

Geulas Yisrael 147

Pesach: Will Geulah Be Selective Or Inclusive?

Aside from everything else, Yetziat Mitzrayim was a logistical miracle. Approximately 3.5 million newly liberated Jewish slaves were joined by a large faction of “eirev rav” Egyptians, which some accounts put as high as another 3.5 million people. Essentially, 7 million people had to be assembled, transported and fed. Only blind faith in Hashem could convince us to follow Him into an arid and dangerous desert. Hashem never forgot our innocent and youthful faith:

זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך לכך אחרי במדבר בארץ לא זרועה

These staggering numbers could have been much larger. A well-known Midrash asserts that only 20% of the Jewish population left Egypt. The Torah describes our triumphant departure from Egypt with an intriguing term:

חמושים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים

Based on the “numeric” tone of the word חמושים, Chazal claimed that only 1 in 5 Jews departed Egypt, the remaining 80% being removed during the week of makkat Choshech, under the cover of darkness. Had the entire nation departed Egypt, the numbers would have been closer to 15 million. Whether Chazal are being precise or merely rounding off and approximating, only a small percentage of our people were redeemed from Egypt. As stunning and history-altering as Yetziat Mitzrayim was, only a small segment of our people was redeemed.

Will Selective Redemption Recur?

Everything in Jewish history is cyclical – what happened before will happen again. Redemption is *certainly* cyclical and our redemption from Egypt created a paradigm for future redemptions. The original night of Pesach was referred to as ליל שימורים and, was a template for future geulah:

שימורים לכל בני ישראל לדורותם

The Exodus from Egypt created a historical carve-out which would shape Jewish history.

Will our final geulah also be selective? If Egypt created a pattern for future redemptions will only a small fragment of our people be redeemed? Some assert this view, especially given the large percentage of our people, both in Israel and abroad, who have abandoned classic Orthodox observance and traditions. Perhaps they are the 80% who will not survive the end of Jewish history.

What *is* the difference between the selective redemption of Mitzrayim and our final and all-inclusive redemption of every single Jew? How will every Jew be redeemed despite the major shifts in the Jewish world away from traditional halachik behavior? How will geulah include “*acheinu kol* beis Yisrael”?

Faith and Land

Despite our tendency to glorify the past, Chazal paint a harsh portrait of the Jews in Egypt. Most of their religious traditions completely collapsed. Chazal laud their preservation of national identity and their maintaining Jewish dress, language and names. The implication is that their theological faith and ritual practice eroded. A Midrash cites the complaints of the angels at keriyat yam suf: Jews had fallen into the pagan culture, and it seemed unjust that Egyptians drown, while Jews cross the dry ocean bed.

It is impossible to correlate between Jews who worshipped other gods and those who didn't survive redemption, but it is easy to imagine that many of those excluded from yetziat Mitzrayim were those whose defection to idolatry rendered them unfit for a newly rebuilt nation of monotheists. As they had completely turned their back on the monotheistic revolution of Avraham, they could not participate in Jewish destiny. They had exited Jewish history.

At our stage of history, the situation is completely different. Throughout our tortured exile, we faced endless hostility and persecution, yet, we stoutly defended Hashem's presence. At no point did we abdicate belief in one G-d and at no point did we voluntarily defect to other religions. Sadly, many Jews have strayed from halachik observance and even, in some cases, from basic tenets of

faith, but they haven't pledged allegiance to other gods. By and large, our people haven't turned our back on Avraham's revolution of consciousness.

In addition to the merits of our monotheistic legacy, modern-day Jews possess an additional merit which includes them in redemption. The Jews of Egypt hadn't yet entered the land of Israel, while our generation is privileged to live in the land of Hashem and to fulfill his divine promise and historical design. For the past century we have tirelessly built our homeland despite the violent opposition of a world which still denies our Biblical rights to Israel. We have demonstrated courage, patriotism, and commitment to Jewish history. Even in the absence of personal merit, commitment to our homeland is sufficient to justify redemption.

זכרתי יאת בריתי יעקב ואף את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכור והארץ אזכור

Even those who have abandoned the lifestyle and calling of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov still enjoy the zechut of Eretz Yisrael.

This is the reason why, on Pesach night, we cite the *Arami Oved Avi* section of Ki Tavo. This four-pasuk synopsis of Yetziat Mitzrayim was recited while bringing Bikurim fruit to the Mikdash. By definition, only those who had entered Israel recited this summary of Yetziat Mitzrayim. Those who have the merit of living in Israel are never excluded from redemption.

In chapter 16, Yechezkeil compares the Jews in Egypt to a pre-adolescent girl. Chazal interpret this as a metaphor for our people who were barren of mitzvot and of any other merit. Jews today, even those who are barren of mitzvot, aren't barren of virtue. We have battled to build our homeland in the face of never-ending hostility and violence. Hashem embedded an ancient echo within every Jewish heart. Commitment to land, people, and history echoes even within hearts which have, sadly, abandoned Har Sinai. Our preservation of monotheism and our courage and defiance in settling Israel makes us all worthy of redemption.

Collective Historical Merit

We also possess collective historical merit. We are at a completely different stage of history. In Egypt we were an emerging nation with little to no national history and a nascent but yet-to-be-developed relationship with Hashem. Tasked with

redeeming us from Egypt, Moshe was baffled about introducing Hashem to downtrodden slaves, who had little exposure to Him. Our national experience with Hashem was first starting to evolve.

We are now at the tail end of history, and have been through a lot, on *behalf* of Hashem and *together with* Hashem. We have valiantly defended His presence in this world at great cost, often paying with our lives. Even if individual Jews may not possess sufficient merit to be redeemed, our people deserve a full-scale and all-inclusive geulah.

The metamorphosis of our relationship with Hashem through history is portrayed in Shir Hashirim, the great lyric of Jewish history. At the outset of the story the young girl-representing our people- is invited to join the Man-representing Hashem. She shyly defers the invitation, worried about foxes infiltrating the vineyard which her older brothers ordered her to guard. Beyond her technical excuses for not rendezvousing with the Man, this country girl from Ein Gedi seems intimidated by a king from a fancy palace in Yerushalayim adorned with ornate wood and plated with expensive gold and silver. They have no relationship and no common history.

By the end of the sefer, which refers to the end of history, the woman speaks a different tune, confidently inviting the Man or Hashem to return to the home she has steadfastly refurbished. Chazal attribute her confidence to Jewish heroism throughout history. In Egypt we possessed little collective merit, but at this stage in history our people have accumulated enough heroism to warrant a redemption which includes every member of our extended family.

The Covenant

Yetziat Mitzrayim occurred prior to our covenant with Hashem. Though Hashem had forged a proto-covenant with our ancestors, it hadn't yet been implemented on a national scale. Yetziat Mitzrayim forged us into a nation which would, seven weeks later, join a covenant with Hashem at Sinai. We are the people of that Brit.

A covenant isn't dependent upon personal merit or even upon collective behavior, but is absolute and immutable. Even though we don't always merit Hashem's favor we are locked together with Him in a historical covenant. Our brit assures

redemption for all members of the covenant, even for those who may not be fully aware of the connotations of our brit.

Grass or Sand?

In that same chapter 16, Yechezkeil compares our people in Egypt to blades of grass:

רבבה כצמח השדה נתתיך

Not every blade of grass is equal in quality and often, inferior blades are cut away to improve the quality of the remaining grass. In Egypt we may have been like grass, but long-term Jewish destiny is compared to sand and dust. Grains of sand are indistinguishable. It is almost impossible to separate grains of sand or particles of dust from one another. We are all part of one common covenant, first forged with our Avot, but later enshrined at Sinai.

זוכר חסדי אבות ומביא גואל לבני ביניהם למען שמו

One By One

Yeshayahu promises us:

ואתם תלוקטו אחד אחד

Hashem will select each and every Jew and return us to Yerushalayim. History has moved on since Yetziat Mitzrayim. Jews have merits. Our Jewish nation have merits. We all have a covenant. Redemption will not be selective.