

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Shgalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

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of
Redemption

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by
Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

Tavo

AN END TO EXILE

Exile is the primary punishment. But there will be Redemption. Although exile is painful to live through, its ultimate purpose and result is beneficial. Why, then, does the Babylonian Talmud say G-d regretted creating exile? The Jerusalem Talmud, when listing the things G-d regretted creating, does not include exile. The Jerusalem Talmud is more general and speaks in a more condensed language than the Babylonian Talmud, which is more specific and explicit. Exile derives from the evil inclination. Of the things G-d regrets, only exile is a direct result of the actions of the Jewish people. The Babylonian Talmud emphasizes that the things G-d regrets lack enduring value. The Jerusalem Talmud emphasizes the element of good in the otherwise regrettable creations. It does not include exile because there is absolutely nothing good about exile.

In this week's Torah reading, Moses forewarns the children of Israel that if they disobey G-d's commandments, G-d will exact retribution. The general punishment, and source for all other hardships, is exile. However, the central message of the rebuke is that, although the Jewish people will suffer greatly, there will be an end to their exile. There will be Redemption.

Given the place of exile in Jewish history, and its centrality to this week's Torah reading, it seems appropriate to discuss the nature of exile. Clearly, G-d did not send the Jewish people into exile simply to punish them for their disobedience. Rather, the afflictions purify the Jewish people, establishing them before G-d. (We may compare this to a child who has disobeyed his father. After making restitution and being punished, he has a closer relationship with, and a deeper respect for, his parent. Indeed, since there is a greater

understanding between them, the experience actually makes him more trustworthy.)

Thus, although it is painful to live through exile, its ultimate purpose and result is beneficial. From this we see that there are two aspects to exile: the immediate, undesirable, negative afflictions and the ultimate, anticipated, beneficial result. Given that the ultimate result of exile is advantageous to the Jewish people, we would expect that, in the final analysis, exile occurred in accordance with G-d's Will.

Yet the Talmud makes the following declaration. "*G-d* regretted creating four things: exile, the Kasdim, the Ishmaelites, and the evil inclination." This seems to negate any good exile might produce. After all, G-d has many agents – many ways He can punish, instruct or test the Jewish people. If G-d regrets having created exile, this seems to mean, at the very least, that it is not the best agent for the job.

Actually, there are two versions of the statement. The Babylonian Talmud says that G-d regretted creating four things. The Jerusalem Talmud, completed over a hundred years earlier, says that G-d created three things, then regretted it. In the Jerusalem Talmud's version, exile is not included in the list.

Both versions present a problem. Elsewhere we are told that "Everything G-d created in His world was created only for His honor." This means that even the things He supposedly "regrets" were also created for a positive purpose. So how is it possible for G-d to "regret" any part of creation?

We thus have before us the following questions: Why is there a difference in the versions of the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud? Why does the Babylonian Talmud include exile among the things G-d regrets, while the Jerusalem Talmud does not? Since everything was created for a positive purpose – G-d's

honor – what does it mean that G-d “regrets” part of creation? Finally, what does this teach us about the nature of exile and our responsibility to bring the Redemption?

To answer the first question: The Jerusalem Talmud speaks in a more general manner, while the Babylonian Talmud explains things in more detail. That which comes earlier uses more abbreviated expressions; for the Jerusalem Talmud, a hint suffices. That which comes later explores and makes explicit the implications of the earlier statement; for the Babylonian Talmud, the logic and reason must be brought into the open.

Exile derives from the evil inclination. We are exiled “because of our sins.” Therefore, when the Jerusalem Talmud lists the things G-d regrets creating, it does not need to mention exile. Having stated that G-d regrets creating the evil inclination, the Jerusalem Talmud understands automatically that the result of the evil inclination, exile, is regrettable.

What, then, does the Babylonian Talmud gain by including exile among the things G-d regrets? The answer tells us something important about the nature of exile. For, unlike the other three regrettable creations, exile comes into existence only as a consequence of our actions. Neither the evil inclination, nor the nations, exist because of what the Jewish people do. In fact, they came first! But exile is the consequence of the actions – the sins – of the Jewish people.

Since G-d has many agents, however, the Babylonian Talmud declares that G-d regrets using this particular agent, exile, as the means to reprove the Jewish people.

By comparing what the Babylonian Talmud emphasizes with what the Jerusalem Talmud emphasizes, we can discern what each teaches us about our Divine service.

The Babylonian Talmud states that G-d regrets creating four things. G-d “regrets” creating them because, on an inner level, they do not conform to G-d’s Will. Since they don’t comply with G-d’s true desire, obviously they can have no real or enduring existence. Those things or relationships that are true, that have real value, we want to endure. When something lacks permanence, even if it serves a useful function temporarily, ultimately it never had validity. Hence, the term “regret” doesn’t mean that G-d had a change of heart; rather it is an expression that suggests the thing “regretted” is not an enduring creation. The Babylonian Talmud thus emphasizes that these four things are “regrettable” – they are negative and will not endure.

The Jerusalem Talmud, on the other hand, lists only three things. It also uses a different phrasing, stating that “G-d created three things, and regretted it.” This emphasizes that, since G-d created them, the three things have some good, some enduring value. That G-d regretted creating them means that the negative part is temporary and will eventually be null and void. Thus, the nations of the world, represented by the Kasdim and Ishmaelites, will no longer harm the Jews. Just the opposite, they will assist and support the children of Israel. Similarly, the evil inclination will no longer lead people astray; rather, the strength and enthusiasm it supplies will be applied to matters of Torah and holiness.

This explains why the Babylonian Talmud includes exile and the Jerusalem Talmud does not: there is nothing good about exile. It is the opposite of Redemption and G-d’s Will, and in the times of Moshiach will cease to exist. The result of exile is a higher level of holiness; but exile itself is wholly negative and will be wholly annihilated.

The difference of emphasis reflects a difference of perspective. The Babylonian Talmud emphasizes the current situation, things

as they are now. Hence, it focuses on the negative circumstances we find ourselves in, primarily exile. And it stresses the negation of those things that obstruct G-d's Will. The Jerusalem Talmud, on the other hand, looks toward the future. While acknowledging the current situation, that there are things G-d "regrets," it also recognizes that things will change, that in the future only the good will remain. Now, the regrettable is foremost; in the times of Moshiach, what will be evident is the G-dliness within all of creation.

What practical lesson can we derive from the above discussion? First, we learn that exile is only a tool, a punishment for our sins – as explained in the Torah reading. G-d does not want us to be in exile. Knowing this, we ourselves should not be satisfied with the situation. And since exile is not an appropriate condition for the Jewish people, we cannot become comfortable or complacent. Indeed, especially when the outward hardships have been removed, we should increase our efforts in and enthusiasm for Torah and mitzvos.

Further, knowing that exile is temporary, we should not become depressed at its length. Especially now, in the footsteps of Moshiach, we must remember that exile has no real substance, and act accordingly.

This means, among other things, not to be affected by the hostility, skepticism or customs of the non-Jewish world. Indeed, with the coming of Moshiach, the non-Jews will assist and support the Jewish people. They will recognize the truth of Torah. Far from opposing the study of Torah and observance of mitzvos, the nations of the world will demand and expect us to be a "nation of priests" and "a light unto the nations."

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 24, pp. 167-176)

The Announcement Of The Redemption

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A special lesson must be derived from all of the above with respect to the Redemption which -- according to all the signs -- must come imminently and immediately... Since according to all the signs the Redemption should have come long ago, we must apply [the verse that describes the recitation that accompanied the bringing of the first fruits to the Temple] "you shall answer and say before the L-rd your G-d"¹ to the special supplication of "Until when"?! [In conformance with the Talmudic commentary that the recitation must be made in a "loud voice," the supplication "Until when" must also] be made in a loud voice. This request is particularly appropriate in the month of Elul when "anyone who wants has permission to greet Him and He receives them all with a gracious countenance and shows to everyone a smiling face."²... Let the Redemption occur already in actuality!

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Tavo, 21 Elul 5751)

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1. Our parsha 26:5.
 2. *Likkutei Torah, Parshas Re'eh* 32:1.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mrs. Roneete Mona Mina bas Reb Zev Kurtzman
Passed away on 9 Cheshvan, 5783

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