

**Seven Decades of  
Torah Life in the  
State of Israel  
2008–2017**

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## **THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL: TO DREAM WITH EYES WIDE OPEN**

**T**here is a joke told in certain circles that the Chabad and Zionist movements should get together — because Chabad has a messiah but no *geulah*, and the Zionists have a *geulah* but no messiah. While the philosophies of both movements are more sophisticated than this joke implies, it highlights one of the most fundamental ideas in the Zionist world view — the existence of a modern-day redemption. A main theme of the religious Zionist view is that the current State of Israel is part of Hashem’s plan for the ultimate redemption. Whether it is the birth pangs or footsteps of the messiah, or the beginning of the *geulah*, our time is portrayed as one of redemption. But as evident from the aforementioned joke, the existence and parameters of this redemption are

highly contested. With the opportunity to discuss the modern era of 5768–5778, I aim to call for a contemporary collection of thoughts, a *cheshbon hanefesh*, of where we are as a state and as a nation in this redemption process.

One of the staples of the Pesach Seder is the drinking of four cups of wine. As the *Torah Temima* (Shemot 6:6) points out, the vast majority of commentators and codifiers of halacha explain that the four cups represent the four “*leshonot shel geulah*,” languages of redemption. The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Pesachim* 10:1), however, presents these four phrases not as languages of redemption, but as four distinct redemptions. *Geulat Mitzrayim*, the redemption from Egypt, is but a title given to four singular redemptions. The *Torah Temima* praises this formulation as appropriate

both within the words of the Torah and within the requirement to drink four separate cups of wine. After all, why celebrate one event four separate times? The *geulah* was thus four small-scale and individual redemptions and not one single salvation.

But why would the Torah categorize the redemption in four independent parts? Why would the standard understanding of one redemption not suffice? Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, the Dubner Maggid, explains that the redemption from Egypt was characterized as four separate salvations to teach us a lesson in complacency. The Jews were challenged to not view their redemption as over once the servitude was no longer hard, nor once they were free in Egypt, and not even when they left Egypt before receiving the Torah.

Each stage of redemption was merely an introduction to the next stage. The Jews were not to become complacent, they were not to feel already redeemed. Each Jew was not to be satisfied with any one step, but should instead investigate further, to see where there was more room for redemption, and to strive for that next step.

There is another lesson to be learned: appreciation. If the redemption had been talked about as one act, the Jews would not have respected the significance of their unique status in each step of the redemptive process. Their national understanding would remain unchanged from one stage to another, in expectation of a redemption not yet here. The easing of labor, relief from slavery, and Exodus from Egypt would remain unappreciated, overlooked, and taken for granted because the redemptions of receiving the Torah and entering the land were not yet realized. To overlook the gifts of G-d with expectations of greater ones is to relate to Him with ignorance and arrogance. Taken together, these two ideas form a call for an honest understanding of the redemptive process, one that is neither complacent nor ignorant, one that both sees future growth while still acknowledging a substantive past and present. Redemption is a process, and as is true in every process, there are many points of triumph along the way before the ultimate goal is attained. This idea is lost on many in contemporary society. On the one hand, there are those for whom the redemption has arrived in full. Those who read the Haftarah of *geulah* on Yom Ha'atzmaut, not out of wishful optimism or prayer, but as an accurate reflection of the state of current events. The words "and the wolf lies with the lamb" come off their lips with no sense of irony, as a

perception of reality, not as a plea for a bright future. The constant assaults in the U.N. over the past ten years, the recent growth in the BDS movement, and the constant threat of war remain happily overlooked or imagined away. These people live in a dream state; a state of arrogant comfort that is less philosophically warranted than it is naïve. They feel we have nothing left to work on, nothing left to earn. It is them the Torah addresses when it says that *geulah* is a long process, a process with which you should never feel complacent. There are more redemptions and more work to be done to merit them, and this work should not be dreamed away.

On the other hand lies those for whom the blessings of Eretz Yisrael, its strength and prosperity, don't even register to their senses. Those who would more easily say *baruch Hashem* on finding a five-dollar bill than on Eretz Yisrael being called Eretz Yisrael once again. These people forget that tradition always had a future in mind. All the bracha goes unobserved and unappreciated — trying to be noticed by the eyes and ears of those who are willfully asleep. They are like those who open a stocked refrigerator complaining that they have nothing to eat. Both of these camps deny an authentic evaluation of where we are as a nation. Both must remember that *geulah* comes in parts, and our current position in the process must both be appreciated and appraised.

We need to genuinely understand who we are as a people as well. We are wont to deem Israel as the ultimate *ohr lagoyim*, light onto the nations, in its current state; pointing to our democracy within a neighborhood of dictators, and our unprecedented advancements in technology in the

last decade. These claims blissfully dream away the corruption scandals that have rocked our government in the past decade and forget that some of those at the helm of high-tech in Tel Aviv care little to nothing of being an *ohr lagoyim*, let alone for the *mesorah* of Torah itself. But to only criticize is to miss the fact that we have a moral enough nation to follow the example given to us in Tanach to hold the corrupt accountable, no matter the office. To only condemn is to miss the fact that the Jews behind Israeli technology startups are making the world a better, more sophisticated place. Those that point fingers at kollel members for abstaining from military service should first recognize the magnificence of a country in which Torah learning is more widespread than ever before. While those who chastise the military for its secular factions must first admit that it is certainly a holy endeavor to protect the Holy Land. We must honestly admit that although our *ohr* may flicker, it most certainly shines as well.

In the end, we must try and emulate the prayer of King David in Tehillim 126, who prayed that when the Jews return Israel, "*hayinu kecholmim*," they will be *like* dreamers. We cannot be dreaming to the point where we lose all faculty of judgment, nor can we be asleep and remain blind to the unprecedented blessing and opportunity we have as a state. We must reflect on ourselves, not as critics or fanatics, but as willful participants looking to bring the redemption. We must be *like* dreamers in our feeling of euphoria and wonder, but pinch ourselves awake when we realize we are dreaming. A *geulah* has come but *The Geulah* has not, and we must be steadfast in making sure it does arrive while never ignoring that it is almost here.