



GEULAS YISRAEL

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Free Will in the Messianic Era

Recognizing the extraordinary pressures of wartime and human vulnerability under the threat of death, the Torah allows a Jewish soldier the indulgence of Yifat To'ar. Shockingly, he is permitted to marry an “attractive” Gentile captive despite the numerous halachic and moral red flags which this raises.

The Torah prefers that a morally compromised person operate within halachic confines rather than blatantly violating the Torah. As Rashi comments, the Torah acknowledges the powerful influence of the *yetzer harah*, and, in this rare instance, accommodates human desires, rather than challenging us to overcome them. This non-conventional halacha showcases how powerful human desire can be.

All human beings are crafted in the image of Hashem, noble and upright. Given our inner virtue, we are naturally drawn to the will of Hashem. Yet, despite this inner purity, our powerful urges and desires often get the best of us, swaying our decisions. We call these desires *yetzer harah*, which refers both to our inner cravings as well as to an external force tempting us and preying on our conscience.

Sometimes we are enticed by physical desire and other times we are confused by ideological bewilderment. Either way,

we are locked in unending battle with the *yetzer harah*, without which we would instinctively obey Hashem's will. Without the counterforce of the *yetzer harah* we would not possess free will, as we would be ineluctably drawn to Hashem's will. In this respect, the *yetzer harah* preserves human free will, and is elementary to human identity.

Will it always be like this? Will freedom of choice exist in the days of Moshiach? Or will Messianic conditions abolish the *yetzer harah* and alter the human psyche?

SHMUEL AND THE RAMBAM

Characteristically, the Rambam adopts an evolutionary view of the Messianic era, based upon the well-known phrase of the amora, Shmuel: אין בין העולם הזה לימות המשיח אלא שעבוד מלכות בלבד

Shmuel asserted that, in general, the Messianic era will preserve our current order. Global violence will cease, antisemitism will abate, and we will enjoy renewed sovereignty. Shmuel's minimalist comments do not address the religious consequences of these global changes, but the Rambam (Hilchot Melachim chapter 11) elaborates: widespread tranquility will enable unhindered study of Torah and unobstructed appreciation of the divine will.

Under the Rambam's Messianic view, human freedom of choice remains, fundamentally, unchanged. We will continue to be challenged by the *yetzer harah* as we know it. Undoubtedly, enhanced spiritual conditions will influence our religious decision-making and will facilitate greater piety. In a world suffused with the knowledge of Hashem and saturated with divine presence religious belief and practice will be more obvious and the world will be more aligned with Hashem. However, we will still possess desires and urges and will still battle with the *yetzer harah*. Under Messianic conditions, human free will remains unchanged.

THE EXTINCTION

A different image emerges from a bold Messianic prediction of Yechezkel. Both in perek 11 and in perek 36, he cites Hashem's promise to provide a "new heart" and a new spirit, while replacing our "heart of stone" with a heart of flesh. Yechezkel's description of a "spiritual" heart transplant implies a drastic overhaul of human identity. He doesn't specify the religious implications of a "new heart", but it is obvious that Moshiach will alter human identity.

Similarly, a gemara in Shabbos (151b) views the Messianic era as a revision of human identity. In the 12th chapter of Kohelet, Shlomo Hamelech urges us to remember our creator in our youth before we reach the period of declining desires or שנים אשר.. אין לי בהם חפץ. Ostensibly Shlomo is encouraging religious commitment during our youth, before it gets too late and our desire for life wanes.

The gemara in Shabbat reinterprets Shlomo's phrase of "days without desire"



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as a reference to the Messianic era when Hashem will slaughter the *yetzer harah*, thereby eliminating free will and discontinuing reward and punishment. In contrast to Shmuel, whom the gemara assumes disagrees with this prophecy, Shlomo Hamelech envisions a Messianic future without a *yetzer harah*. The divinely promised new hearts of Yechezkel contain no illicit desire.

Elaborating both upon Yechezkel's prophecy and upon the gemara in Shabbat, the Ramban (Devarim 30:6) portrays the Messianic era as a return to an ideal and sinless state of Gan Eden. The *yetzer harah* will be entirely purged, and Man, no longer plagued by immoral or illicit leanings, will naturally veer to religion. The arrival of Moshiach will completely re landscape our emotional and psychological makeup, dramatically

transforming religious experience.

Some have qualified this Ramban: perhaps the *yetzer harah*, as we know it, will be abolished, but we will still encounter a different, less internal form of a *yetzer harah*. Currently, our *yetzer harah* is deeply embedded within human identity and exerts powerful influence upon our behavior. Under revamped Messianic conditions, the *yetzer harah* will be “externalized”, similar to the state of Adam Ha’rishon prior to his sin. Recovering Eden means that we too, will no longer possess inner desires but will face religious questions or temptations. Desire will feel more peripheral and exterior, rather than existential and internal, but it will still exist.

However, even if we adopt this moderated version of the Ramban, it is still obvious that, in the Messianic era human identity will be crafted very differently. We will possess less freedom of choice, but live in a world of greater presence of Hashem. It seems like a tantalizing tradeoff. Are we more interested in human experience or in divine presence? This Ramban forces us to reassess our value system! Would you exchange human choice for Hashem’s presence?

REVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Messianic vision demands that we not sheepishly accept our current condition as the perfect state or as the “only” state of human affairs. Redemptive imagination mandates that we anticipate massive changes to our world. We won’t just live in a different world, but will live the world differently. Institutions such as animal sacrifice and monarchy, which we currently abhor, will be restored and celebrated. Not only will our attitudes and values change, but human psychology will also transform. Hearts will be reinvented, and minds will be remapped. As free will becomes adjusted, human experience will be significantly modified.

The Ramban calls us to imagine a world we don’t yet inhabit. That is the call of redemption. ■


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if response.status_code != 200:  
    print(f"Status: {response.status_code} - Try renaming the user")  
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