

Yom Kippur: Are Geula and Teshuva identical?

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The gemara in Yoma (86b) proclaims

גדולה תשובה שמקרבת את הגאולה

"Teshuva is glorious since it hastens redemption". Teshuva advances redemption in the same way that any other mitzvah promotes it. Redemption did not begin in 1948, but has been a cumulative project, stretching across centuries. Each and every mitzvah, prayer, good deed, and page of Torah studied over the past two thousand years have aggregated, and together, they all advance history toward redemption. Seventy-four years ago, the redemptive process took a spectacular leap forward and shifted from the backstage of history to the front stage. Teshuva, like any other mitzvah or religious activity, hastens redemption.

A Precondition?

Teshuva doesn't merely contribute to redemption, but is part of its texture. Redemption is not just a political, national, or geographical shift, but is, fundamentally, a spiritual rehabilitation. All of humanity discovers Hashem, flocks to the epicenter of Yerushalayim, and acknowledges the Jews as the people chosen to represent Hashem. Without teshuva redemption is hollow.

The gemara in Sanhedrin (97) cites the drastic opinion of Rabbi Eliezer that redemption cannot occur until the entire Jewish nation undergoes mass teshuva. Rabbi Yehoshua argues, instead envisioning an unconditional redemptive process, independent of national teshuva. Yet, even Rabbi Yehoshua concedes that mass teshuva is integral to the Messianic process. It may not be a prerequisite for redemption, but will be kickstarted by geula, and then will then spread to all of humanity.

So, teshuva *contributes* to redemption and is also the *platform* of redemption. But is teshuva *synonymous* with redemption? Are they one and the same? You would think not, and you would be right if you were assessing teshuva and geula purely empirically. They are completely different phenomena: teshuva is a spiritual recovery which restores

human beings to a pre-sin condition of nearness to Hashem. Geula is the historical terminus, in which all of humanity recognizes Hashem, acknowledges Jewish selection, and enjoys universal prosperity. Teshuva is essential to redemption, and is possibly a precondition to redemption, but it isn't redemption *itself*.

### Rav Kook's Teshuva

Rav Kook revolutionized teshuva and its relationship with geula by mapping its kabbalistic impact. Classically, teshuva, is perceived as a recovery from individual sin or from national breakdown. If teshuva is a *repair*, it is not necessary under ideal conditions without sin. Of course, human nature is frail, sin is overwhelmingly likely, and when we fail Hashem offers us the gift of teshuva to mend our ruptured relationship.

For Rav Kook, teshuva is not a repair of human failure, but is "built in" to our universe and is native to creation. Kabbalah (specifically the kabbalah of the Ari Hakadosh) illustrates that all reality wasn't merely *created* by Hashem but *stems directly* from His essence. As Hashem is the source of all reality, there cannot be any part of the cosmos which doesn't emanate from His essence.

### Realignment and Re-integration

During creation all reality stemmed from Hashem, but became separated from Him. Hashem is both non-physical and indivisible, but the created world is both physical and divided. Having been separated from Hashem into physical matter, the entire cosmos is in a state of "crisis", and constantly craves to be reunified with Hashem. This constant surging toward "restored integration" with Hashem – which Rav Kook labels as cosmic *ratzon*-sustains reality and is found in all of creation, including inanimate items. This longing for realignment with the essence of Hashem is the spiritual basis of our world.

This innate *ratzon* which suffuses and "drives" all reality is "kabbalistic" teshuva, and similar to all kabbalistic elements, is metaphysical and empirically untraceable. This form of teshuva has little to do with sin and little to do with Man. Attesting to a higher function of teshuva beyond our small world, the gemara comments: תשובה קדמה לעולם - teshuva preceded the creation of our world. If teshuva were exclusively a response to human sin, it would have been irrelevant before the

creation of our world or before Man's first sin. Evidently, teshuva streams through all of creation and not just through human experience.

#### Human choice

Man is the only part of creation which has a choice about this larger teshuva *surge*. Sin separates Man not just from Hashem, but from his world, since it hinders our ability to recognize this "cosmic alignment" with Hashem and to sync with it. When our lives become desynchronized with the overall harmony between "reality" and Hashem's essence, we suffer physically, mentally and intellectually since we are severed from reality.

Through teshuva we resynchronize ourselves with our surrounding universe and with its inner *ratzon* toward Hashem. By restoring alignment with Hashem, teshuva introduces health, wisdom, inner serenity and perfected human experience. Furthermore, by realigning himself with the *ratzon* of Hashem and, by extension, with the world, Man provides the final piece of a fully restored integration.

That fully integrated state is *both* teshuva *and* geula. It is the endpoint of history, and the completion of a cosmic process of restored "integration" with Hashem's will. Teshuva isn't a precondition for geula nor is it merely an accelerant for geula. Teshuva and geula are one and the same. When all reality aligns with Hashem, the long process of re-integration will conclude, restoring a pristine and perfect metaphysical condition- for the entire cosmos and not just our planet. Geula *is* teshuva and teshuva *is* geula.

#### Light not darkness

This broader view of teshuva transforms the *psychological* landscape of the teshuva process. As this inner *ratzon* or surge toward cosmic "teshuva" is innate to the universe, teshuva becomes an inevitable outcome. If teshuva is a purely a human experience, it is subject to the unpredictability of human decisions. Once teshuva is broadened into an intrinsic "force" which sustains all reality, it is predestined. It is bound to occur.

Since it is bound to occur, teshuva should be navigated with confidence rather than with uncertainty or trepidation. Classic teshuva is a journey of doubt: will Hashem accept my penitence, and will He forgive my sins? Cosmic teshuva, however, is a certainty, and therefore, personal teshuva, which is a component of this larger teshuva is also certain.

Confidence in the outcome of teshuva also modifies the *emotional* landscape of teshuva. Classic teshuva transports us to a very dark place of remorse and mortification over our sins. Our hearts are drenched with sorrow and sadness over lost opportunities and our exasperating weaknesses. By contrast, Rav Kook's cosmic teshuva with its capacity to align us with all reality and with the will of Hashem, is a joyful and bright opportunity. Appropriately, his sefer is called Orot Ha'teshuva, and it depicts "radiant repentance" rather than gloomy contrition or heartbroken atonement. The sun always rises on teshuva.

#### A delicate balance

Rav Kook himself stresses that these revolutionary ideas should not supplant the classic modes of teshuva, but should provide an additional and higher plane of teshuva imagination. Broadening teshuva to a larger cosmic narrative should not replace individual teshuva experience and should not distract from authentic personal introspection. Confidence about teshuva's outcome shouldn't moderate the uneasiness and apprehension of standing before Hashem in judgement. The sunny and cheerful joy of "radiant teshuva" should not block us from grieving over our painful failures and betrayals. Just because we search for the radiance of "sunny" teshuva doesn't mean we shouldn't *also* gaze into the mirror in horror at monstrosities peering back at us.

Orot Ha'teshuva allows us to transcend the particular and reflect upon the universal, to leap beyond the immediate and grasp the eternity of teshuva. It gives us wings to soar beyond the narrow cubicles of our own selves and our own struggles, and to cast our personal teshuva journey as part of a larger narrative of all-encompassing and universal return to Hashem. We are not alone.