

# The Redemption Process Has Begun<sup>57</sup>

Rabbi Dov Moshe Lipman

Faculty, Machon Maayan

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."*<sup>58</sup> The Ramban<sup>59</sup> 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

---

<sup>57</sup> 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.

<sup>58</sup> 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."

<sup>59</sup> 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 teaching<sup>60</sup> 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.*”<sup>61</sup>

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

---

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

<sup>61</sup> 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.*”<sup>62</sup>

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 them<sup>63</sup> 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

---

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

<sup>63</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.