



## CELEBRATING PARTIAL TRIUMPH

Imagine for a moment you were tasked with reconstructing, from memory, the *tefillot* we recite on Purim night. Some components of the prayer service are easy to conjure up and quickly come to mind: the recitation of Maariv, filled with eager anticipation for the Megillah reading to follow; the reading of the Megillah itself; the singing (and, in a pre-COVID world, dancing) of *Shoshanat Yaakov*. But, for most of us, other parts of the *tefillah* do not leave the same impression. Once *Shoshanat Yaakov* has ended, the excitement has faded, and the hunger of *Taanit Esther* sets in, we recite a host of additional prayers that we all-too-often mutter as we are halfway out the door, rushing to our break-fast meals. And while it is difficult to label those additional prayers a highlight of the Purim liturgy, in truth, in their own subtle way they communicate a central theme of our Purim celebration.



At the beginning of a discussion of the Purim *tefillot*, the *Tur* (O"CH 693) records a debate regarding whether or not we should recite *U-Va Le-Tzion Goel* — a brief paragraph that we say daily toward the end of Shacharit — after the Purim-night reading of the Megillah. While Rav Amram Gaon would recite the paragraph immediately following Megillah reading, others, the *Tur* notes, felt the prayers should not be said at night. The *Tur* explains that the paragraph of *U-va Le-Tzion* primarily discusses themes of salvation and redemption. Because the Purim redemption was only completed during the daytime

— in the words of the *Tur*: *Ein ikar ha-geula ba-layla* — the essence of the redemption did not primarily occur at night — the paragraph should only be recited during daytime prayers.

The debate is reminiscent of a similar *machloket* that appears in *Masekhet Berakhot* (4B). The Gemara there discusses the principle of *semikhut geulah le-tefillah*, the halakhic obligation to ensure that the *berakha* of *Ga'al Yisrael*, which we recite immediately before Shemoneh Esrei, proceeds directly into the Shemoneh Esrei without any intervening interruption. While all agree that this principle applies during Shacharit, we encounter debate as to whether the principle should apply to Maariv as well. On the one hand, Rabbi Yochanan tells us that *semikhut geulah le-tefillah* should apply to Maariv as well as Shacharit, and one who is scrupulous in observing this attains the exalted status of “*ben*

*Olam Ha-ba*.” On the other hand, the Gemara records the opinion of Rabbi Yeshoshua Ben Levi, who maintains that *semikhut geulah le-tefillah* is unnecessary in the evening prayers.

The Gemara offers several explanations for the *machloket*, but in one, Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi’s reasoning is nearly identical to the second opinion quoted by the *Tur*: *semikhut geulah le-tefillah* is all about the redemption from Egypt, and that *geulah* was only completed during the daytime. Hence, the practice of *semikhut geulah le-tefillah* should be reserved for the daytime prayer of Shacharit, and should not be observed at the nighttime prayer of Maariv.

At the heart of each dispute appears to be a question pertaining to how we view partial or incomplete *geulah*. For one school of thought, partial or incomplete redemption is hardly worthy of recognition, let alone celebration. If daytime is the primary time of *geulah*, then liturgically, the theme of *geulah* becomes the exclusive province of the daytime prayers, and we will not highlight the theme at all when we pray at night.

According to the second school of thought, however, redemption need not be complete to be worthy of liturgical inclusion. We say *U-va Le-tzion Goel* and we emphasize the berakha of *Ga’al Yisrael* at Maariv, despite the fact that neither the Purim redemption story nor the Exodus from Egypt was complete at night. Even partial steps toward redemption, and perhaps even anticipation of impending redemption, are part of the process of *geulah* and warrant recognition and appreciation.

While in practice, the *Shulchan Arukh* rules in accordance with the

*Tur*’s second opinion, the underlying premise of Rav Amram Gaon’s stance is central to the holiday of Purim. The Gemara, *Megillah* 14A, offers several reasons why we do not recite Hallel on Purim. According to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha, we do not recite Hallel because the miracle of Purim occurred outside of Eretz Yisrael, and we do not recite Hallel over miracles that occurred in Chutz La-aretz. In another approach, Rava tells us that the Exodus from Egypt warranted the recitation of Hallel because we went from being slaves to Pharaoh to serving Hashem exclusively; citing Tehillim 113:1, Rava interprets: *Hallelu Avdei Hashem ve-lo avdei Paroh* — praise those who serve Hashem and don’t serve Pharaoh. By contrast, in the Purim story, there was no such complete redemption; we started as *avdei Achashverosh* and ended *avdei Achashverosh*. Even though the immediate existential threat of Haman and his plot to destroy the Jewish people was miraculously averted, at the end of Megillat Esther, the Jews were still the subjects of Achashverosh. Both approaches highlight the incomplete character of the Purim redemption story.

Yet, even as we omit Hallel on Purim, we still celebrate. Purim, and in certain ways, the halakhically similar holiday of Chanukah, stand as models of our ability to celebrate and appreciate even partial and incomplete redemption stories.

Often, we tend to think of *geulah* in the kind of binary terms espoused by the first school of thought outlined above: *geulah* is by its very nature complete, and, when incomplete, it cannot truly be considered *geulah* at all. When we use the term *geulah*, and particularly when we use it in

reference to the *Geulah Sheleimah*, the Final and Complete Redemption, we at times deliberately and at times subconsciously connote a redemption that is whole. “Redemption” has a ring of finality to it.

And yet, if we attempt to translate that perception of *geulah* to our day-to-day lived experiences, we are all-too-often left with nothing to celebrate at all. Moments of complete redemption are difficult to come by, while life is filled with half-victories and partial triumphs. Frequently, the victories we do achieve open up their own set of new concerns and anxieties. A close family friend recently entered remission from cancer after months of grueling treatment. He noted that, now that he had finally achieved the coveted “clean scan” that he had aspired to since diagnosis, he now spends his days divided between inexpressible gratitude and paralyzing fear over the possibility of relapse. On his better days, he succeeds in focusing on the former.

And while, for most of us, that tension is far less acute, to some degree it is present for us all. We all have moments when we figuratively contemplate whether the partial *geulot* of our lives are truly worthy of celebration. And in those moments, the holiday of Purim stands as a model. When we recite the *Al ha-Nissim* prayer on Purim and thank Hashem for the great-but-incomplete miracles that He did for our ancestors, we remember to also thank Him for the *nissim she-bekhol yom imanu* — the daily miracles wrought for us every day — that we mention in the very same prayer of *Modim*. Purim inspires us to appreciate those incomplete miracles that fill and animate our lives.