YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Geulat Yisrael**

**Rav Moshe Taragin**

**Shiur #13: Which Comes First: Redemption or Repentance?**

Western civilization views history as evolutionary and open-ended. The future is completely unknown and is solely a product of human decision. Judaism views history very differently: as predetermined and cyclical. History is constantly surging toward a terminus which resembles the genesis – a perfect world in which the Divine presence is uncontested by Man. Our world isn’t static but is always “coursing” toward the conclusion of history, which we refer to as redemption or *geula*.

The second premise of *geula* is that humans, and particularly Jews, influence the pace and texture of redemption. Religious breakdown reverses the process; when we lost Yerushalayim, the process stalled. However, we can also advance or even accelerate the process, through faith and religious commitment. Jewish redemption redeems all of humanity and, as *Kabbala* reminds us, also affects multiple universes which lie beyond our realm. Redemption and the Jewish capacity to shape it are cornerstones of Jewish belief.

Clearly, Jewish redemption of history hinges upon *teshuva* – both personal and collective. Sadly, we betrayed Hashem and fractured our world. A spiritual "turning-back" to Hashem is vital to redemption. What is less clear is whether historical redemption is contingent upon repentance. If the Jewish people do not repent, will the process stall? Will history be left in the lurch? *Parashat Vaetchanan* certainly suggests as much. Moshe describes the corruption and religious decline of the Jews when encountering the pagan culture of Canaan. Our disloyalty to Hashem caused our exile from the land and introduced historical suffering. Out of the pain of suffering, "*batzar lekha*,*"* we repent, return to Hashem, and are restored. In *Parashat Vaetchanan*, human-initiated *teshuva* must trigger *geula*.

Interestingly, however, the question was debated between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua in a dispute cited by the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (97). Notably, the Rambam endorsed Rebbi Eliezer’s view, that redemption can only emerge in the aftermath of national *teshuva*. Redemptive history awaits the Jewish return to Hashem.

Even if we concur with Rebbi Eliezer and the Rambam that *teshuva* is a prerequisite for redemption, perhaps it doesn’t *precede* redemption. Perhaps a preliminary Messianic event will prompt *teshuva*, which, in turn, will activate a final and complete redemption. For example, the Rambam portrays the Moshiach as a King who inspires a national spiritual reawakening. In the Rambam's Messianic narrative, Moshiach arrives prior to comprehensive *teshuva*, with the task of driving us toward that complete repentance. *Chazal* attribute similar duties to Eliyahu Hanavi, who arrives before Moshiach and inspires *teshuva*. Either way, *teshuva* isn’t independently initiated by our people; it is aided by agents sent by Hashem. *Teshuva* is absolutely vital for compete redemption, but Hashem dispatches proxies to steward the process.

Must "*teshuva*-catalysts" be people, such as Moshiach or Eliyahu Hanavi? Perhaps, alongside the *people* who will steer *teshuva*, divinely choreographed *events* will spark national *teshuva*. Yechezkel (Chapter 34) describes Hashem retrieving His scattered sheep and herding them safely in the land of Israel. Having been reassembled securely under the shepherding of Hashem, we turn our hearts back to Him. This redemptive image of sheep-herding implies a unilateral redemptive process launched by the shepherd. Sheep don’t perform *teshuva* but are forcibly herded. For Yechezkel, the actual return to Israel facilitates *geula*.

We are living through the prophecy of Yechezkel. Our return to the land of Israel has shifted history and has launched a revolution of Jewish consciousness. Shepherding Jews back to Israel has sparked both *teshuva* as well as pre-*teshuva* responses. Religious-minded people process our return in religious terms. We sense a profound shift in our relationship with Hashem. Torah and spirituality flourish as we witness renewed Divine miracles. If Hashem, our shepherd, has once again expressed His love for us, we should be wink back with love, commitment, and *teshuva*.

For other Jews, the State of Israel does not generate religious awakening but does entrench profound nationalistic identification. Millions of Jews deeply identify with the prospect of being "shepherded home.” These sentiments are more nationalistic than they are religious, but they do provide a historical bond which fastens millions of Jews to our common destiny. Might this national awakening be the "platform" for a future "history-altering" spiritual awakening?

The Jews in Egypt abandoned almost all their rituals and beliefs and descended to the moral and religious depths of their slave masters. Yet they retained their national identity, proudly preserving Hebrew language, dress, and culture. This "national pride" formed the cornerstone for eventual religious awakening. It appears as if we are living through similar conditions. Jewish history is cyclical. What happened before will happen again.