

Reflections of Redemption

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

Reprinted for Parshat Nitzavim-Yayeilech, 5783
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ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov

Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

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<http://www.torah4blind.org>

e-mail: yys@torah4blind.org

Rabbi Yosef Y. Shagalov,

Executive Director

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by
Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

Nitzavim

FROM PERSONAL EXILE TO GENERAL REDEMPTION

Nitzavim is always read the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah. The Torah reading contains a promise of Redemption. The conjunction of the verb allows the verse to be read two ways: one, G-d caused the exiles to return, or two, G-d will return from exile with them. The connection between the promise of Redemption and the beginning of the Torah reading is that so long as one Jew remains in exile, so does the Divine Presence. Ending exile and gathering all the Jews is a difficult task. Each individual, whatever his or her status, has a personal exile which is part of and contributes to the general exile. All Jews must be redeemed to take the Divine Presence out of exile. The practical lesson is that all Jews must go out of exile for the Redemption to be true and complete. We are responsible not only for our personal redemption, but that of the entire Jewish people.

This week's Torah reading, *Nitzavim*, is always read the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah. Further, this week's Torah reading contains a clear, unmistakable reference to Redemption. We may therefore ask what is the connection between *Nitzavim*, Rosh Hashanah and Redemption.

The Torah reading begins as follows: "You are standing today, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d – your leaders, your tribal chiefs, your elders, your officers, every Israelite man, your children, your women, and the converts in your camp – even your wood-cutters and water drawers." These verses follow the severe rebuke recorded in last week's portion. There, the Torah predicts that the Jewish people will not observe the mitzvos, thus violating the covenant with G-d. As a result, they will experience devastation, hardship and suffering. Nevertheless, the Torah assures them that, after the

torments of exile, they will be redeemed. They stand together before G-d this day, to enter into the covenant. Part of the covenant is the assurance that, just as the prediction of exile will be fulfilled, so will the promise that the Jewish people will return and repossess the land. This is the concept of *Nitzavim*, or standing.

Shortly thereafter, there is an explicit promise of Redemption. The Torah declares that: "Then the L-rd your G-d will return your captivity and have mercy upon you. He will return and gather you from among all the nations where the L-rd your G-d has scattered you. [Even] if your dispersed are at the ends of the heavens, the L-rd your G-d will gather you up from there, and from there He will take you. And the L-rd your G-d will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. And He will do you good and multiply you over your fathers."

The wording of this passage teaches a deep lesson about the nature of exile and Redemption. In Hebrew, there are several verb forms, or conjugations. Here, we would expect the causative conjugation, since G-d is causing the Jewish people to return. Indeed, that is the sense in which the verses are translated. However, the Torah does not use the causative conjugation; rather, it uses the simple active conjugation. The literal meaning of the verse is that, "The L-rd your G-d will return with your captivity."

Obviously, the causative reading is the primary reading: G-d will cause the exiles to return. Nevertheless, grammatically speaking, the verse says that G-d Himself will return with the captives of the Jewish people. Therefore the Sages explain that in this verse G-d refers to His own exile, as it were. G-d and the Jewish people are so closely attached, they cannot be separated; it is as if G-d went into exile with the Jewish people. When the Jewish people return to G-d, when they do *teshuvah*, G-d will end their banishment. Their exile will end and G-d Himself – the Divine Presence – will return with them.

What is the relationship between this passage, that “The L-rd your G-d will return with your captivity,” and the beginning of the Torah reading, “You are standing today, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d”? On the simplest level, it means that so long as one Jew remains in exile, the ingathering of all the Jewish exiles – the Redemption – is not complete. On a deeper level, it also means that so long as one Jew remains in exile, so does the Divine Presence.

Taking each and every Jew out of exile is a laborious and strenuous task, for there is both the general exile of the Jewish people as a whole, and the particular exile of the individual. Any distancing from Torah and mitzvos, any moment that passes without an awareness that G-dliness permeates all of existence, is a type of exile. The exodus from this personal, inner exile requires us to truly perceive G-dliness, and act upon that perception. Thus our Sages tell us that the day of the gathering of the exiles is so great and so difficult that it seems as though G-d Himself must take each individual out of exile with His own Hand.

An individual’s personal exile and redemption includes, and is part of, the general exile and redemption of the Jewish people as a whole. The verse itself alludes to this when it says, “The L-rd your G-d will return with your captivity.” The phrase, “The L-rd your G-d” is in the singular, meaning that, aside from the collective relationship of the Jewish people with G-d, each individual has a particular relationship, whether he is a leader or a drawer of water.

When G-d seizes the hand of the first Jew and takes him out of exile, then automatically, the Divine Presence itself should also go out of exile. At that moment, the complete and final Redemption should occur. But redemption does not occur when the first Jew leaves exile. When G-d actually “seizes the hand” and takes a particular Jew out of exile, only the particular and condensed radiation of the Divine Presence connected with that individual is

redeemed. Thus other Jews, and the Divine Presence itself, remain in exile. Only the Redemption of **all** Jews redeems the Divine Presence itself.

How does all this apply practically, on a personal level? It's possible to think that going out of one's own exile is sufficient. All that is required is individual redemption – raising my level of Torah study, my observance of mitzvos, etc. But the opposite is true: when a Jew is redeemed from his own personal “exile,” he must see what other Jews need for their own “exodus.” **All** Jews must go out of exile for the Redemption to be true and complete. Therefore, whatever depends on him, he must do.

Acting on this awareness counteracts a mistaken notion one might have. A person who has gone out of “exile” may look condescendingly on others. After all, the “other” is in the lowest possible state, still in a state of exile, distant from G-dliness, Torah and mitzvos. “He,” on the other hand, is superior – “ready” for the Redemption, well-learned, observant. How is it possible that his redemption is connected with and dependent upon the **other**?

The answer connects the beginning of the Torah portion to Redemption. For *Nitzavim* begins, “You are standing today, **all of you**, before the L-rd your G-d.” This emphasizes that the covenant requires **every** Jew. Only when the Jewish people stand together – “**all of you**” – before G-d is the covenant established. True, there is a hierarchy, an order – from the leaders down through the water-drawers. This hierarchy has its importance. But first there must be an ingathering – the Redemption – of **all** the Jewish people, in a general sense. This must include not only the leaders, but the wood-choppers and water-drawers.

This brings us to the connection of *Nitzavim* and Redemption with Rosh Hashanah. For the verse says, “You are standing, **today**, all of you, before the L-rd your G-d.” This “today,” is Rosh Hashanah,

which is why the portion of *Nitzavim* is always read the Shabbos before Rosh Hashanah. When the Jewish people are gathered today, on Rosh Hashanah, “all of you,” together, then G-d assures us He will judge us favorably. When there is *Ahavas Yisroel* – love for a fellow Jew – between the leaders and the drawers of water, and all levels and types in between, then the Jewish people, “all of you,” will be inscribed for a sweet, good year. Indeed, it will be the year of Redemption, when “the L-rd your G-d will return your captivity,” and “the L-rd your G-d will return **with** your captivity,” for G-d Himself will take every Jew out of exile, one by one, gathering us together, all of us, today.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 9, pp. 175-183)

Vayeilech

A LIVING TORAH

Anxiously anticipating Moshiach actually accelerates his arrival. The Rebbe has directed us to make Redemption a living reality. Mitzvos are by and large pragmatic. How do study and preparation hasten Moshiach in reality? When we become a living Torah, we facilitate fulfillment of the Torah's purpose, namely, Redemption. This theme of unity, of oneness with the Torah can be found in this week's Torah reading. As Moses was a living Torah, so Moshiach will be a living Torah. And to the extent that we incorporate this, make ourselves a living Torah, we reveal the aspect of Moses, the spark of Moshiach, within ourselves. At the end of Moses's life "the traditions and fountains of wisdom were closed" to him. This indicated a transmission of leadership to Joshua. The central attribute of Moses is truth, which defines Torah. Because of his unity with Torah, affecting any part of Torah affected Moses as well.

The twelfth principle of faith declares our belief in the coming of Moshiach: "I believe with a perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach, and even though he tarry I will await his coming every day." By expressing belief and anticipation, that itself makes it possible for him to come every day. On many occasions, the Rebbe has urged us to prepare for the coming of Moshiach by studying Torah more intensely, particularly those sections relating to Redemption. We must reorient our attitude by living in anticipation and expectation of Moshiach's imminent arrival, explaining the concepts of Redemption to others, influencing them in a pleasant, peaceful manner. Such actions make Redemption a living reality.

Still, there is something abstract about this. Most mitzvos have a very practical, tangible aspect. Think of a mitzvah – such as tefillin, lighting Shabbos candles, or keeping kosher – and you

realize immediately that it involves doing something physically with a material object. Even the mitzvos of an emotional nature, mitzvos of speech and feelings, such as loving G-d, fearing G-d, being careful with our speech, etc., are pragmatic. A true love for and fear of G-d visibly affects how we act and who we are.

This raises a central question regarding Moshiach and our role in bringing Redemption: How does simply learning about a subject, even becoming excited about it, make it a reality? Does preparing for an honored guest really accelerate his arrival? When we polish the furniture and woodwork, wash and wax the floor, set the table, etc., does he really come any faster?

Probably not. So, how can my Torah study bring Moshiach? True, it can change my perceptions and my behavior, but how can learning and talking about Redemption make it real? Of course, one answer is that it leads me to greater acts of goodness and kindness. But that's not quite the same as transforming the world, making it a dwelling place for G-dliness. Furthermore, even if I'm ready for Moshiach – I've made all the preparations – does that guarantee he will come? By analogy, just because I've done everything necessary to make the honored guest feel welcome – my house is ready, the food is cooked to perfection, everything has been polished and shines – is he forced to come? When I invite him, of course I'll tell him all the details, how much effort went into getting things in order and how eager I am to see him. But even if he accepts my invitation, will he come?

The answer to this is yes, if we have the same mind-set. If there's a unity, a oneness and harmony between us, then, like partners in a dance, the movement of one automatically evokes a corresponding, complimentary movement in the other. By studying Torah in such a way that we become united with it, Torah becomes engraved in us. When Torah becomes inseparable from our very being, we in

fact hasten the Redemption. For Torah itself exists to transform the world, to reveal the inner G-dliness within creation. Thus, we must become a living Torah.

This theme of unity, of oneness with the Torah can be found in this week's Torah reading. Moses, of course, was himself a living Torah and the paradigm for Moshiach. As Moses was a living Torah, so Moshiach will be a living Torah. And to the extent that we incorporate this, make ourselves a living Torah, we reveal the aspect of Moses, the spark of Moshiach, within ourselves.

At the beginning of the Torah portion, Moses says to the Jewish people, "A hundred and twenty years old I am this day. I can no longer go out and come in." Moses does not mean that his physical strength is waning, for later on the Torah testifies about Moses that "his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated." Rather, as our Sages explain, Moses could no longer "go out and come into" the words of Torah. That is, the "traditions and fountains of wisdom" were closed for him.

Of course, one could immediately raise a question: If the "traditions and fountains of wisdom" were closed for Moses, how does he transmit the last three Torah readings, *Vayeilech*, *Haazinu* and *V'zos Haberachah*, to the Jewish people? These three portions contain instructions, moral exhortations and important laws, such as that for writing a sefer Torah. Obviously, then, there must be a difference between the "traditions and fountains of wisdom" which were closed for Moses, and the actual words of Torah.

So, if "I can no longer go out and come in" means that the "traditions and fountains of wisdom were closed," we have to understand what are the "traditions and fountains of wisdom," and *why* they were closed.

First, we need to define the two terms. At Sinai, G-d gave Moses the Written Torah and also the principles for applying its laws and

interpreting its teachings. In addition, certain concepts were given orally to Moses at Sinai. The Torah itself neither mentions these traditions explicitly, nor even alludes to them. Nor can we derive them by logical analysis or using the rules of interpretation. These customs and practices are simply “traditions,” passed on orally from Moses to Joshua, and so throughout the generations.

A “fountain of wisdom,” on the other hand, refers to the debates and deliberations, the limitless discussions about the Torah. These discussions flow one from another, much as water continually flows from a fountain. Obviously, through the give-and-take of debate and argumentation, we can uncover infinite meanings and implications of Torah.

This explains how Moses was able to transmit and teach the last three portions of the Torah. The “traditions and fountains of wisdom” are both extra-textual. Neither customs nor debates are recorded in the Torah; neither is necessary to understand or apply the law in a practical sense.

So we come back to the question: Because the “traditions and fountains of wisdom” were closed to Moses, he could no longer go out and come in. But go out and come in of what? We know that Moses was both teacher and leader. His role of teacher – transmitter of the Torah – remained, as we have seen. Therefore, when Moses says that, “A hundred and twenty years old I am this day. I can no longer go out and come in,” it means he can no longer act as leader of the Jewish people. His leadership had ended and Joshua’s had begun.

Closing off a part of Torah – the extra-textual part – indicated that Moses’s authority had passed to Joshua. But why should this be? What connection is there between the extra-textual part of Torah and the leadership of Moses?

The central attribute of Moses is truth. (This is why he is identified

with Torah, which is called a Torah of Truth.) Truth, by definition, doesn't change. Therefore, when the "traditions and fountains of wisdom" became closed, it affected the very essence of Moses.

Since Moses and the Torah were a single entity, Torah was engraved into the very essence of his being. Every word of Torah was a vital part of his identity. Because of this unity with Torah, the absence of even an ancillary aspect affected Moses, touching the core of his existence and altering his status. And it indicated that the time had come for the leadership of Joshua, whose existence tolerated change, unlike that of Moses. This is why our Sages said Moses's face radiated like the sun and Joshua's face radiated like the moon. Moses's light was constant like the sun; Joshua's waxed and waned, like that of the moon. Thus as soon as Moses experienced change, that was a sign it was time for the era of Joshua to begin.

This is the lesson: At every moment of life we must be completely bound to Torah, as though we are one entity. If it's Torah, then even the smallest detail, and the most abstract argument or implication, must be relevant to our Divine service and affect the very core of our being.

In this way, we become a living Torah, as Moses was a living Torah. And in this way, the spark of Moses within each of us joins with the spark of Moses in the leader of the generation to make Moshiach and Redemption a practical reality.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 29, pp. 189-194)

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

2

We can all see (in this year of miracles) how the signs of Redemption mentioned by our Sages have been fulfilled. This includes the sign cited in *Yalkut Shimoni*¹ (which has been mentioned recently several times):

"In the year the King Moshiach will be revealed, the kings of all the nations of the world will struggle with each other... the king of Persia will provoke the Arabian king; the Arabian king will [then] go to *Aram*² for advice... All the nations of the world will be in turmoil and terror... And (G-d) will say to them (Israel), "My children, do not be afraid, all that I have done I have done only for your sake... Do not fear, the time for your Redemption has arrived!..."

The *Yalkut* then continues:

When the King Moshiach comes he will stand on the roof of the Beis HaMikdash [Holy Temple] and will proclaim to Israel, 'Humble ones, the time for your Redemption has arrived!'"

*(From the talk of Wednesday, Parshas Netzavim-Vayeilech,
22 Elul, 5750)*

1. *Yeshayahu*, remez 499; Also in *P'sikta Rabasi*, 37 (s.v. *kumi ori*).
2. In the *Pesikta* there [the version is] "to Edom."

3

May it be G-d's Will - and this is the essential point - that each and every one of us should become a "shaliach" (a messenger) to inform oneself, one's family, and all the Jews around him or her that: "**Here he [Moshiach] comes.**"¹ and "Behold, this is our G-d... this is the L-rd for whom we hoped."²

(Note that the word "this" [indicating a clear recognition] is mentioned twice.)³ and "Behold, David the Anointed King" [is here] - and therefore *Eliyahu HaNavi* [the prophet] already appeared a day earlier in T'verya [Tiberius]⁴ to announce the arrival of our righteous Moshiach.

It may be suggested that, since Moshiach can come any day - "I await his coming **every day**"⁵ - and since *Eliyahu HaNavi* must announce Moshiach's arrival the day before, that therefore *Eliyahu HaNavi* **actually comes every day** to T'verya and announces the coming of Moshiach. The announcement is directed particularly to those who put themselves in a position of "I await his coming every day," even though (as is the custom of *Chabad*)⁶ they do not actually articulate this verbally, but only think about it. [The announcement is made specifically to us] when we recite [this year],⁷ from the well-known Psalm, the verse: "I have found My

1. Expression used in *Shir HaShirim* [Song of Songs], 2:8.

2. *Yeshayahu [Isaiah]*, 25:9. See end of [tractate] *Ta'anis*.

3. *Shemos Rabbah*, end of chapter 23.

4. See *Eiruvim* 43b: Eliyahu has arrived yesterday... to the Great Court." In turn, the Great Court will first be restored in T'verya [Tiberius]" Rambam, *Hilchos Sanhedrin*, end of chapter 14.

5. Twelfth of the "Thirteen Principles of Faith."

6. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. IX, p. 282 ff.

7. [It is a Chassidic custom to recite Psalms corresponding to one's age as well the Psalm corresponding to the Rebbe's age. This sicha was said during the Rebbe's 89th year. Translator's note.]

servant David, I have anointed him with My holy oil."⁸

...Added emphasis should be placed on all of the above this year, for two reasons. First, this year it is customary to recite the Psalm, which makes reference to the coming of *Moshiach*, when it states: "I have found my servant David, I have anointed him with my holy oil." In addition, this year we have reached the milestone of forty years since the passing of the Previous Rebbe, at which time "G-d has given you a heart to know and eyes to see and ears to hear."⁹ These [being a "*shaliach*" to announce "Behold he comes" and hearing Eliyahu's pronouncement because "I await him every day"] become even more significant since seven days have already passed since we entered into the year [57]51 - תשא"י which Jews have designated and disseminated as the year in which אראנו נפלאות - Avenu Niflaos - I will show him wonders, following the initials of the year.

(From the talk of Wednesday, Parshas Beracha, 7 Tishrei 5751)

8. 89:21.

9. *Tavo* 29:3.

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