

## Geulas Yisrael #101

### Geulah and Tefillah

Twice daily, we recite a constitution of Jewish belief which has been incorporated into keriyat shema. This religious charter combines three sections of the Torah, each of which summarizes a different seminal foundation of Jewish belief.

The first paragraph outlines basic theological tenets: the exclusivity of Hashem, His indivisibility and His selection of our people. He is the universal "echad" but is also "Elokeinu", our G-d, who selected us as His chosen nation. The ensuing pasuk demands that we, somehow, translate our belief in Him into a love for him: **ואהבת את ה' אלוקיך**. Though we can't describe Him, we are passionately devoted to Him. Our words and thoughts can't capture Him, but our hearts are drawn to Him. This remarkable combination of pure monotheism, coupled with loving dedication has been the historical and religious trademark of our people. This religious blend is our gift to humanity and, one day, they will fully appreciate it.

The second paragraph of shema transforms religious belief into ritual behavior. Accepting divine authority without bearing the yoke of mitzvot is vacant. Religion is not just about belief, but about actions, not just thinking, but doing. Hashem's will innervates every nook and cranny of human experience, anchoring every moment to divine experience.

The third and final section of shema, excerpted from parshat Shelach references yetziat Mitzrayim: **אני ה' אלוקיכם אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים**. Hashem didn't merely create our world, winding it as clock to run on its own internal gears. He daily supervises and interacts with His world, as was first demonstrated by his dramatic intervention in Egypt, when He altered Nature, history, science, politics, and human psychology. The final paragraph of shema showcases Hashem's imminence in, and contact with, our world.

Shema blends emunah, mitzvot and hasgachah. Faith, observance and Providence: the three legs of our religious table.

### Elaborating Redemption

Following the final section of shema which mentioned redemption, Chazal introduced additional tefillot and berachot to expound upon our first redemption from Egypt. Shacharit contains one additional redemptive blessing, which concludes with the phrase of גאל ישראל, while arvit includes two additional berachot of geulah, one concluding with the identical phrase of גאל ישראל , with the second blessing closing with a more generic phrase of שומר עמו ישראל לעד, acknowledging Hashem's general protective care. Despite minor differences, shacharit and arvit each display the same "redemptive embroidery" stitched on to the final section of shema. The berachot of geulah embellish the brief mention of geulah contained in the third section of shema.

### Redemption and Tefillah

At this stage, having recited shema and having subsequently pondered redemption, we immediately begin shmoneh esrei prayers. This alignment between redemptive memories and actual tefillah is referred to as סומך גאולה לתפילה. Extolling the importance of this juxtaposition between geulah and tefillah, the gemara guarantees entry into the next world for those who merge these two features. To assure contiguity, halacha forbids any interruption between the geulah section and the ensuing beginning of shmoneh esrei.

Explaining the significance of this juxtaposition, many claim that the blessings of geulah function as a *preface* to prayer. Without prior mention of redemption, prayer would be impolite and even offensive. Without redemptive context, prayer is self-interested, and egotistical. It is embarrassing to stand in the presence of Hashem and selfishly "rifle off" a battery of personal petitions and greedy requests. When framed by redemptive memories, however, prayers are more dignified and more honorable. Redemption casts our personal lives as part of the broader national journey which we traverse along with Hashem. Redemptive consciousness lends our personal lives historical resonance, and casts our personal requests within a wider partnership with Hashem. The juxtaposition of prayer and geulah "redeems" prayer from its pettiness and confers it with historical gravitas and grandeur. Geulah is a vital *preface* to tefillah.

### Redemptive Duties

By contrast, Rabeinu Yonah, a 13<sup>th</sup> century colleague and student of the Ramban, asserted that this twinning of geulah and prayer doesn't ennoble prayer, but *enhances* geulah. Redemptive memory is incomplete without subsequent prayer. Geulah doesn't *preface* tefillah, tefillah is a necessary *suffix* to redemptive memory. Having recalled redemption, our prayer reminds us of our resulting duties.

### Redemptive Duty

Redemption isn't merely a privilege but a historical mandate. We are not redeemed for comfort or luxury, but for mission and historical calling. Without redemptive duty, geulah becomes self-indulgent. Redemption only liberates us from human constraints so we can better serve Hashem. The initial Exodus from Egypt unchained us from human tyranny, enabling our embrace of divine command. Likewise, our final redemption will emancipate us from historical and cultural oppression, heighten religious consciousness and empower us to better recognize Hashem. Without an upgrade in religious commitment, redemption remains hollow.

As it is predicated upon religious commitment and upon hierarchy, prayer is the perfect supplement to redemption. The gemara in Ta'anit derives the obligation of prayer from the phrase לעבדו בכל לבבכם which demands an emotional "service of the heart". Prayer assumes dependence on Hashem and implies hierarchy and divine authority. It acknowledges human frailty while affirming divine majesty. The profile of "eved Hashem" is latent within redemption, but is magnified by prayer.

### Ritual or Mission?

Ideally, geulah intensifies our commitment to Hashem, which, in turn, yields greater Torah study and stricter adherence to mitzvot. Thankfully, in the wake of our return to Israel, there has been a dramatic surge of both. Even if this phenomenal improvement in avodat Hashem can't be directly traced to life in Israel, it is still, unquestionably, generated by the start of our redemption. Torah and geulah are always related, even though that link may not be apparent to the untrained eye.

Even when not expressed through ritual commitment or Torah study, post-redemptive commitment to Hashem is expressed by dedication to

Jewish history and to Jewish peoplehood. A life of mission to the Jewish people is also a fulfillment of post-redemptive duties.

### When Were You Born?

Human beings are intentionally implanted into specific stages of history. Had we been born 100 years ago, we would have fled Nazi persecution, rather than enjoyed the radiance of redemption. Having been born into our era, we are haunted by a lingering existential question: why did Hashem place us in a redemptive era? Why were we chosen above previous generations? We will never know the answers to those questions, but we must shoulder the burdens and duties of redemption. Geulah isn't a free ride, but a historical calling. Prayer symbolizes the consequence and duty of redemption and is therefore a fitting sequel to geulah.

Redemptive privilege and redemptive duty walk hand in hand. Privilege and duty always do. Taking the first without bearing the latter is greedy and immoral.

### Redemptive Faith

Tefillah enunciates a second crucial takeaway of redemption. Watching Hashem descend into our world and reorder it for Jewish destiny should bolster faith. At the Yam Suf, Hashem quieted a roaring ocean, igniting our faith and rousing our poetic imaginations. We chanted Az Yashir and prophesized about the land of Israel and the house of G-d: ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו

Prayer presupposes emunah and faith. We trust that Hashem listens and compassionately responds to our prayers. We don't always understand the answer, but our prayers don't go unheeded. By supplementing our geulah with tefillah, we reinforce our Emunah, a faith which redemption both supplies, and demands of us.

Throughout our exile, enduring a darkened world with a veiled presence of Hashem, we tenaciously maintained our faith. During this period our emunah was forged in suffering and in blood. History has now turned bolstering us with the faith of redemption and of Jewish triumph. Having lived through the initial stages of Hashem's master plan we have been

armored with faith. It is our redemptive duty to maintain strong faith even as the twists and turns of redemption swerve their way to the finish line of history.

Redemptive joy and redemptive responsibility walk hand in hand.