



Restoration

Teshuvah is a multilayered and multifaceted journey through the subterranean layers of identity. As teshuvah encompasses a wide range of emotions and a broad variety of experiences it cannot be captured by one single term or phrase. Instead, our Nevi'im and our Chazal developed a battery of terms portraying the different hues and colors of this transformational experience.

In chapter 44, Yeshayahu employs geulah as a metaphor for teshuvah. In well-known pasuk, recited during slichot, he announces:

מְחִיטִי כָעָב פֶּשְׁעֶיךָ וְצָעֲנָן חַטֹּאוֹתֶיךָ שׁוֹבָה אֵלַי כִּי
גְאֻלְתֶּיךָ

Hashem promises to erase our sins like a cloud, while also proclaiming “Return to Me [and repent] for I have redeemed you”. As geulah evokes the spirit of teshuvah, by exploring geulah we can better understand the pathways and alleyways of teshuvah.

Teshuvah enables Geulah

The gemara in Yoma (86b) lauds teshuvah because it advances final redemption:

אמר רבי יונתן: גדולה תשובה שמקרבת את
הגאולה

Based on this coupling, the gemara in Sanhedrin (99) cites a debate as to whether teshuvah is a necessary precondition to final redemption. Rebbe Yehoshua

disassociated geulah from teshuvah, assuring us that we will be redeemed independent of national repentance. By contrast, Rebbe Eliezer argued that redemption is completely dependent upon teshuvah. Without mass repentance Jewish redemption stalls. Even Rebbe Yehoshua, however, concedes that teshuvah, though not *necessary* for redemption, still deeply affects its pace and texture. Repentance makes the process quicker and more graceful, while also accelerating the timelines of geulah. Even if teshuvah isn't a prerequisite, it is certainly a stimulus of redemption. Recognizing that teshuvah fuels geulah Yeshayahu, effectively urges us “Return to Me so *that I will* redeem you “. Hashem solicits our teshuvah so that redemption will be enabled.

GEULAH AS AN IMPETUS FOR TESHUVAH

The relationship between teshuvah and geulah though, is reciprocal. Teshuvah accelerates and enhances geulah, but geulah, for its part, awakens teshuvah. We believe that one day, all of humanity will gather in Yerushalayim and acknowledge Hashem. Our Messianic narrative doesn't envision extinction of others but inspiration and education.

At this late stage of history, however, much of the world has turned its heart

away from Hashem, including a sizable portion of the Jewish population who have abandoned faith or have discarded halachic fidelity. Yet, we still believe in ultimate mass teshuvah. Evidently, mass teshuvah will be triggered by a colossal divine intervention which will revolutionize human consciousness.

Redemption, or at least the incipient stages of redemption, is the type of event which can revitalize alienated religious hearts. Hopefully we are living through this dynamic and the initial miracles of Jewish regeneration will, ultimately, revive faith and religious commitment across our people.

Recognizing the capacity of *geulah* to incite teshuvah, Yeshayahu effectively pleads that we should “return [to Hashem] because He has already begun to redeem us.” Initial redemption incites teshuvah, which, in turn, accelerates final redemption. To phrase it in Yeshayahu’s terms, Hashem asks us to perform teshuvah, to ignite initial geulah, which hopefully, leads to broad teshuvah which ultimately clinches the final redemption of our people and this world. Teshuvah and geulah march in lockstep through history.

RESTORATION

Though Yeshayahu’s description of teshuvah as geulah underscores that geulah causes teshuvah and teshuvah advances geulah, his primary intent is to highlight the shared features between teshuvah and geulah. By using geulah as a metaphor for teshuvah, Yeshayahu highlights the similarities between these two experiences.

Belief in redemption is premised upon a



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distinctly Jewish view of history. Western civilization views history as evolutionary and open-ended. The future is completely unknown and is solely a product of human decision. For us as Jews, the historical process is predetermined: history has a beginning and an inexorable end. The beginning is called creation and the end is called redemption.

For a Jew, history is not only predetermined but is also cyclical. The beginning resembles the end. Redemption doesn’t reverse advances in culture, technology, and science but it does restore an earlier condition of religion and morality. Redemption doesn’t just change or improve our world but restores it to an earlier and more perfect state.

The actual word geulah appears three times in parshat Behar, all in the context

of restoring land to original owners or liberating slaves. Under certain conditions a seller may reacquire his land, in effect, *redeeming* or restoring it. During the yovel year the entire Land of Israel experiences geulah, in that all sold lands are refunded. If geulah of lands restores original ownership, geulah of history restores the human condition to its original terms. Geulah returns history back to the moral and religious conditions of the past.

By describing teshuvah as geulah, Yeshayahu emphasizes that teshuvah, as well, is restorative. We depict teshuvah with many words: forgiveness, pardon, absolution of sin, penitence, and self-improvement. But teshuvah is, fundamentally, a *restoration*. Sin barriers us from Hashem, whose presence cannot countenance evil. Teshuvah removes those obstructions and reboots our relationship.

Human beings, when insulted or betrayed, can often summon the courage and generosity of spirit to forgive. However, emotional wounds run deep, and it is almost impossible to turn back the clock on a ruptured relationship. We bear the scars of past hurt and rarely can the original innocence of a relationship be fully restored. Humans can offer forgiveness, but full restoration of a relationship is seldom achieved.

By gifting us with teshuvah, Hashem offers us complete restoration and the ability not just to overcome our sins but to reboot our relationship with Him to its original pristine state of purity. It is the gift which only Hashem can offer.

BEFORE AND AFTER

The list of 13 middot enumerates various

compassionate traits of Hashem. The first trait, the word 'ה, connotes basic mercy which Hashem extends to us. Interestingly, the term 'ה is repeated twice. Noticing this repetition, the gemara in Rosh Hashanah (17b) explains that we ask Hashem for His mercy both *before* we sin and *after* we sin. As the Chofetz Chaim asserted, our bold request of Hashem is to restore our relationship to the exact same “pre-sin” condition. By requesting His mercy with the exact same term, both before and after sin, we seek full restoration of lost innocence. Authentic teshuvah causes a reboot.

Teshuvah is a glance back at the past and a reclamation of our past relationship with Hashem. We look back to a simpler time, when we were more innocent and more pure. Life was simpler and our relationship with Hashem was less complicated and less confused. Sins muddle the water and introduce uncertainty and static. Our betrayals erected barriers and obstacles. What was once a clear path is now a mine-field. Teshuvah offers us a ticket back to our past.

DAYS OF OLD

The concluding pasuk of Eicha captures our longing for restoration of our earlier state:

השיבנו ה' אליך ונשובה חדש ימינו כקדם

As the midrash comments, we don't merely seek forgiveness. We boldly ask Hashem to restore us to our original state, prior to sin and prior to human rebellion. We seek Gan Eden, or the “days of old”.

For this reason, Yeshayahu compares teshuvah to geulah. We know where history is heading. We know that history is a circle, and that redemption leads us back

to the beginning of time. Knowing this, we also believe that the redemption of teshuvah leads us back to our own beginning.

Reach back to the past and reclaim it. Reach back to lost purity and renew it. Redeem and Repent. Repent and Redeem.

■ כתיבה וחתימה טובה

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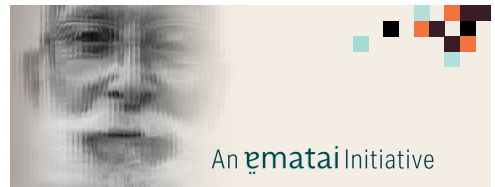
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