." Marxism, Communism, Darwinism, Socialism, Utilitarianism, Millenarianism, and Imperialism were just the headliners in an endless stream of new ideologies conjured up by the human imagination in the great search for meaning. One may claim that the search goes on and this emptiness has fueled modern angst.

Within the 19th century, the most dominant ideology to emerge as religion was collapsing was nationalism. For the first time in history, man defined himself first by nation and only secondarily by religion. If, for hundreds of years, people introduced themselves as a Catholic who *resided* in Paris or as a Protestant who *resided* in London, modern man introduced himself as a *Frenchman* who happened to be Catholic or an *Englishman* who happened to be Protestant. National identity and affiliation replaced religion and the consequences ricocheted throughout Europe, ultimately exploding in the First World War. The continent was eventually remapped based on the new dynamics of nationhood.

This crisis of organized religion did not spare the Jews of Europe, even and especially those who were presumably most fortified. Enlightenment of man exposed the Jews to the persuasive trends of the era. In stunning fashion, Orthodox Judaism came under a new assault, from within. This century saw the rise of Conservative and then Reform Judaism, a communal earthquake which altered traditional Jewish practice and halachik experience like never before. The Haskalah movement, though providing many welcome opportunities, without question, further

rocked the Jewish reality. As Professor Marc B. Schapiro⁷⁵ noted, in the year 1920 there were more young Jewish men enrolled in Russian universities than in all the yeshivos combined. The 'yeshiva world' was primarily an elitist movement, available to a few thousand boys at best, while most Jewish young men faced overwhelming challenges to their religion. Millions of Jews were faced with historical extinction, lost to Jewish history washed away by the tides of secularization which swept Europe. Religion no longer captured the human imagination and it certainly would not speak to the droves of 'imperiled' Jews.

Amidst this peril, Hakadosh Baruch Hu intervened and evoked a long dormant passion which literally rescued so many of our people from historical extinction. In an era of nationalism, He evoked Jewish nationalism and called it Zionism. From the inception of Jewish history, Hakadosh Baruch Hu had planted, within the Jewish heart, the ability to respond to the call of people, homeland and nation, even if that heart was indifferent or even alien to formal religion and ritual. It was that dormant faith which Hakadosh Baruch Hu awakened and it is the process of Jewish Nationalism of Secular Zionism which has restored so many of our people to the Jewish historical journey.

A careful reading of the conclusion of Parshat Noach reminds us that the first Zionist, the first pilgrim to journey to Israel was not Avraham, as commonly assumed, but his father Terach.

And Terach took his son Avram, and Lot the son of his son Haran, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of his son Avram, and he left with them from Ur Kasdim to journey to the land of Canaan, and they travelled to Charan and settled there.

Bereishit 11:31

ויקה תרה את אברם בנו ואת לוט בן
הרן בן בנו ואת שרי כלתו אשת אברם
בנו ויצאו אתם מאור כשדים ללכת
ארצה כנען ויבאו עד חרן וישבו שם:
בראשית יא:לא

Terach begins the migration but, for some reason, sojourns in Charan and never arrives in Israel. Yet it was his initiative to uproot his family and travel to a land he never encountered. This first traveler to Israel is the same Terach who, according to Chazal, was immersed in the ancient world of paganism. Terach was an idolater who never uncovered the presence of an invisible and monotheistic God. Yet this first Jew was ineluctably drawn to a homeland he never inhabited. He sensed, undoubtedly subconsciously, the call of homeland and the promise of nation.

At the dawn of Jewish history, the Ribono Shel Olam programmed the Jewish heart to respond to national identity even if that heart remains indifferent to religious experience. Hundreds of years prior to revealing His will at Har Sinai and delivering a system of Torah and mitzvot, Hakadosh Baruch Hu challenged Avraham to a historical mission at Har Hamoriah during the Brit Bein Habetarim. He delivered to Avraham a terrifying, but glorious challenge to march through history bearing a message of morality and monotheism, often inciting the wrath of a world unable or unwilling to receive that message. That unique echo of Har Hamoriah reverberates within Jewish hearts even when the call of Har Sinai doesn't resonate. It is an echo which Hakadosh Baruch Hu sounded thousands of years ago and evoked once again at the endpoint of Jewish history as so many Jewish people were faced with historical extinction. The secular call of Jewish Nationalism is a 'safeguard' established to capture those for whom religion would no longer capture their Jewish longing and their Jewish identity.

⁷⁵ Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884-1966

Of course this echo of Jewish Nationalism is only partial. As it lacks the halachik and Torah-based frequency it isn't a complete transmission but only a faintly heard echo. Yet it is a historically irreplaceable transmission. Parshat Re'eh describes the ideal goal of Avodat Hashem.

After the Lord your God shall you follow and fear, and keep His mitzvoth, and hearken to His voice, and worship Him, and cleave to Him.

Devarim 13:5

אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו ואתו תיראו ואת מצותיו תשמרו ובקלו תשמעו ואתו תעבדו ובו תדבקון:

דברים יג:ה

The powerful phrases of this pasuk describe our adherence to mitzvoth, loyalty to God's word, worship and service, and finally a complete encounter with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Yet the initial phrase of 'follow after Hashem' appears to describe a very different and inferior experience. If we seek a complete encounter and absolute loyalty, what meaning exists for merely following?

R' Yehuda b. R' Simon opened "You should follow after your God". Is it possible [for a human being] to follow after God? ... Rather, just as God [after creating his world] immediately planted in [and built] His world, so when you enter the land of Israel begin by planting.

Vayikra Rabbah 25:3

ר"י ב"ר סימון פתח (דברים יג) אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו, וכי אפשר לבשר ודם להלוך אחר הקב"ה ... אלא מתחלת ברייתו של עולם לא נתעסק הקב"ה אלא במטע תחלה הה"ד (בראשית ב) ויטע ה' אלהים גן בעדן, אף אתם כשנכנסין לארץ לא תתעסקו אלא במטע תחלה הה"ד כי תבאו אל הארץ.

ויקרא רבה כה:ג

This midrash provides a map for 'following' God or for achieving "*acharei Hashem Elokeichem teileichu*". Is this our ideal? Does a full Jew aspire to walk behind God, merely following Him by example and planting in the land of Israel? After all, don't we aim to stand before him as Avraham did – '*hithalech lifanai vehyei tamim*.' Don't we dream of a more intimate stance of as we were privileged to in the Mikdash? Don't we aspire to stand facing Him, receiving His will, embracing His presence?

Of course, the complete relationship with God is our ideal, but not every Jew, at every point in history, will maintain this ability. Many will have their religion 'beaten out of them' by world events, and still others will have it emptied by the distractions of their world. They will be rendered incapable of '*lifnei Hashem*'. For those Jews, Hakadosh Baruch Hu provides an alternate experience, one which is far less complete but vital in enabling a relationship of '*acharei Hashem*' by planting and building a homeland, by feeling the pulse of a nation, even if they cannot hear the full voice of their God.

There are many great Jews who are passionately dedicated to Israel, though they aren't able to complement that national identity with a religious lifestyle. They may not even be aware that their nationalism is a Divine voice, but they live a life of selfless dedication to our people. To be sure, some are aware of the Divine nature of this call but unable to translate that impulse into Torah and mitzvoth; they sense Shabbat and Jewish festivals, the centrality of Tanach, the generalities of kashruth, but are unable to commit to a lifestyle of comprehensive religious fidelity. Yet others, similar to Terach, aren't even able to associate this call as Divine. They are unable to embrace any halachik system or even any acknowledgement of Hashem. Yet they are pulsing with an ancient Jewish passion, which the Ribono Shel Olam Himself designed. It is

certainly not complete but still Divine. It is a historical calling which has rescued so many religiously disenfranchised Jews from historical irrelevance and has positioned them as active and oftentimes heroic participants in the final chapters of Jewish history. Only Divine wisdom could conceive of a passion so profound and so primal that it compels their participation even though the Divine origin is so indiscernible.

Ilan Ramon z"l, who lost his life in the Discovery accident, in many ways reminded us of everything which is right and proper about Secular Zionism. He flew with an Israeli flag emblazoned on his lapel during a time in which it was not popular to be associated with our homeland or our people. During the Intifada of the early part of the previous decade, we were being assailed for our efforts to defend our people and exterminate terrorism. Showcasing the Israeli flag to an international audience was not the most convenient choice, but it rejuvenated our national spirit when we needed it most. When he flew, he demanded kosher food; he was sensitive to the fact that his flight wasn't personal, but was undertaken on behalf of an entire people. When he flew, he carried lists of Holocaust survivors because he understood that his flight was on behalf of Jewish history and its martyrs and heroes. Though not personally observant, he recited Kiddush on that flight, appreciating the import of this moment for our people and its Shabbat. Finally and perhaps most memorably, he flew with a sefer Torah, and for the first time since the Torah was delivered from heaven it was returned to heaven. Just as it was delivered in a fiery burst, so was it retrieved!

Ilan Ramon z"l represented everything Divine and essential about Secular Zionism. If it weren't for secular Zionism, it would not have been Ilan Ramon aboard the Discovery spaceship with a Kiddush cup, sefer Torah and Holocaust lists. It would have been a Jew, lost to history with a fading picture of an ancient Jewish grandmother upon his wall. But it was Ilan Ramon z"l aboard that spaceship, proudly brimming with Jewish identity, raising the flag of our homeland and the spirit of our people into space!!

The long night of exile has wearied many of our nation. The length of our journey, the endless persecutions and intermittent expulsions have all effaced the Judaism of so many. Many have arrived at the endpoint of Jewish history with their faith intact, mitzvah performance vibrant and Torah study unparalleled. Miraculously, just 70 years after Torah was attacked in Europe and its heroes massacred, there is more Torah being studied than at any point since the first Temple era! This reminds us of the indestructibility and infinity of our Torah and ultimately the supernatural status of our people. Our Torah is not part of this world, and though it may be temporarily impacted by history, it soars above the historical fray. Just as our Torah soars, so do our people, challenged but never defeated by history. Yet so many Jews cannot connect to our Torah and its eternal message. Sadly they aren't able to stand 'lifnei Hashem' in full identification with the entire dual message of our two mountains, Har Sinai and Har Hamoriah. Fortunately though, they still live deep Jewish lives, displaying selfless commitment to our homeland, giving their lives on our behalf, and standing shoulder to shoulder with us as we face a world unwilling to acknowledge the return of a Jew to History. Though they aren't ultimate *ovdei Hashem*, they *are* brothers and partners and are unwittingly driven by a Divine call. Secular Zionism is not some miscarriage of Jewish history. It is the evoking of an ancient Jewish passion, planted in the Jewish Heart by the Ribono Shel Olam and activated at the crucial endpoint in history to help gather and preserve millions for the final moments of our historical journey.

Geulah: The End of Jewish Fear

Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

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On January 16th 1948, not quite two months after the UN vote in favor of a Jewish state, but still almost four months from its eventual establishment, David Ben-Gurion rose to speak. Arab armies were preparing to destroy the as yet undeclared Jewish State. The Jews of Palestine prepared for what looked like an unwinnable military struggle. Ben-Gurion was addressing the Central Committee of MaPai, the most powerful political party and de facto leadership of the Jewish settlement. He spoke about war. He spoke about Jewish history. He spoke about the difficult road that lay ahead and the courage that it would require to succeed.

“War is the ultimate test not only of strength but of the will to live. We now stand, after two thousand years, before this ultimate test... Whoever exercises his will to live to its full extent will pass the test. Whoever’s will fails, will fail... If we have not yet fully dedicated ourselves - with all of our abilities - to the needs of the war, we must certainly do this immediately. If we act before it is too late, if the feelings of a nation that has fought - unlike any other - for its survival for two thousand years do not disappoint, if we do not recoil in fear from the great test as we have not recoiled in fear from many small tests, we will prevail.”

Forty-two years earlier, in 1906, Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook published a short collection of essays entitled “*Ikvei HaTzon*.” The third essay – only two pages long – is titled “*HaPachad*” (“The Fear”).

Rav Kook explains the destructive nature of fear:

“The sole source of all weakness and all material, ethical, and intellectual inaction is fear that overextends its boundary. It threatens the person, that he should not do anything for his own salvation, that he should not raise a finger to save himself lest he be harmed... It makes him weak until, out of laziness and inertia, he falls into all evil.”

Fear, Rav Kook explains, paralyzes us. It makes us feel that we are helpless and unable to change our situation for the better. One who is afraid sees neither potential nor hope. One who is afraid can not be free.

Rav Kook bemoans the fact that the Jewish people in the exile have become characterized by fear. The exile caused a nation that is meant to be girded with courage to become concerned only with the temporary hope of refuge from the dangers of the moment.

Fear does not only negatively affect our choices, it narrows our broader understanding of the world as well. *Gevurah*, the absence of fear, is actually a prerequisite for prophecy.

The shekhina rests only upon one who is wise, courageous, and wealthy.

Shabbat 92a

אין השכינה שורה אלא על חכם גבור ועשיר ובעל קומה.

מסכת שבת דף צב.

Either due to lack of insight or due to overwhelming temporal needs, one who lacks these traits is unable to see beyond the concerns of the moment. Such a person is not free to see a long-term picture filled with possibility. Prophecy, the resting of the *shekhina* on a navi, can not coexist with a perspective that is artificially limited by short sighted or temporary concerns.

Gevurah – courage - is by no means an ignorance of danger. On the contrary, one who is unaware of danger cannot possibly display courage. Whereas fear prevents us from actualizing our will due to the perceived dangers, courage is the refusal to allow danger to influence behavior. Courage – the opposite of fear – is taking action when fear, the natural reaction to danger, would prevent us from doing so.

Fear is the opposite of “*gevurah*.” With “*gevurah*” there is possibility, hope, and greatness.

What is true of the individual is true of the nation as a whole. For the *shekhina* to rest upon *Am Yisrael*, for us to realize our true national identity, we must become a nation that is a collective “*chacham, gibor, and ashir*.”

That *gevurah* is a prerequisite for the realization of our national goals is evident from the following two passages in the Torah.

After the *Akeidah*, - the paradigmatic moment of *gevurah* - when Avraham is blessed by God, the Torah states:

“God declares: I have sworn by My own Essence that because you performed this act and did not hold back your only son, I will bless you greatly and increase your offspring like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore, your offspring shall inherit the gate of their enemies, and all the nations of the world shall be blessed through your descendents since you have obeyed My voice.”

Bereshit 22:16-18

ויאמר בי נשבעתי נאם ה' כי יען אשר עשית את הדבר הזה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך: כי ברך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי השמים וכחול אשר על שפת הים וירש זרעך את שער איביו: והתברכו בזרעך כל גויי הארץ עקב אשר שמעת בקלי: בראשית פרק כב

The first clause, the promise of abundant offspring “like the stars of the sky” has previously been told to Avraham (*Bereshit* 15:5). Similarly, the universalistic vision - “all the nations of the world shall be blessed through your descendents” – is a blessing that Avraham received earlier as well. It is only the second clause, “*your offspring shall inherit the gate of their enemies*,” that is new. The conclusion is both inescapable and historically accurate. *Mesirut nefesh*, the willingness to give up our lives – and the lives of our children – is a prerequisite for the fulfillment of our national goals. If we are unwilling to fight, if we are afraid, we will not succeed in actualizing our identity as a nation.

At the end of the forty years in the desert God commands Moshe and Elazar HaKohen to conduct a census. This command immediately follows the command to attack Midian. The purpose of the census is made clear both by this context as well as the language of God's instruction.

Take a census of the whole community of Yisrael - those twenty years old or more – all who are able to serve in the army of Yisrael.

Bamidbar 26:2

שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל מבן
עשרים שנה ומעלה לבית אבתם כל יצא
צבא בישראל:
במדבר כו:ב

The purpose of the census is clear. Moshe and Elazar are to count the number of fighting men in Israel “*Kol yotzei tzava beYisrael.*”

In the verse that immediately follows its completion a second purpose of this census is revealed.

These are the numbers of the Bnei Yisrael: Six hundred and one thousand, seven hundred and thirty. And God spoke to Moshe saying, ‘To these shall the land be divided as an inheritance according to the number of their names.

Bamidbar 26:51-53

אלה פקודי בני ישראל שש מאות
אלף ואלף שבע מאות ושלושים:
וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר: לאלה
תחלק הארץ בנחלה במספר שמות:
במדבר כו:נא-נג

Moshe is commanded to divide up the land of Israel according to the numbers and names of this census. It seems that God is telling Moshe that this census is to serve an additional purpose, a proverbial killing of two birds with one stone. In addition to counting fighting men, the same census is to be used to divide the land of Israel.

If in fact the census served two purposes, why would God not mention this at the time of the command?

I'd like to suggest that the census, in fact, had only one purpose – the single purpose stated at the time of the command, to count fighting men. As for the question of the division of Eretz Yisrael, the answer is clear. “To **these** shall the Land be divided”. The question, “who are ‘**these**,’ to whom shall the Land be divided?” is answered by looking back at the purpose of the census “*Kol yotzei tzava beYisrael*”. Those who are counted among the fighters of Israel, merit the inheritance of the Land of Israel.

In our day as well, this message holds true. It is through the *mesirut nefesh* of all those who are willing to fight, who are not bound by fear, that we inherit the Land.

God could have given us an empty land for which we would not have to fight. In such a scenario, there would be no struggle, no sacrifice, and no *gevurah*. However, it is only through the *gevurah* of *Am Yisrael*, in our day, that we can begin to realize our true national goals in our Land. This *gevurah* is an essential prerequisite for *hashraat hashekhina*, culminating ultimately in the elevation and perfection of all nations – the true purpose of Jewish nationalism – as stated by God to Avraham after the Akeida: “your offspring shall inherit the gate of their enemies, and all the nations of the world shall be blessed through your descendents since you have obeyed My voice.”

May we embrace God's gift of Jewish strength for which we *daven* every morning. “*Baruch ata Hashem Elokeinu melech ha'olam, ozer Yisrael biGevurah*”.