

# CENTER FOR MODERN TORAH LEADERSHIP



## CAN GEULAH BE REVERSED?

By Rabbi Aryeh Klapper

Yechezkel 36:16-36, the haftorah of Parashat Parah, declares that G-d's Name is profaned by Jewish statelessness. We know that He exiled us for our sins; but the rest of the world ascribes our weakness to His weakness. Therefore, G-d will eventually be compelled for the sake of His Name to redeem us even though we don't deserve redemption.

Abravanel points out that G-d has in fact exiled us. Therefore, He must have purposes for which He is willing to endure some amount of this kind of desecration.

For what purpose might G-d choose to endure the desecration of suspected weakness? The most likely explanations are that this weakness also sanctifies His Name, or else that giving us power would cause even worse desecration.

These are two sides of the same coin. Since G-d's Name is associated with us, His treatment of us affects His reputation for justice as well as His reputation for strength. Punishing His chosen people for their sins demonstrates His commitment to justice; empowering us despite our sins subverts His commitment to justice.

Perhaps even the issue of weakness is really about whether He is able to dispense justice.

If this analysis is correct, it follows that G-d's willingness to engage in undeserved redemption will always be calibrated against the extent to which that redemption is undeserved. Moreover, a redemption of this type will in any case last only long enough to reestablish His reputation for strength.

Understanding Yechezkel as referring to a temporary redemption fits well with the opening metaphor of the haftorah.

### Son of Adam

When the Children of Israel were dwelling on their ground they made it impure through their ways and their actions like the impurity of a *nidah* their way was before Me.

בְּנֵי אָדָם  
בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁבְּיָם עַל-אֲדָמָתָם  
וַיִּטְמְאוּ אוֹתָהּ בְּדַרְכָּם וּבַעֲלִילוֹתָם  
כְּטִמְאַת הַנְּדָה הַיְתֵה דַרְכָּם לִפְנֵי:

Midrash Tanchuma (Metzora 18) understands *nidah* to be chosen here in direct contrast to corpse-impurity:

like the impurity of a *nidah* their way was before Me -  
like the impurity of a *nidah*, and NOT like corpse-impurity;

when there is a corpse in the house – the Kohen Gadol may not enter there,  
but a *nidah* – the Kohen Gadol may enter into the house with her,  
and even sit with her on a settee, so long as it does not rock;  
so too, were Israel compared to one with corpse-impurity – the Divine Presence would never return upon them,  
but they are instead compared to a *nidah*, who can become pure via a mikvah, and with whom a kohen can be together in a house without concern;  
so too, the Divine presence stays with Israel even though they are impure from idolatry,  
as Scripture says: Who dwells with them in the midst of their impurity.

כְּטוֹמַאת הַנְּדָה הֵיטָה דַרְכָּם לִפְנֵי –  
כְּטוֹמַאת הַנְּדָה וְלֹא כְּטוֹמַאת הַמֵּת;  
הַמֵּת בְּבֵית - אֵין כֹּהן גָּדוֹל נִכְנס לָשָׁם,  
אֲבֵל נְדָה - כֹּהן גָּדוֹל נִכְנס עִמָּה בְּבֵית, וַיּוֹשֵׁב עִמָּה עַל הַאיִסְטוּוא,  
וּבִלְבַד שְׁלֵא תֵהָא מִתְנַדְדָּת;  
כִּי, אֵילוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל נִמשָׁלו לְטוֹמַאת הַמֵּת –  
אֵין הַשְׁכִּינָה חוֹזֶרֶת עֲלֵיהֶם לְעוֹלָם,  
אֲבֵל נִמשָׁלו בְּנְדָה, שִׁישׁ לֵה טֵהֶרָה בְּמִקְוָה, וְהִכְהֵן עִמָּה בְּבֵית וַאֲיִנו  
חוֹשֵׁשׁ –  
כִּי הַשְׁכִּינָה שׁוֹרָה עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶף עַל פִּי שְׁהֵן טְמֵאִים מִן הָעוֹבְדֵי  
כּוֹכְבִים,  
שְׁנֵאמֵר הַשׁוֹכֵן אִתְּם בְּתוֹךְ טוֹמְאוֹתֵם.

The Tanchuma uses Aggadic license, glossing over a host of logical and halakhic details, to argue that the relevant characteristic of a *nidah* in this simile is that she *naturally* cycles between a condition in which she is not susceptible to *tabarab* to one in which she is susceptible to *tabarab* (although she still requires a ritual to actually become *tehorab*). The *nimshal* is that the Jewish people will at some point naturally become susceptible to being purified by G-d from the impurity of idolatry.

However, while it is true that the *nidah* naturally becomes susceptible to *tabarab*, it is equally true that she naturally becomes *temeiah* again. If the *nimshal* here is the relationship between Hashem and the Jews, then Yechezkel seems to be saying that the relationship between G-d and the Jews falls into a natural loop of idolatry, purification, idolatry, purification etc. Redemption is inevitable, and so is a subsequent exile.

The problem is that blame is not a useful category for a natural spiritual cycle, any more than women can be blamed for menstruating. A reader of standard *nidah* manuals would reasonably conclude that this cyclicity is essential for the

success of Israel's marriage with G-d! But I assume that Yechezkel does not mean to imply that it's good for G-d and the Jewish people to be separated regularly, at least to the extent of not sharing rocking couches.

But we can't entirely ignore the cyclicity of the *nidah* metaphor. Yechezkel prophesied before the Second Temple was built, and then destroyed. Presumably Second Temple Jews thought that his prophecy was coming true in their times. I suggest that they were correct. Redemption is not necessarily final. (It follows that one cannot be sure that any specific Redemption is final, certainly not until it has hit a standard higher than that of building a Temple.) Possibly Yechezkel's prophecy will come true many times in history.

However, Yechezkel does not say outright that the redemption he is prophesying will be temporary. Some readers therefore reasonably insist that he is referring to a final Redemption. But how and why will this redemption differ from the Second Temple period? The simplest answer is found in verses 26-27:

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in your innards;  
I will remove the stone heart from your flesh, and give you a flesh heart;  
I will place My spirit in your innards;  
and I will make it so that you follow my statutes, and my regulations you will observe and do.  
וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם  
וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת־לֵב הָאֶבֶן מִבְּשָׁרְכֶם וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר:  
וְאֶת־רוּחִי אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם  
וְעָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־בְּחַקֵּי תִלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם:

In other words: A permanent redemption is possible only if G-d transforms human nature.

The question then becomes: Should Jews look forward to such a redemption?

This question is raised and spectacularly addressed by Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horwitz, founder of the mussar yeshiva in Navaredok, in his *Madreigos HaAdam, Tiklun Hamidos Chapter 3*. Rabbi Horwitz notes that throughout the chapter, Yechezkel emphasizes that the Redemption he is describing will be for G-d's own Sake rather than for ours. As noted above, the continued existence of the Jews in stateless exile is a Desecration of Hashem's Name because it implies that He is too weak to redeem us. This is false, of course; He is choosing not to redeem is because of our sins. But appearances matter. So at some point He might be compelled to redeem us. Doing that would require removing our free will. (It follows that this Redemption would be final.)

By contrast, Rabbi Horwitz argues, the regime of the Torah is given to us as free-willed beings for our own sake rather than for G-d's. We should therefore seek to continue that regime rather than looking forward to an undeserved final redemption.

Yechezkel says that because in truth it is not good for humanity for the Redemption to come and human nature to be transformed, because as-is - humans are elevated through being tested, but if there are no tests in existence – the human being will not rise at all, and because human actions will not be the result of effort, they will not actually be ascribed to us . . . Therefore it is proper for us to purify our souls before the Day of Redemption comes .

ואמר מפני שבאמת אין זה טובה להאדם שתבוא הגאולה ויתחלף טבעו,  
כי עכשיו - הוא מתעלה מן הנסיון,  
אבל אז - אין נסיון במציאות, ולא יתעלה האדם כלום,  
ואין מעשיו באים ע"י יגיעה, ולא יקרא על שמו . . .  
וכיון שכן, מהראוי לנו לטהר נפשנו קודם בוא יום הגאולה

As damaged and disappointed as we may be by our own and other's sins, they at least make clear that human nature has not changed. G-d has not as of yet found it necessary to remove our free will. It follows that if we are at the outset or even in the midst of a redemption, there is no guarantee of its permanence – and we should be glad of that.

Let us strive to be worthy of living in a contingent world, and to earn and sustain a contingent redemption.

*Shabbat shalom!*