

Geulas Yisarel #96

Yom Ha'atzmaut

The Flower and the Final Room

Moshe Taragin

Specific details about our redemption are intentionally suppressed. Both Ya'akov avinyu and the navi Daniel were barred from disclosing redemptive roadmaps. Hashem prefers that His geulah process remain oblique and hidden.

Despite the camouflaging of redemption Chazal provide several metaphors to illuminate the process. As redemption is multi-layered it can only be distilled through a blend of metaphors.

The Yerushalmi in Yoma portrays two Talmudic scholars visiting the Kinneret region during sunrise. Watching the first streaks of sunlight pierce the eastern sky, one of them likened geulah to a sunrise: it will be launched in small increments but will gather momentum and explode upon history. IN 1947, upon hearing of the UN partition plan, the Gerer Rebbe quoted this gemara, assuring a skeptical nation that geulah will evolve קימעא קימעא - in small fragments.

An additional midrash likens geulah to a construction process. Famously, Dovid announced מגדול ישועות מלכו, framing redemption as the construction of a fortress. While stressing the gradual nature of redemption, this image also underscores that final geulah is pivoted upon an edifice in Yerushalayim- the Beit HaMikdash. It remains unclear during which stage of geulah it will be crafted and whether our Mikdash will be fashioned by human hand or miraculously provided by Divine grant. Either way, redemption is construction process- literally and figuratively.

A third midrash adapts a pasuk in Shir Hashirim and compares redemption to a deer. A deer is stealthy as it appears and, suddenly, disappears from view, slipping behind a thicket. Though it is no longer visible it hasn't absconded, and will soon reappear. During moments of geulah Hashem may seem to disappear, but He is merely "hiding behind a bush" ready to leap out and finalize our redemption.

The flowering

While each of these vivid tanach-based metaphors capture the grandeur of redemption, the modern Jewish imagination has developed an additional metaphor. In perek 6, Zechariah refers to Moshiach as a tzemach or a *flower* which experiences rapid growth or יצמח . Based upon this flower image the term צמיחת גאולתינו has institutionalized itself as the phrase of modern Jewish redemption. Though many allege that Rav Kook coined this phrase our first

historical record stems from 1956, when this phrase was incorporated into the prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel authored by Chief Rabbi Herzog.

Despite the ubiquity of this phrase, it has aroused significant questioning and even controversy. This ambitious phrase raises grand Messianic expectations which haven't always materialized. In the aftermath of the Oslo accords and the disengagement from Aza many wondered whether the flower had wilted, rather than having blossomed. After all, if redemption promises sovereignty in Israel, withdrawal from parcels of land in Israel cannot be considered a blossoming of redemption. Some even suggested altering the wording of this phrase to reflect unfulfilled visions. Other Jews never saw our return to Israel as the first flowering of redemption. They don't view restoration of Jewish sovereignty as a divinely event and don't recite this prayer. In their minds the flower hadn't wilted, it was never planted by Hashem in the first place.

As someone who does affirm this phrase and does recite the prayer, I acknowledge that for many it doesn't fully resonate. Is there a different metaphor which is more universal and more broadly resonant? Is there a fifth metaphor for redemption? Is there a way to describe the process which acknowledges the potential for setbacks and, also, doesn't directly assume a divine hand in our return to our State?

The Rooms of History

Perhaps we should be describing our *era*, instead of speculating about the *process*. Why not refer to our *era* as the *fourth room* of Jewish history? Let me explain.

1st room: Pre-Sinai

There are four chapters to Jewish history. The first chapter was a 2400-year pre-Sinai era in which Hashem had yet to directly reveal Himself, His will, and His Torah to a human audience. Sadly, most of humanity was adrift in theological confusion and moral mayhem. Unable to grasp the notion that from One came many, they imagined a world dominated by multiple warring gods, who toyed with their weaker human playthings. Without accountability to One moral God, moral behavior of humans was never expected.

Finally, about 2000 years after creation, one man discovered Hashem from behind the curtain of Nature. He began to educate his world to monotheism, while starting a family fashioned after the will of a compassionate G-d. Eventually, the nation he founded was dispatched to Egyptian slavery, and almost completely abandoned their grandfather's traditions. Thankfully, at the last minute, we were redeemed and were quickly escorted into the second room of Jewish history.

2nd Room: Redemption and Revelation

Liberated from Egypt, we stood beneath Har Sinai and experienced a once-in-history event. No religion has ever dared stake our claim: an entire nation of three million strong stood shoulder-to-shoulder, jointly listening to the direct voice of Hashem in a non-hallucinatory fashion. Har

Sinai marked the launch of a 1400-year golden era of Jewish history during which we enjoyed sovereignty and supernaturalism. We lived secure in our homeland centered upon the Mikdash and Yerushalayim, with unlimited access to prophecy and divine privilege. Though prophecy and ru'ach hakodesh ebbed during the second Mikdash, we still encountered the palpable presence of Hashem in Yerushalayim. Sadly, and pathetically, we fell victim to civil strife and tore ourselves apart from within, sinking any hope and wrecking our nation and our Mikdash. Our repeated failure, dating back to the first Mikdash, condemned us to enter the third room of history- the darkest room of them all.

3rd Room: The Dark Room

Scattered among the people's of this earth, we spent 2000 years wrestling with history. Stripped of almost every vestige of Jewish identity, we clung tightly to the Word and Will of Hashem and proved to be stronger than history and more faithful than our enemies presumed. We stoutly defended the presence of Hashem in a world darkened by savagery and violence.

Not only did we survive this maze, but we thrived. Not only did we thrive, but we gradually reshaped the ancient world of black magic, paganism and backwardness, into a modern world of monotheism, science and progress. As the vanguard of humanity, we helped it recover from its 1000-year hibernation and helped humanity discover science, morality, and the dignity of the human condition. The culmination of this process saw the world shift into the last chapter of history, as we entered the final room.

4th Room: The Exit Room

In 1948 we turned a door handle and entered the final room of history. The Holocaust marked a terrible and tragic climax to the third chapter of Jewish history. As a horrific conclusion to the third chapter of history, it represented the single greatest chilul Hashem since the destruction of the Mikdash 1900 years earlier.

We have now entered the final room, through which we walk and through which we will access the terminus of history we refer to as redemption. However, we are walking through a *room*. How long will it take to traverse the room? It is hard to tell. Can there be detours and diversions during our passage through this room? Of course, there can be. Is this a divinely inspired process? I believe that it is, but even for those who don't, undoubtedly history has shifted, and we are all in a completely different place or room than we were a hundred years ago. Walking through that fourth room poses new challenges and demands different responses than those of the previous three rooms.

Redemption, by its very nature, mystifies human imagination. We have no concrete details, only a cluster of redemptive metaphors. No one metaphor fully captures the full vision of this seismic transformation. The more metaphors we conjure, the more visible redemption becomes.

Let us all walk through the final room together. Some of us are holding a flower in our hands, but all of us are walking side-by side through the same room.

Yom Ha'atzmaut Sameiach