

Rebuilding Ourselves, Rebuilding the World: Lessons from the First Exile

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The Maharal¹ makes a remarkable comment in his observation of the words גלה (exile) and גאל (redemption). He notes that these two words share the letters ג and ל and only differ in the third letter, the א. The Maharal explains that what distinguishes exile from redemption is whether or not there is a oneness among the Jewish people. That oneness is represented by the letter א, which numerically symbolizes the number one. When Klal Yisrael loses its sense of unity, the result is a fracturing and fragmentation of the Klal, transforming our status from *geulah* (גאולה) to *galus* (גלות) and dispersal around the world. We are reduced from being unified as one people in our homeland to being spread across the four corners of the earth.

Ayeka: Where are You?

Perhaps we can glean an alternative idea and insight into the concept of *geulah* and *galus* if we examine more carefully the very first time that humanity suffered expulsion. After Adam and Chava eat from the forbidden tree and before their exile, the Torah describes a perplexing event:

And they heard the voice of Hashem Elokim traveling in the garden toward evening, and Adam and his wife hid from Hashem Elokim among the trees of the garden. And Hashem Elokim called to Adam and said to him, where are you?

Bereishis 3:8-9

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת-קוֹל ה' אֱלֹהִים, מִתְּהִלָּה בַּגֶּן-
לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם; וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ,
מִפְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהִים, בְּתוֹךְ, עֵץ הַגֶּן. וַיִּקְרָא
ה' אֱלֹהִים, אֶל-הָאָדָם; וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ, אַיֶּכָּה.
בְּרֵאשִׁית ג:ח-ט

“Where are you?” This question, the first question ever recorded in the Torah, needs to be understood. After all, didn’t God know where Adam and Chava were located geographically? This very question was asked in a most interesting set of circumstances to the Ba’al Ha’Tania, Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, in a fascinating story that is recounted by R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin.²

¹ *Netzach Yisrael*, Chapter 1.

² *Sippurei Chassidim Al Hatorah* by Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin no. 4.

When R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi was imprisoned by the secret service in St. Petersburg, an officer of the Gendarmes came to interrogate him. The officer saw that the rebbe was pensive and consumed in his thoughts, and understood that he was dealing with a great leader. The officer himself was very intelligent and proficient in the Bible.

The officer said to the rebbe, "I have one question regarding the Torah that I would like to ask you. Will you answer my question?" The rebbe replied, "You may ask the question."

The officer asked, "Please explain to me the meaning of the verse 'And Hashem Elokim called to Adam and said to him, where are you?' Doesn't God know where Adam is?"

The rebbe replied, "Do you believe that the Torah is eternal and applicable in all times, to every generation and to each person?" The officer said, "Yes, I do believe that."

The rebbe said, "The meaning of the verse is that at all times God calls out to man and says 'Where are you? Where are you in the world?' A person has a limited number of days and years, and each day of each year he must do good with God and with people. Therefore, he should ask himself where he is in the world, how many years have passed and what did he do in those years..." The officer was amazed. He clapped and said "Bravo!"

After seeing the intelligence of the rebbe, the officer convinced the czar that the rebbe was a very intelligent and holy man and that in his opinion, the accusations against the rebbe were falsified.

This very notion is captured in the words of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch in his explanation of this *pasuk*:

Ayeka—Where are you? Which spiritual level have you reached?

איִכָּה - היכן אתה? איזו עמדה תפסת? לאיזו דרגה הגעת?

This question, which led up to the first exile, the exile of Adam and Chava from Gan Eden, is really the source of exile itself. When man fails to capitalize on the great potential that God has given him and is unsuccessful in using his talents for His service, then he is exiled from himself, from who he truly can be. This inner exile of self is the cause of his external exile from man's geographic location.

Perhaps this is symbolized by the letter א missing from the word גולה. The א in Hebrew grammar represents the אני, the I, of the person. When a person fails to bring out his true spiritual self and potential, when he misses the אני inside of him, he enters into a self-inflicted exile. This spiritual exile from one's own אני then translates into a real displacement from the land of our spiritual destiny, a land that Hashem has gifted us and tailored to allow us to fulfill our own spiritual calling. This is in contrast to גאולה, which results from living a life of utilizing one's unique talents and abilities in serving the Creator. *Geulah* and our return to Eretz Yisrael is a result of each of us living a life of achievement and realization of our spiritual potential. When we attain גאולה then our missing א is restored as we live a life with connection to who we really are.

Ayekah or Eichah

The Midrash in explaining a verse in Hoshea (6:7) makes the following comment:

Rav Abahu said in the name of Rav Chanina; it is stated (Hoshea chapter 6), "and they were like Adam, they transgressed the covenant," (this means to say that) they are just like Adam HaRishon, just as with

א"ר אבהו בשם ר' חנינא כתיב (הושע ו) והמה כאדם עברו ברית, המה כאדם הראשון, מה

Adam HaRishon, I (Hashem) have brought him into the Garden of Eden and I commanded him (not to eat from the forbidden tree) and he transgressed this order and I judged him and had him evicted and exiled, and I mourned over him with the recital of איכה [... I judged him with exile as it says "and I banished Adam," I mourned over him with the recitation of איכה as it says, "And Hashem Elokim called to Adam and said to him, where are you?"] so too Adam's children, I have brought them into the land of Israel, I have commanded them to perform mitzvos and they have transgressed those mitzvos, I have judged them with eviction and exile, and I have mourned over them with the recitation of איכה. I have judged them with exile as it says (Hoshea chapter 9) "from my home I have exiled them," and I have mourned over them with the recitation of איכה as it says (Eichah chapter 1), "How is it so that she (Zion) sits..."

Bereshis Rabbah Chapter 19 number 9

אדם הראשון הכנסתיו לתוך גן
עדן וצויתיו ועבר על צוויי,
ודנתי אותו בשלוחין ובגרושין,
וקוננתי עליו איכה... ודנתי אותו
בגרושין דכתיב ויגרש את
האדם, קוננתי עליו איכה
שנאמר ויקרא ה' אלהים אל
האדם ויאמר לו איכה, איכה
כתיב, אף בניו הכנסתים לא"י,
וצויתים ועברו על הצווי, דנתי
אותם בשלוחין ובגרושין וקוננתי
עליהם איכה... דנתי אותם
בגרושין שנאמר (הושע ט)
מביתי אגרשם, קוננתי עליהם
איכה שנאמר (איכה א) איכה
ישבה.

בראשית רבה יט:ט

We are taught in the Midrash that when Hashem asked Adam, איכה (*ayekah*), He was really lamenting and mourning over Adam. God was saddened by Adam's sin, pained by his exile. Instead of reading the word *ayekah* as a question of where are you, it is to be read *eichah*, an expression of mourning.

Perhaps, in light of the above interpretation, we can better understand the relationship between these two readings. More than a coincidental spelling between these two words, there is a deep message the Midrash is conveying. For the wayward Jew, the question of where are you is a piercing and painful experience—an experience of realizing one's distance from the Ribbono Shel Olam, recognizing a life of lost potential, and comprehending the failures and disappointments of his life. This is an *eichah* experience. This is Hashem's lamentation, bemoaning the state of man, and anguishing over his downfall. That is where the *ayekah* experience and the *eichah* experience merge, joining in suffering over the lowly state of man.

The Destruction of the Human Beis HaMikdash

The aforementioned Midrash contains another important message highlighting the great potential of the Jew and further underscoring the severity of his failures. The Midrash compares the exile of the entirety of Klal Yisrael to the exile of Adam HaRishon. Adam, one single individual's exile, seems to be likened to the exile of a large nation. I believe the Midrash is teaching that when Hashem looks down at every single Jew, He sees vast capabilities. When man fails to achieve, Hashem mourns that failure just as he mourns the larger scale failure of the entire nation. To God, each Jew is precious; each Jew represents endless opportunities for greatness.

On many a Tisha B'Av I vividly recall how my father, Rabbi Mordechai Willig, would pose a critical question. We read in the Kinnos scores of compositions mourning over the destruction of the two temples, the exile of all of Israel, and the deaths of so many thousands of Jews. Yet among these many Kinnos, we dedicate an entire kinnah to the tragic story that befell the two children of Rabbi Yishmael Kohen Gadol. Why such attention? Why do we devote so much

space in our KinnoS and in our limited mourning capabilities to two children when there is so much more to think about?

My father would quote Rav Yosef D. Soloveichik, who offered a beautiful explanation. He suggested that while we mourn the loss of such great numbers of Jews who were killed, the mourner can be overwhelmed at the staggering figures and can begin to lose his ability to appreciate each loss. Instead of mourning for the deaths of real people, he begins to think of the loss as a number, as a cold historian who records historic events. The stories of these two children help shape and personalize the loss of each person in the hearts and minds of the mourner.

Perhaps one can further expand on this notion and suggest that indeed the loss of two lives is worthy of mourning just as the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. Here the author of the KinnoS is emphasizing the value of each individual. The loss of every person can be seen as the loss of the Beis HaMikdash itself, warranting genuine sorrow and pain.

This idea can be elucidated more clearly based on a comment of the Alshich. The Alshich, in his explanation of the verse (Shemos 25:8) "ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם" (And you shall make me a Mikdash and I will dwell amongst them"), says the following:

It says that I will dwell among them and not (that I will dwell) in it. And the idea is, because I heard those who extract from here that the main residence of the Shechinah is in man himself, and not in the home (Beis HaMikdash), from the fact that it says (I will dwell among) them.

Alshich, Shemos ch. 25

"ושכנתי בתוכם" ולא אמר בתוכו. והוא: כי הנה שמעתי לומדים מכאן כי עיקר השראת שכינה באדם הוא, ולא בבית, מאומרו "בתוכם".

אלשיך, שמות פרק כה

This incredible concept demonstrates the thought we mentioned previously, that each person has such immense significance. Each person is charged with the responsibility to become a living Beis HaMikdash, to use his abilities and talents to bring more Godliness into this world. Therefore, with the loss of every single Jewish life, we mourn and grieve as we do over the loss of the Beis HaMikdash.

Indeed, *galus* according to this understanding reflects the commonality of exile from one's self and from the Beis HaMikdash in a very real way. Both are lacking the \aleph of redemption, both are deficient in fulfilling their common mandate and purpose to be a home to the Shechinah.

We read with respect to the creation of man:

And Hashem Elokim created man from the dust of the earth and He blew in his nostrils a spirit of life, and man became a living soul.

Bereishis 2:7

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם, עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו, נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים; וַיְהִי הָאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.
בראשית ב:ז

Targum Yonasan based on Chazal adds the following:

And Hashem Elokim created man with two inclinations and He took earth from the place of the Beis HaMikdash (and used it to create man).

Targum Yonasan, Bereishis 2:7

וברא ה' אלקים ית אדם בתרין יצרין ודבר עפרא מאתר בית מקדשא.
תרגום יונתן, בראשית ב:ז

Why did Hashem choose specifically earth from under the Beis HaMikdash to create man? One explanation may be that Hashem is imparting to us this very message. Man is meant to serve as a portable Beis HaMikdash, serving as a home to the Shechinah wherever he travels. The Beis Hamikdash and Adam were made from the same material, underscoring their shared purpose. When either fails to achieve this objective, when either one disposes of their א, then גאולה turns to גולה, redemption transforms to exile.

The Aleph of God

Shlomo HaMelech teaches in Mishlei:

One who alters the statements of people will cause further fighting; the one who complains will bring about separation between man and his chief.

Mishlei 16:28

איש תהפכות, ישלח מדון;
 ונרנן, מפריד אלוף.
 משלי טז: כח

The Zohar in explicating this verse states:

Who is the chief? This refers to the Holy One Blessed Be He (For He is the Chief of the world).

Zohar, Tzav no. 98

מאן הוא אלוף דא קודשא בריך הוא (דאיהו אלוף
 של עולם).
 זוהר, פרשת צו אות צח

When man sins, he drives a wedge between himself and his Creator, further distancing himself from the Ribbono Shel Olam.

Perhaps, homiletically we can suggest that the *Aluph* mentioned in this verse is connected to the letter Aleph. When one sins, he causes a division in the word גאולה, the sinner removes the Aleph from that word and transforms it into גולה (exile). When humanity eliminates Hashem, the *Alupho Shel Olam* (Chief of the world), from their lives, they bring about an existence absent of God, and are removed from His dwelling.

In a similar vein, we know that the letter Aleph has the numerical value of one:

Who knows one? I know one. One is Hashem, our God in the heavens and the earth.

Passover Haggadah

אחד מי יודע? אחד אני יודע. אחד אלוקינו
 שבשמים ובארץ.
 הגדה של פסח

This famous passage that we recite at the culmination of the Pesach seder has early roots in our tradition.

The Talmud Yerushalmi teaches:

There is no one except for the Holy One Blessed be He, as it says, Hear O Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One.

Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:1

אין אחד אלא הקב"ה כמה דת מר שמע
 ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד.
 תלמוד ירושלמי, סנהדרין י:א

The Aleph in גאולה also signifies the Oneness of Hashem. When the Jewish people restore Hashem into their daily routine, when we begin to truly live a God-conscious existence, we then convert our exile into redemption.

We can further develop this idea based on the comments of the Midrash:

And the one who spoke against his creator (referring to the primordial snake) and said that you will not die, he has separated the chief; he has separated the Aleph of the world and was immediately cursed.

Bereishis Rabbah no. 20

ונרגן שריגן דברים על בוראן, ואמר
לא מות תמותון, מפריד אלופ
שהפריד אלופו של עולם ומיד
נתקלל.
בראשית רבה פרשה כ

There is discussion among the commentaries on the Midrash as to who the Alupho Shel Olam is. According to the *Matnos Kehunah* it is a reference to Adam, who was at that time considered the chief of the world. However, the *Eitz Yosef* explains in line with the Zohar:

That he separated the chief etc.: This refers to the Creator blessed is He, the Master of the world. He (Adam) alienated Him from the world, through this sin the Shechinah left the world...

Eitz Yosef, ad loc.

שהפריד אלופ כו'. הוא
הבורא ית' אדונו של עולם. הפרידו
מן העולם שבחטא זה נסתלקה
שכינה מן העולם...
עץ יוסף שם

These two explanations come together in a remarkable way. When man distances himself from Hashem, when he chooses to ignore his spiritual side, he, in effect, has exiled himself from his creator. This in turn generates God's exile from this world. As Hashem withdraws His presence from a world that is unwelcoming to His Shechina, the state of *galus* sets in. When man dispenses with the Aleph that is within his potential, Hashem, in kind, removes His Aleph from the lower world, leaving this world in a state empty of the Shechinah.

When Adam turns to (Flesh and) Blood

The Shelah HaKadosh³ adds another important aspect to this idea. The Shelah explains that the Midrash is referencing the Aleph in Adam's name. When the snake influenced man to sin, he effected a major change to Adam's fundamental character. He successfully eliminated the Aleph from Adam's name leaving him with just the letters דם (blood).

In light of what we have discussed earlier, we can better understand this revolution. What makes man the most unique creation in this world is that he is composed of the physical and the spiritual. He is a composite of blood (דם) and Aleph (א) which represents his spiritual dimension, the part which serves as a home to the One (א) above. Together they unite to become אדם (man).

When man chooses to sin, he drives away the Aleph (א) and is left with blood (דם). He becomes a mere physical being, devoid of his spiritual character. Thus he is referred to as merely flesh and blood, not much different than any other creature.

We read in the very beginning of Divrei HaYamim (Chronicles):

Adam, Shes, Enosh.

Divrei Hayamim I 1:1

אדם שש, אנוש.
דברי הימים א א:א

³ *Maseches Pesachim.*

What is noteworthy is that the letter Aleph (א) in Adam's name is quite large. What is the significance of this enlarged Aleph (א)?

Perhaps there is a profound lesson we are to learn from this. Although we must recognize that man is multidimensional, involving a complex structure and an amalgamation of both the physical and spiritual, we must always remember that there exists a hierarchy. We are required to always position the spiritual dimension of the individual as primary. The enlarged Aleph is to remind man to ensure that his spiritual side, his Aleph (א) should tower over his blood (דם)—that Godliness should radiate from his body to the extent that it outshines his corporal features.

And he (Moshe) said, for the hand is on the chair of God, (there will be) a war of Hashem with Amalek, from generation to generation.

Shemos 17:16

Why is chair spelled kais (כס without the Aleph) and not kisei (כסא), and also (why is) the name of God divided in half? (The answer is that) Hakadosh Baruch Hu swore that His name will be incomplete and His chair will be incomplete until the name of Amalek will be destroyed. And when its name will be obliterated, then Hashem and His chair will be complete.

Rashi, ad loc.

וַיֹּאמֶר, כִּי-יָד עַל-כִּסֵּי-יְהוָה,
מִלְחָמָה לְה', בְּעַמְלֵק--מִדֹּר,
דָּר.
שְׁמוֹת יוֹטוּ
...ומהו כס, ולא נאמר כסא,
ואף השם נחלק לחציו, נשבע
הקב"ה שאין שמו שלם ואין
כסאו שלם עד שימחה שמו
של עמלק כולו, וכשימחה שמו
יהיה השם שלם והכסא שלם,
רש"י שם

The interpretation of Rashi notwithstanding, we still must clarify why the Torah chose to leave the Aleph (א) absent. Why not omit the כ or the ס of כסא (chair)? Perhaps we can better understand this using the ideas presented earlier. As long as Amalek is in this world, God's name is incomplete. That is because Amalek is the antithesis of anything spiritual. It represents the Adam without the Aleph (א), a world without Hashem. Until the point where evil is eradicated from this world, Earth, which serves as the throne of God, will be deficient of His Shechinah. For this reason, it is precisely the Aleph (א) that is omitted from this word.

The sefer *Ahavas Shalom*⁴ adds a beautiful insight to the idea that we have developed. He explains that the Hebrew word *dam* (דם, blood) is the same numerical value (גימטריא) as the word exile (גולה), which equals 44. When man lives a life devoid of Hashem, he is essentially in exile from his real self. He is living a life of mere flesh and blood. Redemption (גאולה) is the point when we reinsert Hashem back into our lives. The numerical value of redemption (גאולה) is equivalent to the word Adam (אדם). When we live a life with the Aleph (א), with Hashem, then we will experience the redemption.

Conclusion

We all mourn for the destruction of our Beis HaMikdash. We all grieve for our current state of exile. Yet let us once again take note and look carefully at the world's very first expulsion. When Adam and Chava were banished from Gan Eden, Hashem placed guardians to ensure that they did not return.

⁴ *Parshas Emor, s.v. Usefartem.*

And He (Hashem) banished man and He placed Cherubim in the east side of Gan Eden, and (He positioned) the revolving flaming sword to guard the entrance to the tree of life.

Bereishis 3:24

וַיִּגְרֹשׁ, אֶת-הָאָדָם; וַיִּשְׁכֵּן מִקְדָּם לְגִן-עֵדֶן אֶת-הַכְּרֻבִים,
וְאֵת לַהֲטֵ הַחֶרֶב הַמְתַּהַפֶּכֶת, לִשְׁמֹר, אֶת-דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ
הַחַיִּים.

בראשית ג:כד

The Ba'al Shem Tov asks a penetrating question. If Hashem really did not want Adam and Chava to return, why did he not build a gigantic wall at the entrance?

His answer is inspiring. Hashem chose the revolving sword because He wanted to allow them a chance to return, a chance to slip through the sword's rotation. If this is true for Adam and Chava, it is also true for us. If man truly desires to end his state of exile (גלות), he has the ability to do so. We are in control of our own destiny. When we begin to allow Hashem re-entry into our homes and into our lives, then Hashem lets us back in to His home and His land. When we restore the Aleph (א) to Adam (אדם), then Hashem restores the Aleph (א) to Geulah (גאולה).

May we be merit the hasty arrival of the *Geulah Sheleimah* (Ultimate Redemption).