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THE CONTINGENCY OF REDEMPTIVE PROCESSES: THOUGHTS AFTER A WEEK IN ISRAEL

By Rabbi Aryeh Klapper

This past Shabbat I was honored to give the shiur after davening at Kehillat B'Orkha in Yerushalayim. It meant the world to me to have an opportunity to teach purely *lishmoh*, without the pragmatic motive of attracting students to the Summer Beit Midrash. I had a moment to see myself as a contributor/*to'rem* rather than wallowing in golus guilt.

As a visitor, I felt the need to offer consolation for the community's losses before presuming to share my Torah. But public mourning is forbidden on Shabbat, and therefore public consolation is inappropriate.

So I began as follows:

What should a person do if called on to make a blessing publicly, if he or she knows that the blessing will be in vain, but declining risks an infringement of human dignity? Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked this question (so I was told decades ago by my teacher Rav Mordechai Willig), IIRC with regard to *sheva berakhot* after a *chuppah* that only the invited blesser knew had been halakhically invalid (perhaps the ring was borrowed?). Rav Feinstein cleverly suggested that the person begin studying a book that quotes the blessing, and start reading out loud when reaching the quote. This converts the blessing to Talmud Torah and so evades the problem of *berak'hab levatalah*.

It seems to me that the physical prop of the book is not strictly necessary. The point is to have intellectual rather than liturgical intent.

So let me share two linguistic points. 1. When the word *Hamakom* is used liturgically to represent G-d, and the context also mentions a specific place such as Yerushalayim, the intent is that G-d can be present in every place and yet fully present where we are. 2. Phrases such as "**amidst all the other** mourners of Tziyyon and Yerushalayim" are intended to situate the consoler as a mourner as well, as mourning with the consoled.

Having created a learning context, I felt that I could appropriately read the standard formula of consolation aloud. (Do you agree? Why or why not? Please email me your thoughts.)

And now on to Parashat Terumah (the shiur at B'Orkha was related to Parashat Mishpatim).

When was Parashat Terumah transmitted by Hashem to Mosheh?

A Tosafist tradition states that it was transmitted during the forty days after the Revelation at Sinai. Moshe was instructed to make a facsimile of Hashem's throne room, which He would then inhabit. The Jews were to be His surrounding honor guard on earth just as the angels are in the heavens. This plan is the basis of Psalms 82:6-7: "*I said 'You are e-lohim, and you are all members of the Upper World'*". But the sin of the Golden Calf interceded. "*Instead you will die as human beings; like any one of the princes you will fall.*"

It seems to me that according to this interpretation, Parshiyot Terumah and Tetzaveh are entirely hypothetical. This *terumah* is never brought; this *mishkan* is never built. The *terumah* specified in Shemot 35:5 is a replacement and not a belated fulfillment. Moreover, these parshiyot were obsolete before Mosheh conveyed them to Bnei Yisrael. So why are they in Torah at all?

I suspect that many readers have instinctively answered: *Derosh vekabeil sekhar!* That is the answer given on Sanhedrin 71a for the positions that the laws of the Rebellious Son, Idolatrous City, and/or the Leprous House "never were, and never will be".

Honestly, that is less an answer than a begging of the question. The obvious follow-up is: Why does one receive reward for studying material with no practical implications?

But I think this case is different regardless; if anything, it can teach about the others rather than being learnt from them. I wonder whether anyone has imagined-in-depth a counterhistorical Torah world in which the Rebellious Son etc. were ordinary practical areas of halakhah.

Here I suggest that the point is to make us reflect on what might have been. More strongly: the point is to make us understand that linear progression to fulfillment of authentic Divine plans is never inevitable. Hashem can (k'b'yakhol) pivot instantaneously in response to sin. This was true of the original Mishkan, and I submit that it is presumptively true of our as-yet-unbuilt Beit HaMikdash as well.

As far back as I can remember, I have refused to include the words "*reishit tzemichat geulateinu*", meaning something like "the beginning of the thriving of our redemption", in my liturgy. (Possibly I picked this up in college from Rabbi Norman Lamm z"l, although the Shabbat morning minyan I grew up in didn't

include this prayer at all.) This means that when I daven mussaf before the amud, the gabbai takes over for the Tefillah liShlom Medinat Yisroel. Sometimes I'm tempted to instead adopt another clever Rav Feinstein suggestion, muttering *shetehei*=let it be under my breath before that phrase. But actually the point is to take a public stand against the presumption that we are on a course of irreversible progress toward Redemption.

I shared my practice with a prominent *dati leumi* Israeli rabbi last week. He responded as follows: "I believe that we are not at the beginning of the Redemptive process, but rather in the middle. Nonetheless, there is no guarantee that the process will not be reversed so that we have to begin anew." We agreed that this message emerges clearly from Sefer Yirmiyahu.

Another prominent rabbi spoke to me in terms directly reminiscent of Yirmiyah. Israeli society had become focused on power, he said, and yet power could not be the solution for everything. Reliance on power means that failure must come eventually. (Deborah notes that the government includes a party called "Jewish power". But the Hebrew for that is *otzumah*, whereas the rabbi referred to *koach*).¹

These were hard things for me to hear from Israelis, and I imagine that it would be vastly more difficult for most *dati leumi* Israelis to hear them from me. Just last week a friend wrote to me, as a critical response to something I posted, that "what we really need is an outpouring of constant unambiguous support especially from intellectuals". I reacted badly. I'll take this opportunity to publicly apologize for the affective inadequacy of my response.

There are many, many beautiful things about how the *dati leumi* community has responded to the horrors of October 7 and the ongoing radical evil of Hamas and those who support Hamas. "Resilience" can't begin to capture what it is they are accomplishing. Nor should there be any ambiguity about the justice of trying to destroy Hamas.

B'Orkha initially invited me to speak Friday night rather than give a shiur during the day. I began researching the famous story in Chovot haLevavot Gate 5 Chapter 5:

ואמרו על חסיד, שפגע אנשים שבים ממלחמת אויבים, ושללו שלל אחר מלחמה
חזקה,
אמר להם: שבתם מן המלחמה הקטנה שוללים שלל, התעתדו למלחמה הגדולה.
אמרו לו: ומה היא המלחמה הגדולה?
אמר להם: מלחמת היצר וחייליו.

They said of a particular pious man, that he met people, on their return from a war against enemies, who had taken spoils after a fierce battle.

He said to them: You have returned from the minor war, wherein one takes spoils; prepare for the great war!

They asked: What is the great war?

He replied: The war against the evil inclination and its soldiers.

Who was this pious man? Centuries later, Rabbi Yehoshua Ibn Shouib, a student of the RASHBO, identified him as Alexander of Macedon. In graduate school, Professor Paul Fenton told my class that it was Mohammed, and that the original Arabic distinguished between the greater and lesser jihads. He argued that Chovot haLevavot had deliberately obscured his source, and was amused that as a result Mohammed is quoted as an authority in both Chassidic and Mussar literature.

את חטאי אני מזכיר היום – I recall a past sin of mine today. I took this identification for granted decades ago when a Harvard commencement speaker controversially sought to sanitize the word "jihad". But last week I learned that, at least according to Internet sources, many/most Muslim scholars deny the authenticity of the attribution to Mohammed in Muslim sources from around the same time as Chovot haLevavot. They contend that it improperly diminishes the stature of war-jihad and reflects excessive Sufi influence.

I have a second difficulty with the story. It suggests that the war against the evil inclination begins only once one has returned from the physical battle. It seems to me that the battles are better depicted as simultaneous, and that in important ways, the spiritual battle is intensified in times of physical battle.²

I suggest that the spiritual battle intensifies similarly in times of political battle. I further suggest that this is true nationally as well as individually.

Great military, political, and spiritual achievements cannot lead us to ignore our failings, lest we squander those achievements. Of course, one can always claim that a current redemptive process is intrinsically different from all previous such processes, that this one is final and therefore irreversible. Perhaps it is. The risk is that those who refuse to learn from history are more likely to repeat it.

Shabbat shalom!

¹ My initial draft associated the position this rabbi was criticizing with Kahanism. Certainly Kahanism contains, perhaps embodies, the same practical and theological flaws and blind spots. But the exact nature of the association deserves separate treatment.

² Deborah suggests that in Chovot haLevavot, the "taking of spoils" implies that the larger battle was already lost, especially if it refers to humans taken as slaves. There is a good Tanakhic case for this argument, and October 7 makes the point viscerally immediate. But spoils are not mentioned in many later citations.