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THE TORAH OF REDEMPTION

As the Jewish people grow and evolve throughout history, the Torah follows a similar pattern. Just as new attributes of our national character are realized and developed over time, so too Torah study grows, and new facets of Torah are revealed with each day. And so, alongside the dramatic changes that our people undergo as we return to our homeland, the Torah, too, is evolving with us. The flowering of the Torah in the time of redemption is termed “*Toras hageula*,” and it has a unique character that is directly tied to the times during which it is being revealed. In the upcoming essay, we will both attempt to define *Toras hageulah* as well as understand some of its impact on klal Yisrael.

Toras hageulah can be described with three main pillars, and though they all flow from the same source, it helps to

divide them up. The first pillar is the increased focus on the hidden side of Torah, known as *penimiyus Hatorah*. The main feature of *penimiyus Hatorah* is its fixation on Hashem’s presence. Instead of speaking about the halacha itself for example, it focuses on Hashem’s divine wisdom that went into commanding the law. Whereas the halachic side of Torah may focus on practical behaviors in the workplace, *penimiyus Hatorah* focuses on looking deeper and seeing Hashem in every business deal. In the past, such study was limited to only a few unique people, but the soil of Eretz Yisrael is rich with the right nutrients to foster its spread to the masses. The Land of Israel is the land of prophecy, the land of interaction with Hashem, and that is what makes it spiritually ripe for Torah study that is entirely focused on seeing and interacting with Him.¹

Rav Kook explains:

מתי הוא טוב ללמוד סתרי תורה, כשהתשוקה הפנימית של קרבת ד' היא חזקה, מתעלה ומתגברת, עד שלא תתן מנוח לנפש, ואינה משביעה את חפצה בשום תכן רוחני וקדוש שבעולם, כי אם עם ההגיון הפנימי המדבר ברזי עולם.

*When is it good to learn the secrets of the Torah? When the inner desire for closeness to Hashem is strong, ascending and increasing until it does not give rest to the soul and does not satiate its desire except through the most spiritual and holiest content in the world, except through the inner logic that speaks of the secrets of the world.*²

Oros Hatorah 10:1

The return to the land of prophecy has sparked this desire in our people to be close to Hashem,³ and thus not only is the soil ripe for *penimiyus Hatorah*, the people, too, are primed to engage in it in a real and broad way.⁴ [The

unity of the people is also a major theme in *penimiyus Hatorah*, and klal Yisrael is seen as one body, with each individual acting as a unique cell with a unique purpose. In this way, *klal Yisrael* acts as single chariot for materializing Hashem's presence in this world.]

The second pillar of *Toras hageulah* flows directly from the first, and that is the expansiveness of the Torah. *Toras hageulah* is not limited to any sphere, and in fact covers all bases of life. Whereas in the past, the enemy of the Jewish people may have been the Greeks, and their evil activities included influencing the Jewish people to be involved in sports, art and music (the Yefes of the universe), in the days of *geulah*, those activities play a big part in *avodas Hashem*. Exile has forced our people to put up walls from the beauty of the material world and separate from it in the safety of *batei medrash* and shuls, but on the soil of Eretz Yisrael, the mundane can be holy and need not be shunned. Art, music and athletics all have a place in the Torah, and there can be healthy engagement in the holiest of contexts without fear of being dirtied by ulterior un-Jewish motives. Hashem is everywhere and is the life force of everything, and therefore He can be accessed in all corners of existence. In fact, this was an ideal since the earliest days of mankind when the Torah tells us:

יִפֹּת אֲלֵהִים לְיִפֹּת וְיִשְׁכֵּן בְּאֶהְלֵי שֵׁם...
May Hashem grant beauty to Yefes, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem.
Bereishis 9:27

This means that the kingdom of Yefes, the glory of Greece, will one day find its place in the tents of Shem, the ancestor of the Jewish people. Due to the spreading of awareness of Hashem

in all places, Hashem can be accessed and appreciated in what was once off limits because it was deemed unholy.

The third pillar is the expansion of *avoda shebilev*, the service of the heart. Tefila has extended beyond the borders of the synagogue and has become a mode of existence. Tefila does not occur only in three specific meetings of the day, but rather is a yearning for connection with Hashem that is constant. As Rav Dov Singer terms man the "*homo mispalelus*" (*Tikon Tefilati*, intro), we are naturally pray-ers and tefila is our frame of life. Thus tefila has grown to more of

The return to the Land of Israel provides an opportunity to heal pain that we have experienced throughout the exilic distance.

a natural state of *dveykus*, no matter what activity is going on.

This also includes a deepening of the Torah's view on the human experience, which encapsulates both the emotional and psychological realms of ideas and activities. The Jewish heart is developing and our relationship with Hashem is deepening. The return to the Land of Israel means a return to the place where Hashem's presence is most potent, and it provides an opportunity to heal pain that we have experienced

throughout the exilic distance. *Toras hageulah* speaks to the Jewish heart and enhances that relationship with Hashem.

The evolution of Torah study in the times of redemption is just getting off the ground. Already, its impact has dramatically affected the experience of Jews in the Land of Israel and it is beginning to spread its influence in the Diaspora. The outcome of these developments include greater connection to Hashem, greater connection to each other, and a tangible march toward the days of prophecy. *Toras hageulah* is deep and exhilarating, and is worth engaging with on a deeper level no matter where it is studied. The more *Toras hageulah* spreads to the Diaspora, the more those in the Diaspora will realize the importance of returning home — the place where these ideas are most relevant and most potent — and the more unified our people will be.

Endnotes

1. This is not a coincidental phenomenon. Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai wrote in the Zohar, *Ra'aya Mehemna*, Naso 124b, the foundational text of *penimiyus Hatorah*, that the study of his sefer will bring the Jewish people out of exile.
2. Translation by R' Yosef Bronstein *shlita*.
3. This thirst is a direct fulfillment of a prophecy in Amos:

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם ה' א-לֵקִים וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי רָעֵב בְּאֶרֶץ
לֹא רָעֵב לֶלֶחֶם וְלֹא צָמָא לַמַּיִם כִּי אִם לְשִׁמְעַת אֶת דְּבָרֵי
ה'.

A time is coming — declares my Lord Hashem — when I will send a famine upon the land: not a hunger for bread or a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of Hashem. (Amos 8:11)

4. See "*Ma'amar Hador*" from Rav Kook for his understanding that the core of the nation — both observant and not yet observant Jews — have this same yearning for *penimiyus Hatorah*.

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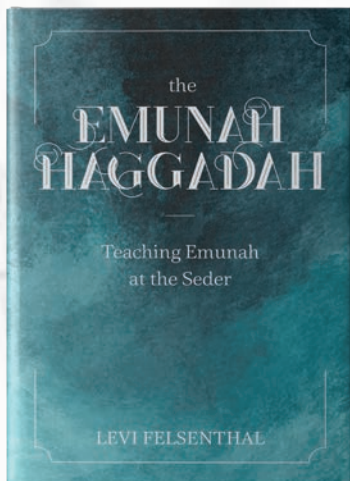
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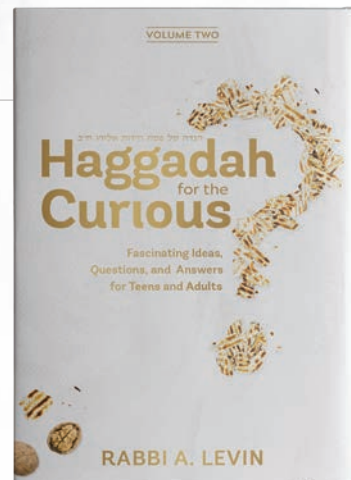
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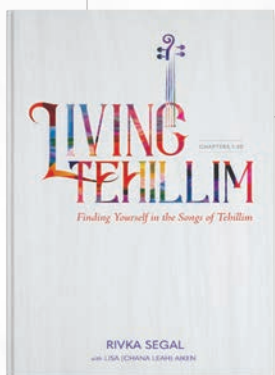
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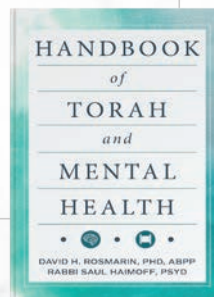
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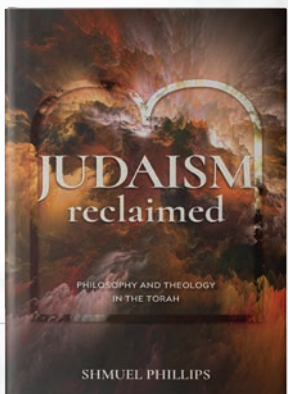
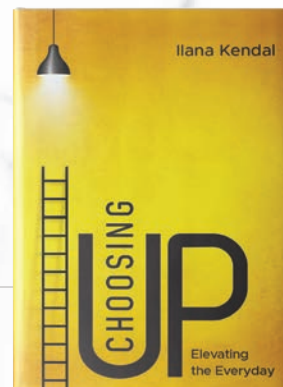
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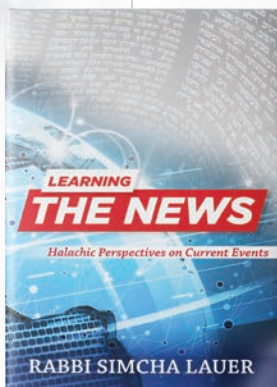
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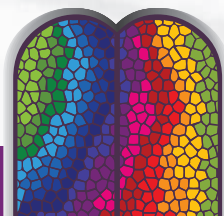
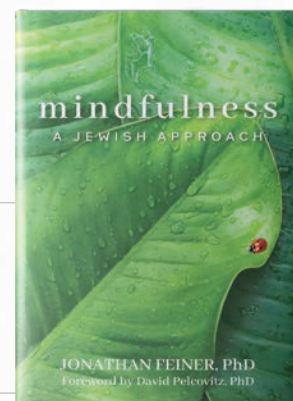


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Chaim Goldberg finished his semikha this year in the RIETS Israel Kollel and is currently a graduate student in child clinical psychology at Hebrew University.



WILL DEMOGRAPHICS CHANGE HALACHA?

Between 2007 and 2018, the percentage of world Jewry located in Israel rose from 41% to 45%.¹ With demographic trends indicating that by 2029 (perhaps much sooner)² a majority of Jews will be living in Israel, some may question whether the obligation to tithe one's produce—to separate *terumot* and *ma'asrot*—will soon change from its current status as a Rabbinic obligation to a Biblical obligation.

The background necessary to understand this question consists primarily of two concepts. The first is whether the land

of Israel retains a level of holiness today that triggers a Biblical obligation of tithing. The Talmud³ records that Joshua sanctified the land, giving all agricultural commandments (*mitzvot teluyot b'aretz*) the status of a Biblical obligation. There is a debate whether this Biblical status was eternal or not. Most opinions hold it was nullified with the destruction of the First Temple, but that Ezra renewed the sanctification upon the return of the exiled Jews to rebuild the Second Temple.⁴ The Talmud further debates whether Ezra's sanctification was eternal or whether it, too, was nullified with the

destruction of the Second Temple. For our purposes, to reduce a complicated Talmudic debate, those who hold the holiness of the land remains in force until this day hold that tithing remains a Biblical obligation even today,⁵ while those who hold that the land's holiness was nullified regard the obligation as Rabbinic.⁶ Maimonides, however, whose opinion we will focus on since it was later codified by the Shulchan Aruch, paves the way for a third approach⁷. He sides with the view that Ezra's sanctification remains, yet rules that tithing is Rabbinic due to the lack of “ביאת כולכם”—a phrase

1 Sergio DellaPergola. “World Jewish Population, 2018,” in Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin. (Editors) The American Jewish Year Book, 2018, Volume 118 (2018) (Dordrecht: Springer) pp. 361–452.

2 As the study cited did not use a strictly halachic definition concerning who is a Jew, there is ample reason to believe that this benchmark will be reached in the next year or two, as there are likely more non-halachic Jews in the Diaspora reported as Jews in this survey than there are in Israel.

3 Shevuot 16a

4 Rambam H. Beit HaBechira 6:16, Ra'avad H. Terumot 3:13, Tur/Shulchan Aruch 331:1

5 Tosafot Yevamot 82b, Ra'avad H. Terumot 1:26

6 Rashi and Meiri Sanhedrin 26a

7 H. Terumot 1:26

representing the second concept, to which we now turn.

Regarding the commandment of separating *challa*, the Torah states "בבאכם אל הארץ" "When you (*plural*) come to the Land." The Talmud⁸ expounds, —"בבאכם" —"בביאת כולכם אמרתי ולא בביאת מקצתכם"—"all of you, not some of you," that is, *challa* only applies on a Biblical level when *all* Jews come to Israel. Therefore, all would agree—even if one holds that Ezra's sanctification was eternal—that separating *challa* is of a Rabbinical nature so long as not all Jews are living in Israel. Maimonides' ruling is innovative because he extends this condition from *challa* to tithing *terumot uma'asrot*. Therefore, despite ruling that Ezra's sanctification remains until this day, he maintains the obligation of tithing is not Biblical since this second condition of all Jews being in Israel remains unfulfilled. He emphasizes that even in the Second Temple era the obligation was rabbinic, since not all Jews returned with Ezra.

Given our understanding of Maimonides, presumably this *halacha* will not change until all Jews are in Israel. However, there is a debate on how to understand the requirement of "ביאת כולכם"—does it require *all* Jews to be in the land of Israel? Or does it simply require a majority? The *Sefer HaChinuch*⁹ and the *Ritva*¹⁰ hold that only a majority is required and the *Chazon Ish* implies this as well¹¹. On this basis, one can suggest that when a majority of Jews are in Israel the nature of the obligation will in fact turn Biblical. Nonetheless, this appears to be the minority opinion and, importantly, it is not clear whether Maimonides and *Shulchan Aruch* would themselves subscribe to that understanding.

Moreover, even if we accept the opinion

that only a majority is required, the matter remains unresolved. There remains a question that emerges from Maimonides' opinion which demands explanation. Namely, if he holds Ezra's sanctification was eternal and the land of Israel has an elevated level of holiness to this day, why is "ביאת כולכם" necessary? How does all (or most) Jews being in Israel change anything? R' Chaim Soloveitchik understands that this requirement signifies a fundamental difference in the land's holiness¹². Yes, it was sanctified by Ezra and constantly maintains a state of holiness; nonetheless, it does not achieve its ultimate level of holiness

The what gives the land of Israel its ultimate holiness is the Jewish people's physical presence in the land.

until the Jews are in the land itself. Some commandments require this ultimate level of holiness and *terumot uma'asrot* is one of them. *Torat Ha'Aretz*¹³ builds on this understanding of Maimonides, suggesting that since this level of holiness was lacking in Ezra's time as well, Ezra's sanctification did not take hold with regards to *terumot uma'asrot*. Thus, in order for *terumot uma'asrot* to regain a Biblical status once again, there would need to be what Maimonides calls

"קדושה שלישית" "The third sanctification." Regardless of how many Jews live in Israel, this is something which will only take place with the coming of *Mashiach*.¹⁴

To end on a philosophical note, what R' Chaim's understanding means, in essence, is that what gives the land of Israel its ultimate holiness is the Jewish people's physical presence in the land. Thus, while there are a number of valid reasons why any given individual may not be able to make *aliyah* at the present time, the thought that "I'll go when *Mashiach* comes, once the Temple is rebuilt and all the holiness is restored" ought not be part of one's thought process. Rather, we should feel empowered by the thought that the *aliyah* of every Jew brings the land one step closer to its ultimate level of holiness. May we merit to see Jewish communities in Israel continue to flourish and to see the day when *terumot uma'asrot* become a Biblical obligation once again!

8 Ketubot 25b

9 Mitzva 385

10 Ketubot 25b

11 Shevi'it 21:5

12 H. Shemitta v' Yovel 12:16

13 Vol. 2, 3a-3b. See there for further discussion and additional proofs.

14In a personal communication, R. Reichenberg, S'gan Rosh Beit Hamidrash Emunat Ish (a Kollel exclusively dedicated to learning and research regarding mitzvot teluyot b'aretz) mentioned that he views this opinion as legitimate consideration vis-à-vis the question of what the psak (ruling) would be should we reach the benchmark of a majority of Jews in Israel.



CONTEMPORARY KORBANOS: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Imagine it is right after Purim. The pile of *mishloach manos* has begun to shrink to a manageable size, the costumes have returned to the box in the basement, and you start to come to grips with the fact that Pesach cleaning is on the horizon. Then, someone posts in your neighborhood WhatsApp group: “Looking for a family of 4-6 to join our KP. Anyone interested?” You read it again; are they really looking for someone to join their korban Pesach? Was the Beis HaMikdash rebuilt, and you just somehow missed it? You reply privately to your neighbor, and she explains that this year, they’re planning on bringing a korban Pesach even though the Beis HaMikdash hasn’t been rebuilt yet. You send a question in to your “Shailos U’Teshuvos” group chat, asking if that’s at all allowed. And the answer, surprisingly, isn’t as clear as you might expect.

Kedushas Har HaBayis

Does Har HaBayis (The Temple Mount) retain its *kedusha* even after the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed? The Gemara in *Megilla* (9b-10a) compares the period of the Mishkan at Shilo and the Mikdash in Yerushalayim. One difference, it writes, is that there was a period of *heter bamos*, personal altars, that were allowed after the destruction of Mishkan Shilo. However, after King Shlomo built the Mikdash in Yerushalayim, that was the end of the “*Bamos era*”; personal altars were no longer allowed. What is the law after the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed? The Gemara quotes a dispute about the status of Har HaBayis after the *churban*: one opinion holds that it retains its *kedusha*, while the other holds that the *kedusha* left when the building was burned. Tosfos holds,

though, that everyone agrees *bamos* are no longer an option. Our only chance at offering korbanos nowadays would be on Har HaBayis, and only according to the opinion that Har Habayis retains its *kedusha*.

Which opinion do we follow? The Rambam (*Beis HaBechira* 6:14-16) holds that it does retain *kedusha*. He explains that the *kedusha* of Yerushalayim and Har HaBayis comes from the presence of the Shechina, which descended when King Shlomo built the first Beis HaMikdash. Nothing, not even total destruction, can remove the presence of the Shechina; Har HaBayis remains holy. R’ Ishtori HaParchi, author of the *Kaftor VaFerach*, brings a number of other sources that also indicate that Har HaBayis still has *kedusha*, even though the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed (Chapter 6). Therefore, we can bring korbanos even without the

Beis HaMikdash being rebuilt.

The Raavad stridently disagrees. He brings a number of sources indicating that Yerushalayim and Har HaBayis no longer have *kedusha*. In fact, he suggests that this was by design: when Ezra returned to Israel and rebuilt the Beis HaMikdash, he knew that the third Mikdash would be drastically different, as described at the end of Sefer Yechezkel. Therefore, he only planned on infusing temporary *kedusha*.

Korbanos Without a Beis HaMikdash

Assuming Har HaBayis retains *kedusha*, are we allowed to bring *korbanos* without a Beis HaMikdash?

While the Gemara seems to say that if there is *kedusha*, a Beis HaMikdash is not necessary to offer *korbanos* (*makravin af al pi she'ain bayis*), the Chofetz Chaim, *Likutei Halachos*, *Zevachim* 66b, raised a technical issue. One of the requirements for most *korbanos* is that they need to be brought *lifnei pesach Ohel Moed* — at the entrance to the Ohel Moed, a phrase that shows up a number of times in the *pesukim*. Even if Har HaBayis retains its *kedusha*, is the lack of a *pesach Ohel Moed* a problem? Rav Moshe Shternbuch (*Moadim U'Zemanim* 4:351) suggests several answers. For example, that may only apply as long as the structure exists. While we have a Beis HaMikdash, *korbanos* need to be brought at the entrance of the Beis HaMikdash, as opposed to anywhere else. However, once the structure has been destroyed, that requirement is no longer relevant.

Placement of the Altar

Do we need to build our Mizbei'ach in the exact same place as the original

Altar for the service to be valid? The Gemara in *Zevachim* 62a, records that Chagai, Zecharia, and Malachi returned with the Jews from exile in Bavel. One testified as to the proper placement of the Mizbei'ach, another testified as to its measurements, and the third testified that *korbanos* can be brought even before the Beis HaMikdash was rebuilt. This implies that there was a need to identify exactly where the Mizbei'ach was meant to stand; it wouldn't have sufficed to guess or choose a new place for bringing *korbanos*. What could we do now that we don't have a prophet showing us the proper place and measurements for the Mizbei'ach?

While we could try to measure using descriptions found in various sources, another problem becomes immediately clear: we don't know how long an *amah* is! How can we use measurements to determine the location of the Mizbei'ach? Furthermore, the Mizbei'ach is supposed to 32 X 32 X 10 *amos*. If we don't know the exact measurement of an *amah*, how can we build the Mizbei'ach? Fortunately, the Rambam in the same perek (halacha 17) provides a solution. The Rambam writes that the exact size of the Mizbei'ach is not critical. In fact, it can be as small as 1 X 1 X 3! As long as we can figure out the approximate area where the Altar used to stand, we can build a tiny replica anywhere in that original square and the Mizbei'ach will be valid.

Inauguration in a State of Purity

Even if we manage to build a Mizbei'ach, we have another problem. Every vessel in the Beis HaMikdash needs to be initiated before use. When it comes to *using* the vessel, *tuma*

(ritual impurity) is not a problem; when most of the nation is *tamei*, we can ignore the problems that *tuma* causes for offering *korbanos*. However, many (including the *Chasam Sofer*, *Shu't Yoreh Deah* 236) suggest that the *chinuch*, the initiation of a new vessel, requires complete holiness. Is that attainable to initiate our Mizbei'ach? Everyone is assumed to be *tamei meis* nowadays, and we don't have ashes of a *parah aduma* to purify ourselves. Rav Shternbuch suggests that this may not be an issue. According to the opinion that the original *kedusha* of Har HaBayis is everlasting, that means that the *chinuch* of the first Mizbei'ach is still extant. Even though that original structure is no longer standing, a new Mizbei'ach would be considered a "*tikkun*," a rebuilding or fixing, rather than a new vessel, obviating the need for initiation with complete purity.

Let us assume that we can resolve these issues: Har HaBayis still has *kedusha*, there's no need for *pesach Ohel Moed*, and we can at least approximate the place of the Mizbei'ach. Who will perform the service? We need two things: 1) a Kohen, who is 2) *tahor* from all different strains of *tuma*. Do we have either of these?

Status of the Kohanim

While we have many Kohanim, it's not clear how confident we are in their *yichus* (lineage). A Kohen is entitled to *teruma* from produce grown in Israel, charged with *nesias kapayim* and delivering *Birkas Kohanim* (*duchening*), and instructed to carry out the service in the Beis HaMikdash. Of those, serving in the Mikdash carries the most severe punishment if done improperly. Chazal were willing to settle on lower standards

for *teruma d'rabanan* (*terumah* that is only rabbinic in nature) and Birkas Kohanim. Anyone who has a *chazaka* that he is a Kohen — born to a father who was a Kohen — can eat *teruma d'rabanan* and do Birkas Kohanim. However, they insisted that only verified Kohanim serve in the Mikdash. A Kohen needs more than just *chazaka* to serve; he needs to prove his lineage. The Rambam (*Isurei Biah* 20:1-2) writes that he needs two witnesses who can verify that his lineage goes back to a Kohen who actually served on the Mizbei'ach. No one has such a strong *yichus* nowadays; this would seem to be a major problem. However, *Chasam Sofer* argues that the issue is not as overwhelming as we might have thought. The only concern of a Kohen without *yichus* is that at some point, someone in the family married a *chalalah*, a woman who isn't allowed to marry a Kohen. Her children no longer have the status of Kohanim. However, the Gemara, *Kiddushin* 66b, says that the service of *chalal* (the son of a *chalalah*) who serves and then finds out that he is a *chalal* is still valid after the fact. Rav Shternbuch dismisses this rationalization, pointing out that being a *chalal* is not the only concern. The fourth perek of *Kiddushin* relates that the family of the Chashmonaim lost their *yichus* when women from that family had relations with non-Jewish servants. Those children are not simply *chalalim* — they have no connection to the Kehuna! The lack of verified Kohanim is a significant problem.

Dealing with Impurity

Tuma is less of a problem. The only *tuma* we can't fix nowadays is *tumas meis*, *tuma* incurred from contact with or proximity to a dead body. That requires ashes from a *parah aduma*,

which we don't have. Other forms of *tuma* need only immersion in a mikveh or flowing spring.

Of course, *avoda* can't be done in a context of *tuma*. However, when most of the *tzibbur* is *tamei*, *tuma* is temporarily ignored (*tuma dechuya b'tzibur*). This leniency applies only to *tumas meis*. Therefore, the *tuma* issue can be avoided: the Kohen would immerse in a flowing spring.

Bigdei Kehuna

Assuming we have a Kohen who is able to serve, he also needs to be wearing the uniform. Every regular Kohen had to wear four special pieces of white linen clothing while he was serving in the Mikdash: pants, a tunic, a hat or turban, and a belt or sash (Rambam, *Klei HaMikdash* 8:1). Without this uniform, a Kohen is like a non-Kohen and is not allowed to do the *avoda*. Unfortunately, we have many questions about how to make these special clothing; for example, we don't even know what the regular Kohen's headwear is meant to look like (See Tosfos, *Sukka* 5a-b and Rambam/Raavad *Klei HaMikdash* 8:2). There is also a *sha'atnez* issue to deal with: the belt was interwoven with wool and linen. As long as the clothing is made properly, we can apply the rule of *asei doche lo saasei* — a positive commandment can override a negative commandment. However, if anything was made improperly, the mitzva is not fulfilled by wearing the priestly garments, in which case there is no permissibility to wear the *sha'atnez*.

Need for Public Funds

Every aspect of the Beis HaMikdash needs to come from public funds

(Rambam *Klei HaMikdash* 8:7). When we had the Beis HaMikdash, every member of the nation donated a half shekel each year. This money was used for korbanos of the nation, as well as for the clothing of the Kohanim and upkeep of the vessels. There is only one korban that is an exception to this rule: the korban Pesach. (While each family or group pays for their own korban, it is still treated as a public offering, and is still subject to the leniency of *tuma dechuya b'tzibur*.) The Rambam (*ibid*) suggests a workaround that will solve the problem for other korbanos: an individual can donate something to the Mikdash on behalf of the *tzibbur*. As long as he really has in mind to give the donation on behalf of the entire nation, it would be considered public funds and usable.

Conclusion

This only scratches the surface of the issues to be dealt with. There are more that we didn't even mention, and each one we did mention could be significantly expanded. Even if we solved all the halachic issues, there are obvious practical impediments to building a Mizbei'ach and offering korbanos on the Har HaBayis. Nevertheless, learning the sources and working through each potential issue gives practical expression to our desire for the Beis HaMikdash to be rebuilt. Across the generations, different personalities have tried to find ways to bring back the service of korbanos. We look forward to the opportunity to present ourselves to Hashem and dedicate everything we have to His service, and to bring that Mikdash-infused perspective back into our everyday lives (see Rav SR Hirsch's commentary on the beginning of Sefer Vayikra).



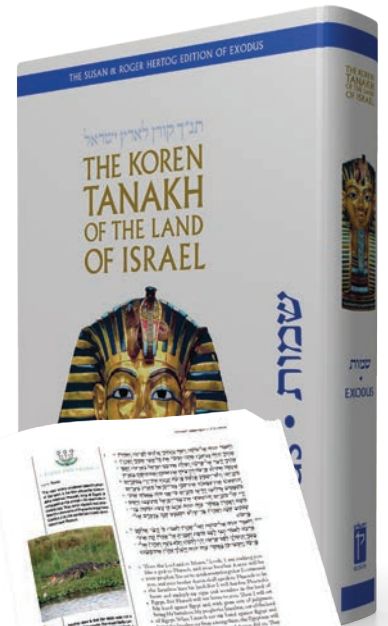
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STORIES OF RETURN

In July 2014, during Operation Protective Edge, Max Steinberg, an American-born IDF lone soldier, was killed in Gaza. He, like many others, was inspired by a Birthright trip to make aliyah and join Israel's army. The night before his funeral, however, a disturbing article was published. Allison Benedikt, the current executive editor of *Slate*, wrote an article on the online magazine partly blaming Birthright for his death. Needless to say, the brash statement crossed many lines. But one of her questions remains valid: "What makes an American kid with shaky Hebrew and no ties to the state of Israel suddenly decide he is ready to make this sacrifice?"¹ And Max is not alone; hundreds, even thousands like him have made the courageous move

to leave their homes and families behind to support their Jewish state. But how exactly do we explain this phenomenon?

In his commentary to *Pirkei Avos*, R' Chaim of Volozhin, the foremost student of the Vilna Gaon, provides us with an answer. The Mishnah in *Avos* (5:3) praises Avraham for withstanding the ten trials posed to him. But whereas the preceding mishnah refers to him simply as Avraham, our mishnah refers to him as Avraham Avinu, Avraham our forefather. Noting the subtle lingual difference, R' Chaim remarks:

כי כמה מדות שהצדיק טרח ויגע להשיגם,
לבניו אחריו המה כטבע מוטבע ובקצת יגיעה
יגיעו לזה כמו שנראה בחוש שרבים מעמי
ארץ מהיהודים מוסרים את עצמם על קידוש

השם והוא מוטבע בנו מאבינו אברהם ... וכן
ההתעוררות לאדם פתאום לילך לארץ הקודש
הוא מנסיון לך לך.

There are many great levels that a tzaddik works and toils to achieve, to whose descendants after him they are naturally inborn. And with only a little effort, he (the descendant) will reach [this high level], as we see with our own senses that many simple Jews give their lives for the sanctification of God's name. And this is our nature from Avraham our forefather... And so too the sudden inspiration to travel to Eretz Yisrael, this is from the test of "lech lecha."

Every *nisayon*, every trial that Avraham Avinu withstood, was not merely a personal spiritual achievement by the individual Avraham; it was an experience and essential quality that Avraham Avinu,

the father of a nation, would bequeath to all of his descendants. The spiritual and mental courage that Avraham (then Avram) displayed in response to the call of “*lech lecha*” would be built into the fabric of the Jewish soul for all time.

We can understand this idea further based on a comment by Rabbeinu Nissim (the Ran), the great Spanish Talmudist. In his philosophical work, *Derashos HaRan* (8th *derasha*), the Ran notes:

שהענין כאשר קבל צורה אחת, גם כי תסתלק הצורה ההיא מן הדבר ההוא, שיקבל הדבר ההוא הצורה ההיא שנית יותר בקלות במעט פעולה.

*When something once acquired a certain form, even if the form subsequently departed from it, it will be easier for that thing to acquire that form once again.*²

Once Avraham Avinu made the sacrifice and carried out the charge of “*lech lecha*,” it subsequently became easier for every Jew after him to follow suit.

And so it was throughout Jewish history that Jews around the world left everything behind and responded to this inner calling with an almost absurd passion. Absurd in the sense that it was not because of greater financial opportunity or stronger familial ties — historically, it was usually the opposite — but by an inner yearning ingrained in our spiritual DNA from the time of Avraham Avinu.

Although, as the Rambam tells us in his *Sefer Hamitzvos* (Positive Commandment, 153), the Jews will always maintain *some* presence in our homeland, this did not preclude the historical reality that after the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash (70 CE) most Jews were living in the Diaspora. Be that as it may, the call of “*lech lecha*” never left the Jewish consciousness. And so there were always those great individuals, those courageous sons of Avraham Avinu, who left behind “their land, their birthplace and their father’s house” headed for “the land that I will show you.”

One of the first “stories of return” we have on record of belongs to R’ Achai Gaon, the author of the halachic-aggadic work the *Sheiltot*, one of the first post-Talmudic works published. In around the year 750 C.E. he left Babylonia, the center of Jewish learning at the time, and settled in Israel, where he remained until his last day.³

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Most famous, however, was the aliyah of the Ramban. The great Talmudic scholar and Kabbalist famously disagreed with the Rambam (Mitzvos omitted by the Rambam, positive, no. 4) and argued forcefully that living in Eretz Yisrael is one of the 613 mitzvos. Moreover, this one mitzvah is equal to all the mitzvos in the Torah and one about which Chazal expanded greatly. The Ramban, however, didn't just talk the talk; he, quite literally, walked the walk. In the year 1267, at the age of 72(!) the Ramban left his family and the world he knew behind, set out for the land of Israel, and on the 9th of Elul arrived home at last in the port of Acco. Shortly thereafter, he traveled to Jerusalem where he found poverty, ruins, and hardly any Jews at all. Though he found destruction, he saw hope:

ומה אגיד לכם בענין הארץ כי רבה העזובה וגדל השממון וכללו של דבר כל המקודש מחבירו חרב יותר מחבירו ירושלים יותר הרבה מן הכל ... ועם כל חרבנה היא טובה מאד.

What can I tell you about the land, greatly forsaken and significantly desolate? But the principal of the matter is: the more sacred, the greater the destruction. And Jerusalem is more destroyed than all... but despite its destruction, it is very good.

Kitvei Ramban, Vol. 1, pg. 368

He turned a dilapidated old house into the city shul, taught Torah, composed his classic commentary on Chumash and helped rebuild and restore a Jewish community in the Jewish city. And ever since, Jerusalem has been home to a community of Jews.

Skip forward about 200 years. In 1488, R' Ovadiah of Bartanura, the author of the famous commentary on the Mishnah, set out for Jerusalem

and quickly became the spiritual leader of a community in need. The famed Kabbalist, R' Yeshaya HaLevi Horowitz (the Shelah), left the post of Chief Rabbi of Prague and moved to Israel in 1621. Some seventy years later, R' Yehuda Hachassid (not to be confused with the medieval scholar) took with him a small following and settled in Jerusalem at the turn of the 18th century. The Ohr Hachaim too followed suit in 1740, settling in the Holy Land. And in 1789, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, almost impulsively, set out for the Holy Land. Although he remained there for six months, upon walking *daled amot* on the holy ground, he remarked that he could return. And there were many, many more who risked everything to return home.

One aliyah trip, however, taken by an unparalleled scholar, was especially mysterious:

הנה אנשים נוסעים על כמה שנים בשביל ממון מניחים נשותיהם ... ואני תודה לא-ל

נוסע לארץ הקדושה שהכל מצפים לראותה
חמדת כל ישראל.

It is common for men to leave their wives for years traveling for business... But I, thank God, am traveling to the Holy Land, about which everyone longs to see, our people's most Beloved
Iggeres HaGra, Alim L'terufah

It is unclear what year exactly the Vilna Gaon set out for Eretz Yisrael, but it is clear that he never made it. For reasons unknown to us, he turned back in the middle. When pressed by his sons as to his motives for returning, his response was: "Heaven did not grant me permission" (Introduction to *Biur HaGra; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*). Though the Vilna Gaon himself did not complete the journey, his students did for him. In 1808 a close disciple of the Vilna Gaon, R' Menachem Mendel of Shklov, headed for Eretz Yisrael only to begin what would later be known as the aliyah of the Perushim, the community founded by



students of the Vilna Gaon. Soon after, R' Yisrael of Shklov, another close student of the Vilna Gaon's, followed. In 1816, R' Menachem Mendel moved to Jerusalem and established the Ashkenazi community of Jerusalem. The "Shklovs," along with fellow students of the Gra and their families, were responsible for setting in motion a revival of the Holy Land. Their impact is felt to this very day.

Any student of the Talmud knows that when encountering a halacha two questions must be asked: What is the *makor*, the source for the law, and what is the *sevara*, the logical reasoning behind the law? If R' Chaim of Volozhin has provided us with the *makor* for the "aliyah phenomenon," it is the Maharal who provides us with the *sevara*. In the first chapter of his philosophical work, *Netzach Yisrael*, he writes the following:

... וזה כי אין ספק כי הגלות הוא שינוי ויציאה מן הסדר, שהשם יתברך סדר כל אומה במקומה הראוי לה, וסדר את ישראל במקום הראוי להם, שהוא ארץ ישראל. והגלות מן מקומם הוא שינוי ויציאה לגמרי. וכל הדברים כאשר הם יוצאים ממקום הטבעי, והם חוץ למקומם, אין להם עמידה במקום הבלתי טבעי להם, רק הם חוזרים למקומם הטבעי... שאין עומד בתמידות רק הדברים הטבעיים...

It is clear that exile is a divergence from the natural order. For God, Blessed be He delineated each nation in its proper place and the Jewish people in their proper place, namely, Eretz Yisrael. And exile from their place is a total divergence. And all things that are moved from their natural place cannot persist in a place that is unnatural for them; rather they must return to their natural place... Only things that are natural persist... "

When a Jew speaks of "return" he can refer to either the return to his Creator (*teshuvah*) or the return to his Land. As the *Sefer Chareidim* (chapter 59) writes, "Just as Hashem chose the Jewish people, so did He choose Eretz Yisrael." The natural state for a Jew is in the Presence of God and the natural place for a Jew is in the land of God. A lacking of either is unnatural and, says the Maharal, bound to end. Hence the Rambam writes in his *Hilchos Teshuva* (7:5):

וכבר הבטיחה תורה שסוף ישראל לעשות תשובה בסוף גלותו ומיד הן נגאלין.
The Torah already promised that ultimately, Israel will repent at the end of her exile and, immediately, she will be redeemed.

Whether it is a return to his Creator or

to his homeland, the Jew will return, almost compulsively, as if steered by an inner, constant voice, whispering "lech lecha, go, go to yourself, to your Creator, to your homeland." So when we hear of a seemingly unaffiliated Jew suddenly seek out his Creator or abruptly decide to give his life for his people and we are asked, "What makes an American kid with shaky Hebrew and no ties to the state of Israel suddenly decide he is ready to make this sacrifice?," we know very well. Because it comes naturally.

Endnotes

1. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2014/07/max-steinberg-death-how-birthright-convinces-american-jews-to-embrace-israel.html>.
2. Translation from Sefaria.org.
3. See R' Zechariah Fendel's Legacy of Sinai pg. 248.

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GISHMEI BRACHA

Umbrellas and raincoats have been a necessity for those fortunate to have spent this year in the Holy Land. Over the winter, Israel was blessed with the most rainfall in over 50 years! The seasons are now transitioning from *choref* to *aviv*, from winter to spring. And while the contrast in the Diaspora may be limited to a difference in temperature, the Jews of Israel experience a dramatic change in weather patterns, where stormy rain clouds are replaced by bountiful sunshine. This transition is most poignantly expressed in the change of our *nusach hatfillot*, removing *mashiv haruach* and altering the *vtel tal u'matar* in our Shmone Esrei. By reading our texts carefully, we will notice that these are not the only references to the rain of Israel in our prayers and literature. We embrace the winter with Shimini Atzeret's *Tefilat*

Geshem, we welcome the summer with Pesach's *Tefilat Tal*, and signifying their importance, the chazzan dons a *kittel*. Inside the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur*, the Kohen Gadol would pray for the upcoming year's rainfall (*Seder Ha'Avodah, Nusach Sefard*). A large portion of *Mesechet Ta'anit* is involved with the additional prayers and fasts established in order to supplicate G-d for rain, and the Amoraim (*Ta'anit* 7a,7b) make statements as remarkable as:

אמר רב יהודה גדול יום הגשמים כיום שניתנה בו תורה.

R. Yehuda said: the day that it rains is as great as the day that the Torah was given.

אמר רבי חמא בר' חנינא גדול יום הגשמים כיום שנבראו שמים וארץ.

R. Chama b. R. Chanina said: the day that it rains is as great as the day that the heavens and the earth were created.

The list goes on... Why does the rain of Israel play such a central role?

We could ask a more fundamental question: For a nation of farmers who have an entire order of Mishna, *Seder Zeraim*, dedicated to their agricultural endeavors, a desert land with little access to water seems to be a poor choice of location. Why in fact did G-d choose Israel? The answer to this question might be hidden in the *pesukim* of Parshat Eikev (Deut. 11:11-12):

והארץ, אשר אתם עברים שמה לרשתה--
ארץ הרים, ובקעת; למטר השמים, תשתה-
מים. ארץ, אשר-ה' אלקיך דרש אתה: תמיד,
עיני ה' אלקיך בה--מרשית השנה, ועד אחרית
שנה.

But the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, soaks up its water from the rains of heaven. It is a land which the Lord your God looks after, on which the Lord your

God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end.

We see that it was no unfortunate coincidence that the Jewish people landed in the desert land of Israel. G-d tells us that is specifically because He cherishes Bnei Yisrael that He puts them in a desert land. People with an unlimited water source will never turn to G-d for help, will never look to the skies for rain; their life resources are streaming by their feet. In contrast, says G-d, settling Bnei Yisrael in a desert region will allow them to turn to the One above for its sustenance, pray to G-d for rain, and always know from where their livelihood stems.

In these few *pesukim*, G-d reveals an important message. Our dependency on Him is not an inadvertent arrangement, nor a happenstance coincidence. Rather it is a conduit that affords us the opportunity to turn, beseech, and ultimately connect with G-d. Behind every challenge is a blessing. A blessing from the One above, reminding us that He is present and readily available. Earlier in Parshat Eikev, G-d cautions about the challenges of wealth. All too often does the wealthy man forget Who provided his wealth, while the destitute fellow is in constant connection with G-d, always requesting His basic needs.

G-d's settling His agricultural nation in a desert land was the best way to guarantee the nation's constant beseeching of His heavens for rain. Rain does not merely sustain our physical survival in Israel, it is at the core of our spiritual existence. The rain of Israel is hand-delivered by G-d in response to the *tefillot* of *klal Yisrael*, and each drop penetrates the soil and imbues the land with *kedushah*. The Land of Israel is no desert — it is a flowing oasis of prayer.

Although for thousands of years Jews in the Diaspora prayed for rain in Israel, the true feeling of dependency on Israel's rain had not been on the Jews' consciousness until the recent resettlement of the Land in the past hundred years. The Jews of Israel are once again blessed to live with an active feeling of dependency on G-d's rain. The special *nuschaot* in the *tefillot* of Eretz Yisrael that address the need for

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rain, such as the addition of “*g'shamim b'itam*” (rains in their proper time) in Birkas Hachodesh and the distinct “*Aneinu*” in Shmone Esrei, highlight the unique connection with G-d only the Jew living in Israel can experience.

Today in 2020, the advent of modern technologies and desalination plants has seemingly reduced Israel's reliance on G-d's rain. An endless water tap

in every Israeli household, multiple swimming pools per hotel, and drip irrigation across every farm in Israel — the Land of Israel is more hydrated today than many western countries. What reason is there to continue praying for rain?

While this may seem true, and our dependency on rainfall has diminished, the Land of Israel does not allow its inhabitants to merely sit back and enjoy the Land. She challenges her people. She challenges them so they turn to G-d. Whether this challenge is manifest in rain, security concerns, or the difficulty of making a living, the Land will forever force its people to look to G-d for help. The very fabric of the Land of Israel is imbued with a connection to its Creator, and she expects no less of her people.

אשא עיני אל ההרים מאין יבוא עזרי עזרי
מעם ה' עושה שמיים וארץ.

*I will lift up my eyes to the mountains.
From where does my help come? My help
comes from the Lord, who made heaven
and earth.*

Psalm 121:1-2

The Jews of Israel endure struggles and challenges, but it is for this exact reason that Jews choose to live there. The flip side of every challenge is a blessing — the opportunity to look to G-d for assistance. While the Land of Israel may not have an elaborate highway system nor many rushing rivers, her humble roads whisper to G-d as they traverse the Jerusalem hills, and her rivers rush not with water but with the heartfelt prayers of every Jew in Israel. May we all be *zoche* to internalize that the greatest blessing in life is not to receive rain, but to need rain — *gishmei bracha*.



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ACTUALIZING PROPHECY: MAN'S OBLIGATION OR GOD'S?

Any attentive member of a Religious Zionist youth group will immediately smile upon seeing an elderly couple sit on a Jerusalem park bench or children run around Gan Sacher. These seemingly insignificant occurrences in truth carry with them an over 2,000 year promise:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת עַד יֵשְׁבוּ זְקֵנִים וְזָקֵנֹת בְּרַחֲבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאִישׁ מִשְׁעֲנָתוֹ בְּיָדוֹ מַרְבֵּץ וְרַחֲבוֹת הָעִיר מְלֵאוֹ יְלָדִים וְיִלְדוֹת מִשְׁחָקִים בְּרַחֲבוֹתֶיהָ.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women sit in the broad places of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the broad places of the city shall be

full of boys and girls playing in the broad places thereof.

Zekharyah 8:4-5

Tanakh is saturated with prophecies that ostensibly foreshadow the Jewish People's rise from the ashes of the Holocaust, its return to the Land of Israel, and its creation of a sovereign state.¹ Any Religious Zionist recognizes that the State of Israel does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it plays a critical, metahistorical role in the fulfillment of the Jewish People's destiny, expressed and outlined in the words of our ancient prophets.

Aside from perhaps putting a smile on our faces, what function do

these prophetic visions play in a halakhic life? Are eschatological prophecies merely descriptive in nature, telling us of hopeful times, where we may find comfort amidst terrible years of exile and persecution, yet not demanding anything from us in addition to a life committed to mitzvot? Moreover, perhaps prophecies and their fulfillments are "the secrets of the Holy One,"² apathetic to or even discouraging of human involvement. Or, on the other hand, are prophecies proscriptive, charging the Jewish People to *actively pursue* the messianic vision and bring about its fulfillment? Is a Jew obligated to actualize prophecy and

I would like to thank Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein whose shiurim on "The Rav, the Rebbe, and Rav Kook," and more specifically on this topic, inspired me to write this article. His and his family's Aliyah to Israel greatly inspired and continues to inspire many of his students who are passionate about doing the same.

take part in the realization of the Jewish People's destiny, even in the absence of or in a perceived conflict with halakhic obligations? This article will explore the different approaches to this question, specifically in relation to fulfilling the vision of *Berit Bein HaBetarim*, the dreams of Yosef, and eschatological prophecies of the ultimate redemption.

I. *Berit Bein HaBetarim*: Egypt's Role in Fulfilling God's Decree

If the descendants of Avraham were destined to undergo persecution in a foreign land for 400 years,³ how could Egypt have deserved punishment for bringing this prophecy to fruition? In a discussion about free will, Rambam⁴ asks this very question and answers:

המצריים, כל אחד ואחד מאותן המצירים

והמריעים לישראל, אילו לא רצה להרע להם הרשות בידו, שלא גזר על איש ידוע אלא הודיעו שסוף זרעו עתיד להשתעבד בארץ לא להם, וכבר אמרנו שאין כח באדם לידע היאך ידע הקב"ה דברים העתידין להיות

In regard to the Egyptians, each and every one of the Egyptians who caused hardship and difficulty for Israel had the choice to refrain from harming them, if he so desired, for there was no decree on a particular person. Rather, [God merely] informed [Abraham] that, in the future, his descendants would be enslaved in a land which did not belong to them.

Rambam asserts that Pharaoh and the Egyptians had no place in determining how prophecy was to be manifest, especially when it entailed persecuting another people. A human is not meant to intervene with the secrets of the supernal worlds. Egypt should have waited until God's decree was fulfilled through another nation enslaving

Israel.

Ramban⁵ rejects Rambam's view and offers his own:

והרב נתן טעם בספר המדע . . . ולא נתכנו דבריו אצלי, שאפילו גזר שאחד מכל האומות יריע להם בכך וכך, וקדם זה ועשה גזרתו של הקב"ה זכה בדבר מצוה . . .

The [Rambam] gave an answer in Sefer Madda . . . but his words have not settled with me, for even if God decreed that one of the nations cause hardship for [Israel] through any means, and a certain nation arose and fulfilled that decree, that nation has merited performing a mitzvah.

Had they not taken things too far, Egyptians could have performed a *mitzvah* by running to enslave the Israelites before anyone else did. Prophecy or Divine decrees are analogous to the decrees of any human king—the ruler wants his

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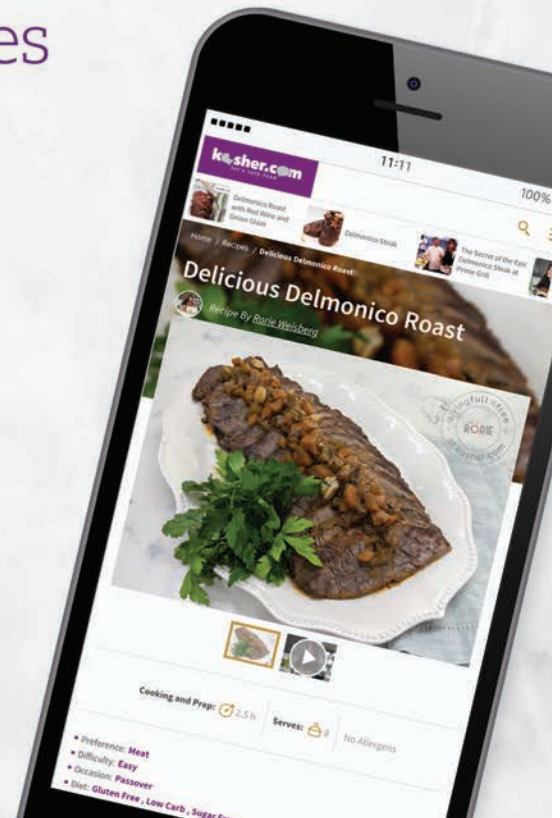
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constituents to actively fulfill his command and not tarry in bringing it to fruition. Ramban, unlike Rambam, understands there to be a value or perhaps obligation in fulfilling prophecy, even in face of sinning⁶ by persecuting another nation⁷. Aligning one's destiny with God's promises has real *halakhic* consequences.

II. Yosef and his Dreams

Commentators struggle with determining Yosef's course of action as the viceroy of Egypt in relation to his brothers. Accusing the brothers of espionage, not contacting his father for years, as well as Yosef's other erratic behavior motivate commentators to explain Yosef as slyly encouraging repentance, testing his brothers, or even taking revenge.⁸ Ramban,⁹ however, understands that Yosef had a different goal in mind:

ולפי דעתי . . . כי בראות יוסף את אחיו משתחוים לו זכר כל החלומות אשר חלם להם וידע שלא נתקיים אחד מהם בפעם הזאת . . . וכיון שלא ראה בנימן עמהם חשב זאת התחבולה שיעליל עליהם כדי שיביאו גם בנימין אחיו אליו לקיים החלום הראשון תחילה.

It seems to me . . . when Yosef saw his brothers bowing to him, he remembered his dreams that he dreamt about them and understood that at present one of them was not fulfilled (because not all of the brothers had bowed down) . . . when he saw Binyamin was not with the brothers, Yosef conjured up this plan to accuse the brothers so they would bring Binyamin to him to fulfill his dream.

Yosef actively pushes to fulfill his dreams, which he realizes have foretold his ascent to power in Egypt. Only once *all* the brothers bow down to him will Yosef be able to reveal his identity and contact his father. For the

moment, however, Yosef can continue neglecting his responsibility to contact his father.¹⁰

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama¹¹ strongly objects to Ramban's assumption that human action should be directed to fulfill divine prophecy:

ותמהני ממה שכתב הרמב"ן ז"ל שעשה כדי שיתקיימו חלומותיו כי מה תועלת לו בשיתקיימו ואף כי יהיה תועלת לא היה לו לחטוא כנגד אביו. אבל היה לחשוך עצמו מחטוא לו והחלומות העושה יגש פתרון גם שתראה סכלות עצומה שישתדל האדם לקיים חלומותיו שהרי הם הדברים אשר יעשו שלא מדעת הבעלים:

I am bewildered at Ramban's explanation that Yosef did what he did in order to make his dreams come true. What did this benefit him? And even if it profited him, he should not have sinned against his father. As for the dreams, leave it to Him Who sends them to make them come true. It seems infinitely foolish for a man to strive to fulfill his dreams which are matters beyond his control.

According to Rav Kook, a Jew acts in tandem with God's Hand rather than passively wait for the Redemption to come.

Like Rambam above, Rabbi Arama understands dreams and prophecy to exist outside of the realm of human decision making. Furthermore, were there even some value in actualizing prophecies, Yosef could not have bypassed real halakhic obligations such as honoring his father to achieve

this secondary goal.

III. Actualizing Eschatological Visions: The State of Israel

This debate presented above has continued to pervade the discussion about our relationship with the State of Israel today. When asked whether prophecies or Kabbalistic ideas that foretold of redemption's secular, anti-religious beginnings provided any legitimacy to the Zionist project, Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik¹² (the Brisker Rav) called upon *Berachot* 10a, which discusses King Chizkiyah's sudden illness and subsequent conversation with Yeshayah:

אָמַר לִיה: מַאי פּוֹלֵי הָאִי? אָמַר לִיה: מְשׁוּם דְּלֹא עֲסַקְתָּ בְּפִרְיָהּ וְרִבְיָהּ. אָמַר לִיה: מְשׁוּם דְּחֻזְאֵי לִי בְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ דְּנִפְקֵי מִינְאֵי בְּנֵי דְלָא מְעֵלוּ. אָמַר לִיה: בְּהַדֵּי כְּבָשִׁי דְרַחֲמֵנָא לְמָה לָךְ? מַאי דְמִפְקֵדְתָּ אִיבְעֵי לָךְ לְמַעֲבָדָהּ, וּמָה דְנִחָא קַמִּיהּ, קוּדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא לְעַבְדָּהּ.

Hezekiah said to him: For what transgression am I being punished? Isaiah said to him: Because you did not marry and engage in procreation. Hezekiah said: I had no children because I envisaged through divine inspiration that the children that emerge from me will not be virtuous!? Isaiah said to him: Why do you involve yourself with the secrets of the Holy One, Blessed be He? That which you have been commanded, the mitzva of procreation, you are required to perform, and that which is acceptable in the eyes of the Holy One, Blessed be He, let Him perform, as He has so decided.

The Brisker Rav's proof comes from Chizkiyah's original plan: by neglecting to fulfill the vision of having kids and instead opting to avoid something halakhically reprehensible (i.e. raising unvirtuous

children), Chizkiyah clearly displayed that prophecy cannot overrule halakhically problematic actions. Similarly, prophecies hinting at secular Zionism being the harbinger of Messianic times do not sanction an individual to act in support of secular Zionists who clearly expressed their opposition to Torah values (something the Brisker Rav considered a formal halakhic prohibition).¹³ Metahistorical values emerging from Tanakh and Kabbalah cannot compete with the technical laws laid out in the *Shulkhan Arukh*.

The consistent opinion of the Ramban¹⁴ reflects the attitude of many Religious Zionist leaders at the movement's founding until today. For example, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook writes¹⁵ that upon witnessing the beginnings of prophetic

fulfillment one must contribute to achieving full realization:

ועתה מי הוא העור שלא יראה בזה יד ד' הנוהגת אותנו, ומי לא יחוש חובה לעצמו להיות פועל עם אל ועתידה בת קול להיות מפוצצת בראשי ההרים ואומרת: כל מי שפעל עם אל יבא ויטול שכרו.¹⁶ מי יוכל להפטר מלסבב מצדו תוספת ברכה ומהירות ישועה, לעורר לבות רבות לשוב אל אדמת הקודש, לנחלת ד', להאחז בה, לישיבה בעסקים ובבנינים, בקניית קרקעות, בנטיעות ובזריעה, ובכל דבר שהוא מקור חיי ישוב נכון ומסודר

And now, who is so blind that he does not see the Lord's hand guiding us in this, and does not feel obligated to work along with God? A heavenly voice in the future will cry aloud from the top of the mountains and say, 'Whoever has wrought with G-d, let him come and receive his reward.'¹⁷ Who can exempt himself from doing his part in bringing additional blessing and swifter salvation; from awakening many hearts to return to the Holy Land, to the Lord's legacy,

that they may become a part of it, to settle it with enterprises and buildings, to purchase property, to plant and sow, to do everything necessary for the foundation of life of a stable and organized settlement.

According to Rav Kook, a Jew is obligated to react to historical shifts on the world stage and recognize their significance for Jewish destiny.¹⁸ A Jew acts in tandem with God's hand rather than passively wait for the redemption to come.

Even Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik—who articulated his own hesitancy of an over-fervent Messianic Zionism¹⁹—expresses a similar perspective on fulfilling prophecies:

Halakhic man discerns in every divine pledge man's obligation to bring about its fulfillment, in every promise a specific norm, in every eschatological vision an everlasting commandment.²⁰

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According to the Rav, one does not live halakhically if messianic visions do not translate to commands by which one lives his/her life. Active building and working the Land, as well as perhaps playing or sitting in the streets of Jerusalem, fulfill obligations as they realize the visions of old.

IV. Conclusion: But How do we Know?

Ramban and Rav Kook have won out in the Religious Zionist world against those who argue that metahistorical sensitivity and the realization of dreams are not essential in living a proper halakhic life. Nonetheless, one glaring question remains: how can anyone be audacious enough to postulate that the visions of the prophets specifically refer to our generation and *this* State of Israel? Can we really know with certainty? The Gemara²¹ relates:

אמר רבי אלכסנדר רבי יהושע בן לוי
רמי כתיב (ישעיהו ס:כב) "בעתה" וכתיב
"אחישנה" וכו' אחישנה, לא זכו בעתה.

Rabbi Alexandri said: Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi posed a contradiction: The verse (Isaiah 60:22) says God will bring the redemption in "its fixed time," and then the verse states God will "hasten the redemption?" If Israel merits the redemption, God will "hasten it." If they do not merit it, God will bring it "in its affixed time."

There is a fixed time in history that redemption is destined to come; at that point, the visions of old will be realized. Nevertheless, R. Yehoshua Ben Levi tells us that prophecy and redemption are flexible, and each can fit into different periods of history; while eschatological visions will describe a redemption fixed for, say, the year 6000, the Jewish People

have the capabilities of reeling the redemption closer to the present day and have those very same prophecies realized in the present.

In our days, the ancient visions do perhaps foreshadow our current situation; the history of Zionism and the modern State of Israel may very well have the potential to fit into the prophetic narrative. Only we can decide whether to actualize them.

Endnotes

1 See for example: Yeshayah 11:11-12, Yechezkel 37, Michah 4:8 and Malbim there.

2 See *Berakhot* 10a.

3 Bereishit 15:13-14.

4 *Mishneh Torah: Hilkhos Teshuvah* 6:5.

5 Bereishit ad loc. Interestingly, Ramban also disagrees with another assumption Ramban makes. Ramban, as we saw above, understands the decree to be open for any nation to fulfill. Ramban (Bereishit 12:10) asserts that the decree was destined to be fulfilled through the Egyptians alone.

6 *Meshekh Chokhmah* (Bereishit 15:13) asserts that the by persecuting Israel, Egyptians formally violated the Noahide command of setting up courts and a justice system (*dinim*).

7 Ramban ad loc. also extends this principle to the actions of Sanheriv and Nebuchadnezzar who were both called upon by prophets to persecute *Malkhut Yehudah*. Both rulers were punished since they did not act to fulfill the divine decrees but rather to glorify their names and kingdoms. I thank Rabbi Mayer Twersky for pointing this out to me.

8 Radak Bereishit 42:1, *Seforno* 44:2, *Keli Yekar* 42:7 for different explanations.

9 Ramban Bereishit 42:9. See also *Aderet Eliyahu* of the Gra and Netziv ad loc. who say similarly to Ramban. Netziv writes that Yosef only had to fulfill the prophecy because he was the prophet. A prophet cannot "give up" on his prophecies (See *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 11:5).

10 For Ramban, this answer directly

addresses how Yosef neglected his father : "How is it that Yosef, after living many years in Egypt, having attained a high and influential position in the house of an important Egyptian official, did not send his father even one message to inform him (that he was alive) and comfort him? Egypt is only six days' travel from Chevron, and respect for his father would have justified even a year's journey! ... [It would] have been a grave sin to torment his father by leaving him in mourning and bereavement for himself and for Shimon; even if he wanted to hurt his brothers a little, how could he not feel pity for his aged father?" (Ramban Bereishit 42:9)

11 *Akedat Yitzchak Sha'ar* 29:9.

12 Quoted in *Shu"t Teshuvot V'hanhagot* 2:140.

13 It is unclear how exactly the Brisker Rav understands the end of the Gemara where Yeshayah clearly disapproves of Chizkiyah's tactics.

14 Ramban remains consistent in yet another example of fulfilling prophecies. According to Ramban (Bereishit 49:10), the prophecy of *lo yasur shevet M'Yehuda* (Bereishit ad loc.), which confirms that the kingship is reserved for the tribe of Judah, halakhically binds all of Israel to not ascend to the throne if they do not come from Judah. The Hasmoneans (2nd century B.C.E), who were kohanim, were ineligible to be kings and violated this prophecy. This set up their ultimate downfall. I thank Efraim Wagner for pointing this out to me.

15 Kook, *The Great Call*, (הקריאה הגדולה), 1907.

16 Rav Kook is referencing *Vayikra Rabbah* 27:2.

17 See previous footnote.

18 See, for example, *Orot HaMilhama* where Rav Kook writes about World War I and its implications for ushering in the Messianic Era.

19 See Community, Commitment, and Conversation, 163-164, for an articulation of the Rav's stance towards the religious significance of the State of Israel. See also *Kol Dodi Dofek* (also known as *Fate and Destiny*).

20 *Halakhic Man*, 100.

21 *Sanhedrin* 98a.



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THE POWERS OF A JEWISH KING

Jewish history certainly seems to be on a positive trajectory. After 2,000 years, millions of Jews have returned home to a burgeoning and bustling country. Israel is growing, making strides geopolitically, economically and spiritually. However, with all the developments, advancements and religious progress, we must remind ourselves of a critical missing link in the actualization of the ideal Jewish society. Contrary to the appreciation of democracy no doubt embedded in our DNA, we are still waiting for the reestablishment of *Malchus Beis David* (the Davidic Kingdom); we are waiting for our king.

We may wonder what positive role the Jewish king plays. After all, the separation of powers enjoyed by

virtually all modern democracies seems almost axiomatic. Monarchy seems outdated, inefficient and unideal. But this is a flawed perspective that stems from a misunderstanding of the role played by the Jewish king. In reality, Jewish monarchy is part of a greater system with its own separation of powers. The Ran, in his *Derashos* no. 11, explains that while the role of the rabbis and judges of the Sanhedrin is to institute and apply halacha, the king's responsibility and authority lies in maintaining and developing the nation in areas outside the realm of what halacha directly relates to, what halachic literature has deemed "*tikkun medina*," or modifications of the state. Anything necessary for societal function, not explicitly addressed by halacha, falls under the purview

of the king. What follows is a brief discussion of sources suggesting that aspects of *malchus* in various forms have, in fact, traveled alongside us throughout our exile, to this very day.

The first extension of Jewish monarchy outside of the prototypical king on the throne in Israel was the office of *Reish Galusa*, or Exilarch. The *Reish Galusa* was the leader of the Jewish community in Babylonia. This institution was established concurrent with the exile of King Yechonia and his court at the end of the First Temple, and was more or less an active position in Jewish exile for over 1,000 years. Tracing his lineage to the royal Davidic line, the *Reish Galusa* exercised political power over his constituents with tax collecting and judicial authority. This

power was recognized by Chazal. As the Rambam, *Hilchos Sanhedrin* 4:13 explains:

ראשי גליות שבבבל במקום מלך הן עומדים,
ויש להן לרדות את ישראל בכל מקום ולדון
עליהן בין רצו בין לא רצו שנאמר לא יסור
שבט מיהודה אלו ראשי גליות שבבבל.

The exilarchs in Bavel stand in place of the king, and they have the authority to impose their will on the nation at any time and to judge them whether or not they consent, as the verse states "the staff shall not leave Judah," these are the exilarchs in Bavel.

Note that the Rambam brings the verse "lo yasur shevet M'Yehuda" in sourcing the authority of the *Reish Galusa*. This is based on the Gemara, *Sanhedrin* 5a. This verse is the source that the Jewish king is generally supposed to be from Shevet Yehuda. Here we see the first departure of the classic application of Jewish monarchy. Apparently, this authority can be manifested in a king in exile of sorts, outside the Land of Israel. It is striking that with the onset of *galus* efforts were made to establish and maintain a seat of rule for the Jewish community. However, today, without a *Reish Galusa*, are we fully devoid of any semblance of monarchy? The *Avnei Nezer*, *Yoreh Deah* no. 312, in a broader discussion about whether a position of town rabbi should pass through inheritance to the deceased's son, maintains that modern rabbis, lacking the authentic *semicha* originating from Moshe, do not hold the position of the *shoftim*, the judges of old. Rather, they are acting as "kings":

רק באמת אין כוונת התורה לדון כשאין
סמוכין. רק שההכרח לדון במידי דשכיח
ואית ביה חסרון כיס שלא יחרב העולם. והוא
דומיא דמלך ממש שבמשפט יעמיד ארץ וא"כ
הרי הוא בירושה כמו מלך ממש.

The truth is, the Torah did not intend for people to judge without semicha. Only in extenuating circumstances, in common enough situations which would cause financial loss, to maintain order. In this regard, he (the rabbi) is comparable to a king, literally, maintaining order in the land, in which case the position should pass through inheritance.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly for the time we live in, some argue the modern government of Israel with the prime minister at its helm has the status of the kingdom of the Jewish people. This is based on an oft quoted comment of the Radvaz, *Melachim* 3:8, where he maintains that the king of Israel is crowned by a prophet, or with the consent of all of Israel:

והאי מלך היינו שהומלך על פי נביא או
שהסכימו עליו כל ישראל.

The king is crowned by a prophet or with the consent of all of Israel.

This second tract, consent of the people, is novel, and its implications are profound. Rav Kook, *Mishpat Kohen* no. 144, based on this comment, maintains that any leader recognized by the Jewish nation takes on the role of king, with all the stringencies and honor afforded to him:

שבזמן שאין מלך, כיון שמשפטי המלוכה
הם ג"כ מה שנוגע למצב הכללי של האומה,
חוזרים אלה הזכויות של המשפטים ליד
האומה בכללה... אבל למה שנוגע להנהגת
הכלל, כל שמנהיג את האומה דן הוא
במשפטי המלוכה, שהם כלל צרכי האומה
הדרושים לשעתם ולמעמד העולם.

In a time without a king, since the rules of the monarchy are relevant to the general national condition, these rights return to the nation as a whole... However, in regard to leading the nation, any (modern) leader governs with the rules of the monarchy that includes the

short-term and long-term needs of the nation.

We cannot overstate the significance of this approach. Every election (even three in a year!) takes on the significance of a coronation ceremony. What a privilege for those living in Israel, that they can participate actively in the crowning of the chief representative of the Jewish state, himself (to a certain extent) the embodiment of royalty.

We have seen that the position of king was historically not limited to a monarch in Israel. In addition, throughout this long and often dark exile our rabbinic leaders may well have taken on regal roles. Finally, perhaps the office can be assumed by one who has no royal or prophetic or religious claim to the throne, but rather by a consensus of the people.

Ultimately though, until the full realization of *Malchus Beis David*, with the coming of Mashiach, we should remind ourselves of the kingly portion within all of us. We are all the children of the ultimate King, Hashem. As Chazal, *Bava Metzia* 113b, state, "kol Yisrael bnei melachim," the entire nation are the children of kings. The *Sefer HaChinuch*, no. 16, commenting on the prohibition of breaking the bones of the *korban Pesach*, explains that such behavior is unbecoming of royalty. Every year, on Seder night we remind ourselves of our monarchical ties by assuming kingly behavior. In anticipation of the ultimate fulfillment of the geulah unfolding before our very eyes, it would do us well to remember that, in addition to our religious and political leaders, we are all members of the *mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh* — a kingdom of priests and holy nation.



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