

# Parashat Nitzavim- Vayelech





# 1. Repentance and Redemption

- Is redemption the reward for repentance?
- Why does the Torah combine the two subjects?
- Why is there so much repetition in our parasha?

**Repentance** Parashat Nitzavim, in chapter 30, verses 1-10, features a “parasha of repentance”:

When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and **you take them to heart** wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children **return** to the Lord your God and obey ... (Devarim 30:1-2)

וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל  
הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה  
וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ  
וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּ אֶל לְבָבְךָ בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם  
אֲשֶׁר הִדְיָחְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
שָׁמָּה: וְשָׁבַתְתָּ עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
וְשָׁמְעֶתָ בְּקוֹלוֹ...

This parasha of repentance deals with Israel’s return to God after they have been distant from Him as a result of their sins. The root שׁוּב appears in this parasha seven times.<sup>1</sup>

**Redemption** The Torah also weaves another theme into this repentance passage, whose main topic is drawing closer after spiritual distancing. This theme is inherently similar to repentance but deals with a different aspect of it – the issue of redemption. Redemption is Israel’s return to their land after

1 Additionally, the word “שׁוּבוֹתְךָ” appears in verse 3, apparently meaning “your return from captivity,” as the Radak in Sefer HaShorashim interprets, presumable having the the root שׁוּבָה.

physical distancing, after being exiled and scattered among the nations. The Torah also uses the verb “שוב” in its description of redemption and the ingathering of exiles:

|                                     |                                 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| And the Lord your God will return   | וְשׁוּב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת        |
| you from your captivity and have    | שְׁבוּתֶךָ וְרַחֲמֶיךָ וְשׁוּב  |
| mercy on you and gather you again   | וְקִבְּצֶנְךָ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים  |
| from all the nations where the Lord | אֲשֶׁר הִפְצִיבְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ |
| your God had scattered you... (3)   | שָׁמָּה...                      |

Even though the Torah integrates these two subjects – repentance and redemption - into a single passage, without distinguishing between them, they can be read as two separate discussions. Below, we will look at this passage of “repentance” from verses 1-10 and differentiate between these subjects (verses of repentance will be colored in green, while verses that discuss redemption are marked in blue):

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1When all these blessings and     | (א) וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל    |
| curses I have set before you come | הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה          |
| on you and you take them to       | וְהִקְלָה אֲשֶׁר נִתְּתִי לְפָנֶיךָ      |
| heart wherever the Lord your God  | וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּ אֵל לִבְּךָ בְּכָל       |
| disperses you among the nations,  | הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִדִּיתִךָ ה'           |
| 2 and when you and your children  | אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה: (ב) וְשִׁבַּתְתָּ     |
| return to the Lord your God and   | עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ            |
| obey him with all your heart and  | בְּקִלּוֹ כָּבֵל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ   |
| with all your soul according to   | הַיּוֹם אֲתָהּ וּבְיַדְךָ בְּכָל לִבְּךָ |
| everything I command you today,   | וּבְכָל נַפְשֶׁךָ:                       |

3 then the Lord your God will return you from captivity and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

(ג) וְשָׁב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתֶךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצֶךָ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְיָצֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה:

4 Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. 5 He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.

(ד) אִם יִהְיֶה נִדְחֶךָ בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם יִקְבְּצֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ: (ה) וְהִבִּיאֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְרָשׁוּ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וִירְשֶׁתָּהּ וְהִיטְבֶּךָ וְהִרְבֶּךָ מֵאֲבוֹתֶיךָ:

6 The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

(ו) וּמָל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת לְבַבְךָ וְאֶת לְבַב זַרְעֶךָ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבַבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ לְמַעַו חַיֶּיךָ:

7 The Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you.

(ז) וְנָתַן ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת כָּל הָאֲלֹתֵי הָאֱלֹהִים עַל אֹיְבֶיךָ וְעַל שֹׂנְאֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר רָדְפוּךָ:

8 You will again obey the Lord and follow all His commands I am giving you today.

(ח) וְאַתָּה תָּשׁוּב וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל ה' וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֵצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם:

9 Then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as He delighted in your ancestors,

(ט) והוֹתִירְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
בְּכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ בְּפָרִי  
בְּטֹנְךָ וּבְפָרִי בְהִמְתֵּךְ וּבְפָרִי  
אֲדָמָתְךָ לְטִבָּה כִּי יָשׁוּב ה'  
לְשׂוֹשׂ עֲלֶיךָ לְטוֹב פְּאֻשָׁר  
שֵׁשׁ עַל אֲבוֹתֶיךָ:

10 if you obey the Lord your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Torah and turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

(י) כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹר מִצְוֹתָיו  
וְחֻקֹּתָיו הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר  
הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל  
ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל  
נַפְשְׁךָ.

Let us note several interesting points:

1. The Torah repeats the promise of repentance many times in different verses.<sup>2</sup>
2. As mentioned, the Torah weaves two subjects into a single parasha, alternating the two subjects – apparently, in order to emphasize their forming a single parasha.<sup>3</sup>
3. The Torah uses the root שׁוּב regarding both repentance and redemption, for example, “ושׁוּב וּקִיבֹצְךָ” – “gather you again from all the nations” (3).
4. In the parasha of redemption, the root שׁוּב could

2 “You shall take to heart” (1); “you shall return to the Lord your God” (2); “The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts” (6); “you will return and listen” (8); “when you listen to the voice of the Lord your God” (10).

3 See the appendix

have been used in its active form (such as “ השיב” or “ ישיב”, whose significance would be Israel’s return. However, the Torah uses the simple form of the verb, Qal, which seems to indicate that God Himself will return to Israel (we will return to this point later).

We will now look at the interpretations of some of Israel’s greatest commentators.

## 2. A Historical Interpretation (A Study of the Abrabanel’s Interpretation)

Two types  
of Jews

The Abrabanel<sup>4</sup> perceives this parasha of repentance as a prophecy of Israel’s future. This is how he

4 In his commentary on Devarim 30. The Abrabanel also interprets this in his book Mashmia Yeshua, where he brings all the prophecies of redemption, interprets them, and summarizes what can be learned from them about the redemption. His commentary on our parasha appears in “Mevaser HaSheni” the third prophecy (it appears in the Ketuvim volume of the Abrabanel’s commentary on the Tanach); his words there are identical to his commentary on our parasha, but are brought in a wider, clearer context with an additional summary of “Seven Teachings of What is To Come.” At the end of his words, he writes:

הנה הנבואה הזאת דבריה ברור מללו, שהיא עתידה להתקיים וכבר נתקשו ונתחבטו בפירושה חכמי הנוצרים ומהם השתדלו לקיימה בפקודת בית שני וילאו למצא הפתח, ומהם באו לפרשה על הגאולה הרודניית שבעניין הנפש, ולא מצאו כל אנשי חייל ידיהם, לפי שהאמת יורה דרכו, שאם היו הקללות כפשוטם ונתקיימו ראוי שתהיה הגאולה כפשוטה ותתקיים גם כן...

It is clear that the words of this prophecy will be fulfilled in the future, and the wise men of the Christians have already found this difficult and struggled with it, and have tried to explain how it was fulfilled in the Second Temple, but they could not work out how the curses were fulfilled in the literal sense, then it is only worthy that the redemption will also be fulfilled in the literal sense.

explains the repetitive verses in this passage – as pertaining to the future of different groups within Israel. He even goes on to interpret the verses as specifically relating to groups of Jews in his own time: to the “Marranos” who outwardly pretended to change their religion, and to the Jews who openly retained their Jewish identity.<sup>5</sup> Each of these groups must repent differently, and similarly, their redemption will also be different:

The openly  
declared  
Jews

It says “then the Lord your God will return you from captivity and have compassion on you” about those Jews who publically adhere to their Judaism, and regarding them it is said “captivity” because they are in captivity and slavery. And it says “with compassion” because due to their lowliness and troubles, they will need compassion.

הנה אמר 'ושב ה' אלהיך  
את שבותך ורחמך"  
על כל החלק היהודים  
המפורסמים ומחזיקים  
ביהדותם ועליהם אמר  
"את שבותך" לפי שהם  
בשביה ועבדות. ואמר  
ורחמך כי לשפלותם  
וצרותיהם יצטרכו  
לרחמים.

5 And these are his words:

ולפי שהאומה בתוך הגלות תחלק לשני חלקים החלק הקטן מהם מחזיק הדת והולכי בתורת ה'. ובשם ישראל יכנו והם הנשארים מעט מהרבה. והחלק האחר הוא רוב העם אשר מתוך הצרות וכובד הגלות עברו על דת...

Because the nation in exile will be divided into two parts, the smaller part of them preserving religion and following the path of God's Torah. And they will be called in Israel's name and they will remain few among the many. And the other part, the majority of the people, transgressed religion out of all the trouble and pressure of exile.

**The  
Marranos**

However, the other part, those who have left their faith because they were forced, it says, “and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.” And it does not refer to prison or to compassion. And this is the reason why He must gather them from all the nations, for they are assimilated and intermarried with them...

אמנם על החלק האחר, מהיוצאים מכלל הדת מפני אונסם, אמר "ושב וקבצך מכל העמים" וגו'. ולא אמר בהם שביה ולא לשון רחמים. וזו הסבה שזכר בכל אחד שיקבצם מכל העמים להיותם מעורבים בהם ומתחתנים בהם...

In the Abrabanel's opinion, the word heart, mentioned in verse 6, refers to the Marranos:

Moreover, the expression “The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants” hints to the Marranos, many of whom are uncircumcised of heart and of flesh. Therefore it says that it is not enough that the Holy One circumcise their flesh, but also their uncircumcised heart, and although they have been born on the knees of strangers and their customs, their heart will love God with all their heart and soul...

The Torah emphasizes that these “forced” Jews must repent for their deeds, even though their hearts are supposedly pure, and always kept the faith. In relation to the deeds of these “forced” Jews, the Torah repeats and emphasizes: “and you shall return and obey the voice of the Lord and keep all His mitzvot”<sup>6</sup>

6 He says thus:

A promise  
of  
abundance

The Abrabanel concludes his words with an explanation of the need for the final blessing, “Then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands,” as a promise that is made in order to encourage those who were “forced” into denying their Judaism, to repent:

And it says “and the Lord your God will make you prosperous”... I believe that He intends to say to them that the riches and honor they have always had will be given to them in even more abundance and success...for God does not desire that those who are close to Him should be ascetics, but rather that He will once again delight in you as He delighted in your forefathers who were even more blessed with all this goodness more mightily than all other nations.

והנה אמר והותירך ה'...ודעתי בו שכוון לומר אליהם כי העושר והכבוד שהיה להם מאז, יתנהו להם ביותר שפע והצלחה... כי לא יחפוץ הש"י שיסתגפו ביותר האנשים הדבקים אליו, אבל ישוב לשוב עליכם לטוב כאשר שש על אבותיכם שהיו מושפעים בכל הטובות האלה ביתר שאת וביתר עז מכל האומות.

---

והנה אמר עוד ואתה תשוב ושמעת בקול ה' ועשית כל מצותיו וגו'. כנגד העוברי' על דת מפני היראה שהיה להם תשוב' בלב ויושר האמונות לכן אמר עליהם ואתה תשוב אל תחשבו אחר כך להפטר מן המצות אבל אחרי שתבא אל הארץ תשוב מדרכיך ותעש' תשובה טובה על אשר חדלת מלשמוע המצוה ואתה תשמע בקול ה' ותשמור מצותיו שלא היית שומר מצוה.

As it says, You will yet return and listen to God's voice, and do all the mitzvot, etc. For the sake of those who transgressed religion, but who had fear and repentance in their hearts and honest belief, therefore it says to them, You will return, and do not think that afterwards you will get rid of the mitzvot; after you come to the Land you will repent from your ways and do good repentance for all the mitzvot you had stopped obeying, and you will listen to God's voice and keep his mitzvot that you had not observed.

And He will not withhold such material goodness from you so that what happened to your forefathers will not happen to you, that out of sheer wealth they abandoned God and turned away from Him. For you will not be like that, for you will obey God's voice, observing His mitzvot and statutes, for the repentance you do will be with all your hearts and with all your souls, and therefore you will return to sin no more.

והנה לא יאסור הטובות הגשמיות האלה עליך לפי שלא יקרה לכם כמו שקרה לאבותיכם, שבריבוי הטוב עזבו את ה' וסרו מאחרייו. ואתם לא תהיו כן, כי תשמעו בקול ה' לשמור מצוותיו וחוקותיו, יען וביען הייתה התשובה אחר עשית בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם, ולכן לא תשובו לחטוא.

The Abrabanel sees the Torah's promise for the material wealth promised in the future redemption as a direct appeal to those forced to deny their Judaism, who chose to outwardly abandon their religion in order to spare their possessions and wealth. Those Marranos may fear that they are expected to renounce material wealth in order to fully repent, to compensate for the sins that resulted from their reluctance to give up their worldly possessions. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes that in the future redemption, it will not be unacceptable to be wealthy: on the contrary, "the Lord your God will make you prosperous." All this is contingent, of course, on observing God's mitzvot with all their hearts and souls.

**A historical interpretation**

The Abrabanel interprets this passage in light of current events of his time: he lived in the time of the Spanish Inquisition. He witnessed firsthand how

the Marranos could not withstand the pressures of Christian society and renounced their religion in order to retain their wealth and positions, but were also frequently subjected to great suspicion and the persecution of the Inquisition. The Abrabanel himself belonged to the Jews who retained their Jewish identity - and therefore suffered greatly at the hands of the Inquisition, and were eventually expelled from Spain. Those who were expelled were subjected to great hardship, as the Abrabanel describes in the introduction to his books.<sup>7</sup>

The difficult situation of the Jews of his generation led the Abrabanel into a Messianic mindset, and he

7 In his introduction to the book of Kings, he writes that:

וילכו בלא כח שלוש מאות אלף רגלי העם אשר אנכי בקרבו, מנער ועד זקן טף ונשים ביום אחד מכל מדינות המלך אל אשר היה שמה הרוח ללכת... ומצאום צרות רבות ורעות השוד והשבר הרעב והדבר... וגם יד ה' הייתה בהם להומם ולאבדם כי רבים בני שוממה לעבדים ולשפחות נמכרו בכל גלילות הגויים ורבים טובעו בים סוף צללו כעופרת במים אדירים וגם מהם באו באש ובמים כי נשרפו האניות ותבער בהם אש ה', סוף דבר כל משפטיו הרעים איש לא נעדר אשר להרב להרב ואשר לשבי לשבי, והדביק ה' בהם את הדבר והיו לזוועה לכל ממלכות הארץ עד כי ספו תמו מן בלהות וישארו מעט מהרבה...

In one day, three hundred thousand people walked on wearily, myself amongst them, from youth until the aged, young children and women, through all the states of the King to where there was the strength to walk...and they encountered many terrible troubles, robbery, hunger and illness... and God's hand struck against them, confounding and destroying them, for many were deserted, sold as slaves and maidservants amongst the nations, and many drowned in the Mediterranean Sea like lead in mighty waters, and they faced fire and water for their ships were burnt, and God's fire burned against them, eventually, at the end of all His harsh judgment, there was no man who was not touched by the sword or by slavery, and God afflicted them with disease and they were looked upon with horror by all the nations of the land, for their lives ended in catastrophe and they remained few out of many...

wrote three books about redemption<sup>8</sup> in order to encourage the Jews of his time, whose situation was desperate.<sup>9</sup> He read current events as a world revolution that brought the Jews to the brink of disaster, but would hopefully lead to a new, promising beginning.<sup>10</sup>

**The  
redemption  
after the  
fulfillment of  
the curses**

The Abrabanel felt that the Jewish nation was experiencing the curses described in parashat Ki Tavo, and now, after the curses were fulfilled, the redemption, too, must necessarily follow. He describes the impending redemption in wondrous terms, as he comments on our parasha:

And He says that He will bring them to the Land inherited by our forefathers and there will be no need to conquer it like Yehoshua did, who diligently conquered and divided for fourteen years.

ואמר שיביאם אל הארץ אשר ירשו אבותיהם ושלאיצטרכו לכבשה כמו שעשה יהושע שהתמיד בכבוש וחלוק י"ד שנה.

8 “Maayanei HaYeshua” (a commentary on Daniel), “Mashmiya Yeshua,” “Yeshuot Meshicho.”

9 He writes in the conclusion of “Maayanei HaYeshua”:

למה תאמר יעקב ותדבר ישראל אבדה תקוותנו... כי קרוב יום ה' על כל הגוים ובא יבוא לא יאחר וקרובה ישועתו לבא על ישראל עם קרובו... וזהו תכלית כוונתי וסוף דברי וכל מאוויו בספר היקר הזה אשר עשיתי, לחזק ידיים וברכים כושלות יאמצו...

Why should Yaakov say and Yisrael speak of their lost hope... for the Day of God will shortly come upon all the nations and it will surely come and not be late and salvation will shortly come upon Israel, his closest nation...and this is the purpose of my intention and my conclusion and all my wishes in this dear book that I have made is to strengthen weak hands and trembling knees...

10 In his book Yemot Olam he describes the crises of the Jews and their connection to the upheavals of human history.

For God inherited it, and this is “and you shall inherit it and be more prosperous than your ancestors.” That is, their lot and inheritance and success in the Land will exceed that of their ancestors, who inherited the Land.

כי הש"י ירש אותה וזהו "וירשתה והטיבך והרבך מאבותיך". כלומר שתהא נחלתם וירושתם והצלחתם בארץ יותר ממה שהיה לאבותם אשר ירשו הארץ.

In the Abrabanel's opinion, it is promised that after this redemption, there will be no more exile, thanks to the “circumcision” of the heart which will prevent Israel from sinning and being punished again.<sup>11</sup>

11 He writes thus:

ולפי שלא יפחדו מגלות אחר יען יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו, ואין איש בארץ שיעשה טוב ולא יחטא, לזה יעד ומל' ה' את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך. באופן שתהיה מוכן תמיד לאהבה את ה' אלוהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך למען חייד ולא תבא לגלות אחר ולא אל קללות אחרות עוד.

In order that they will not fear exile because a person's heart was created to be wicked from his youth, and there is no one in the land who does good but does not sin, because of this God circumcised your hearts and the hearts of your children. In order that they will always be ready to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul in order that you may live and you will not come to exile or other curses any more.

Afterwards, he goes on to explain what is meant by “circumcision of the heart”:

Circumcision of the heart is not the lack of choice or its negation at that time, for possibility is what defines a sentient being. But its purpose is to make their choices good so that their hearts will only desire that which will perfect them. But not towards desire or excess pleasure which what the foreskin truly represents, for at that time they will be on the same level that the first man Adam was born into, as the Ramban writes, and like Yirmiyahu, may he rest in peace, writes (part 31) “Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, and I will make a covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, a new covenant, not the covenant I made with your forefathers, for this is the covenant I will make, etc, and I will place My Torah within them.” And so the prophet Yechezkel also says: “and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will place

**Revenge  
upon the  
nations**

Another aspect of the redemption is revenge upon the nations. Abrabanel, in whose time the nations embittered the lives of the Jews to no end, is not satisfied with the prospect of the removal of the nations' yokes from around Israel's necks, but demands full vengeance:

And because Israel suffered much trouble and strife in exile, it therefore says: "and the Lord your God will bring all these curses upon your enemies and those who hate you, who persecuted you," and this will be your revenge and the righteous will rejoice for vengeance is prophesied.

ולפי שישראל סבלו  
צרות רבות ורעות בגלות,  
לכן אמר "ונתן ה' אלהיך  
את כל האלות האלה על  
אויביך ועל שונאיך אשר  
רדפוך", והיא תהיה להם  
נקמה וישמח צדיק כי  
חזה נקם.

The Abrabanel's greatness is his ability to see the contemporary and historical relevance of the verses, and to anticipate the redemption out of the crises and suffering of his time.<sup>12</sup>

---

within you, and then they will walk in My ways."

<sup>12</sup> Professor Bentzion Netanyahu, of Blessed memory, wrote an important book about the Abrabanel's philosophy: *Don Isaac Abrabanel – Statesman and Philosopher* (translated by Aharon Amir, Shokan, 2005). The second part of the book, which discusses his political and philosophical views, is particularly recommended.

### 3. Gradual Progress

#### (A Study of the “Akedat Yitzhak’s” Approach)

##### Repentance in stages

Another approach to this parasha appears in the commentary of R. Yitzhak Arama<sup>13</sup>, the author of Akedat Yitzhak. In his opinion, the Torah repeats verses of similar meaning in order to describe the different stages of the redemption process. Repentance does not come at once, but in stages:

...for the first stage is undertaken with difficulty and weakness, while the second with increased, augmented strength, and the first will be sufficient for leaving the path of evil, and the second for strengthening his resolve to return to its opposite, and this is the beginning of movement towards become closer to Him...

When in exile, in the depths of weakness and abomination, you find that He will instigate repentance, as it says, “and you will return to the Lord your God” is juxtaposed with redemption, as it says, “and the Lord will bring you back from captivity” and

...שהעניין הראשון הוא הנעשה בהתחלה בקושי ובחולשה, והשני הוא הנעשה אחר ההתחזקות וקצת ההתגברות, והראשון יספיק לעזיבת הדרך הרעה והשני להתחזקותו לשוב ממנה אל הפכה, והוא התחלת התנועה להתקרב אליו יתעלה...

כאשר ימצאו בגלות בעוצם החולשה והתיעוב אתה מוצא שהוא מקדים תשובה, באומרו “ושבת עד ה' אלהיך” סמך ליה גאולה באומרו “ושב ה' את שבותך” ואחרי גאולה – תשובה ואחר התשובה השנית תוספת

13 R' Yitzhak Arama, a contemporary of the Abrabanel, also lived through the Spanish Inquisition, and he too experienced the torments of the nations on his own flesh.

after redemption – repentance, and after further repentance is a good addition... and afterwards stronger repentance...

טובה... ואחרי כן תשובה יותר חזקה...

And this means that there, in their weakness in enemy lands, they will not be abandoned to their feebleness and weakness... but in your weakness, you will become stronger, beginning what you have been awakened to, to return to Him and obey His voice... at least listen willingly and willfully, even if your deeds are not whole...and this is truly the beginning of repentance... for even the yoke of a heavy burden is around your necks, it is worthy for you to return to what your hearts are saying, and you will have the strength to begin repenting from your sins, for if you make an opening the size of the eye of a needle I will open an opening the size of a hall.

והכוונה כי בהיותם שם בחולשתם בארצות אויביהם לא ייעזבו אל הרפיון והחולשה... אבל התחזקו בכם בהיותכם בחולשתכם להתחיל התחלת מה במה שתתעוררו לשוב אליו ולשמוע בקולו... לפחות תהיה השמיעה ברצון ובאזות נפש, עם שהמעשים לא יוכלו להיות שלמים... והנה זהו באמת התחלת התשובה... כי אפילו בהיות עולם על צווארך למשא כבד, ראוי שתשיב אל לבך אלו הטענות ותתחזק להתחיל בתשובה מעוני כי הנה אם אתה פותח כחודה של מחט הנה הוא יפתח לך כפתחו של אולם.

(Akedat Yitzhak, Devarim, *Sha'ar HaMe'ah*)

The Akedat Yitzhak explains that the Torah presents the issue of repentance and redemption interspersed together because these two processes are dependent

upon, and advance, each other, and neither can fully unfold without the other.<sup>14</sup> As long as Israel are under the yoke of the nations, their repentance towards God is limited, because physical weakness affects a person's spiritual state. Only with God's help – that is, the redemptive process, can they progress in their repentance.<sup>15</sup>

14 He writes thus:

ואז תתחזק במעשים יותר, כמו שאמר "ומל ה' אלוקיך את לבבך... " והוא יהיה עניין שלם יותר מברית מילה אשר ניתן לאברהם אבינו... ונתן ה' אלוקיך את כל האלות האלה על אויביך, והנה כאשר יגיעו כל אלה ההצלחות כבר תוכל להתחזק יותר על התשובה מבראשונה, והוא אמרו "ואתה תשוב ושמעת..." , וכבר תוכל על המעשה השלם, מה שלא נאמר תחילה רק השמיעה, ובה תתחזק עוד הגאולה והישועה בידך בהשלמות ענייני כמו שאמר: "הוותרך ה' אלוקיך בכל מעשה ידיך..." " שיתמיד הצלחותיהם בקיום עצמם ובסיפוק צרכיהם בשמחה... שהוא תכלית ההצלחות כי בזה יוסיף להם אומץ גדול עוד בהשלמת מעלתם, והוא מה שפירש בסוף: "כי תשמע בקול ה' אלוקיך... כי תשוב אל ה' אלוקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך", והוא שכל מה שיעשו משמירת המצוות והחוקים התוריים תהיה כוונתם אל התשובה הנכונה אליו, לא אל יראת העונשים... אבל בבחינת הטוב מצד שהוא טוב...

And your deeds will be more fervent, as it says, "and the Lord your God will circumcise your heart..." and it will be a more complete matter than *brit milah* that was given to our forefather Avraham...and the Lord your God will give all these curses upon your enemies, and when all these successes come to pass you will be able to repent more fervently than before, and this is the meaning of the statement "and you will repent and listen..." and you will be able to achieve the full action, unlike at first, when you could only listen, and through this the redemption and salvation will be complete, as it says: "and then the Lord your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands," for they will constantly succeed in sustaining themselves and fulfilling their own needs in joy... which is the purpose of success, for through this they will attain even greater strength through perfecting them, as is explicitly stated: "for when you obey the voice of the Lord your God...for when you return to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul"– that their incentive in keeping the mitzvot and the statutes will be their desire for proper repentance, rather than fear of punishment...for good for good's sake...

15 See Nechama Leibowitz's *Studies in the Book of Devarim*, parashat Nitzavim – Repentance and Redemption.

**The  
description  
in the text**

The Akedat Yitzhak's explanation seems to explain the interspersed text very well: repentance-redemption-repentance-redemption. However, studying the text in depth seems to present an opposite picture – the description of the repentance already seems to open (verse 2) with an advanced form of repentance:

You and your children shall return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul. וְשָׁבַתְּ עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלוֹ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּנְךָ הַיּוֹם אַתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ בְּכֹל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ.

This describes repentance that brings a person right up to God, with all his or her heart and soul, presents obedience to His voice, and states the commitment of the next generation as well – how can there be greater repentance than this?

Indeed, the next verses that describe repentance (8,10) do not seem present a picture of more advanced repentance, but rather, they repeat the same words:

You will again obey the Lord and follow all His commands I am giving you today...you shall obey the Lord your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Torah and turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. וְאַתָּה תָּשׁוּב וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל ה' וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּנְךָ הַיּוֹם. כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמּוֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו הַקְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה כִּי תָשׁוּב אֵל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ.

**Consistent  
repentance**

It may be that through such repetition, the Torah presents an important principle-definition mentioned in the Akedat Yitzhak. Repentance is not a one-time act, intended for sinners alone. Repentance is a perpetual process. As long as the human being is living in this world, he is living in a state of imperfection, and he must therefore constantly strive for perfection and progress, so that the course of his life is, in fact, a course of repentance. As Rav Kook describes:

...the most important foundation of [a person's] perfection is the constant yearning and desire for perfection, and this desire is the basis of repentance, which always triumphs over his way of life, and truly completes it. (Orot HaTeshuva 5:6)

...עיקר יסוד השלמות שלו  
[=של האדם] היא העריגה  
והחפץ הקבוע אל השלמות,  
והחפץ הזה הוא יסוד  
התשובה, שהיא מנצחת  
תמיד על דרכו בחיים  
ומשלימתו באמת.

The Torah weaves the verses of repentance together with verses of redemption – even though these verses are repetitive – in order to express that repentance is not a one-off **event**, but rather a transition to a new **state** – a state of perpetual completion and closeness to God, of never-ending elevation towards new spiritual heights.

## 4. From Redemption of the Heart to Fulfillment of the Mitzvot (A Study of “Or HaHaim” in Light of the Words of the Ramban)

עד ה'  
and  
אל ה'

This parasha can also be explained in light of the words of R' Haim Atar, in his commentary “Or HaHaim.” “Or HaHaim” reads the repetition of this parasha as the gradual process of different stages of repentance. Reading the verses in depth, one can note two differences between the first verse about repentance and the last verses:

The first difference is that that the first repentance is עד ה', “until” God, while the last form of repentance is אל ה', “to God.” Some commentators explain that the meaning of the phrase “עד” is “until, but not quite until,” and therefore the repentance “to” God is greater.<sup>16</sup>

Fulfillment  
of the  
mitzvot

Another difference, perhaps a more significant one, is that the end of the parasha discusses fulfilling the mitzvot (verses 8 and 10), while the first part does not mention actual fulfillment.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> See the Malbim on this parasha, verse 10.

<sup>17</sup> While the verse at the beginning of the parasha says “You will again obey the Lord and follow all his commandments,” which can be interpreted as fulfilling the mitzvot, this is not explicitly stated; in contrast, at the end of the parasha it is twice explicitly mentioned “and you shall *do* all of His mitzvot...to observe his mitzvot and statutes.”

From repentance in the heart to fulfillment of the mitzvot

According to this, although the Torah uses similar expressions for both verses of repentance, this still describes different stages of repentance. The first stage is repentance in one's heart, obeying God's voice ("with all your heart and all your soul"). This awakening of heart has the power to awaken Supreme love, driving the process of redemption. Little by little, together with the redemption process, the desire to give practical expression to this love also awakens. Thus, repentance reaches a new stage – a stage of practical repentance, of fulfilling the mitzvot.<sup>18</sup>

The first awakening of repentance is defined by the Or HaHaim as "the repentance of Torah Study," and is followed by two more stages – avoidance of negative mitzvot, and then observance of positive mitzvot:

There are three general stages of keeping God's mitzvot: the first is studying its laws; the second is keeping its prohibitions; and the third is keeping its positive

...שיש ג' דברים כלליות  
במצות ה': א' היא עסק  
התורה; שנית – שמירת  
מצות לא תעשה; שלישית –  
קיום מצות עשה.

18 The "Or HaChayim" focuses on three components of repentance that a person should include in his repentance and their ranking order, and also incidentally mentions the expected reward – using the principle of *middah keneged middah*, measure for measure – of each of the components of repentance. In our discussion I have chosen to approach this from the opposite angle (a historical angle) – by tracing the redemption process and how each stage motivates a different component of the process of repentance.

commandments. The three stages are presented thus: Studying its laws is presented as “and you shall return to the Lord... and you shall obey His voice,” which is Torah study, and nothing else is mentioned, for this is the first stage of repentance that he who returns must be done, and it is said “And the Lord your God will return you from your captivity and have mercy on you and gather you again” as the Zohar (3:2) says, that in the merit of Torah study Israel will be redeemed... Keeping its prohibitions is presented as “and the Lord will circumcise your heart,” and it is known that an “uncircumcised heart” means wickedness and love of evil in a person’s heart, and therefore it says “the Lord will circumcise” for love of God, meaning that love will flow through you with pleasant affection for your God, and the reward of this is that God will remove all troubles from us onto our enemies, as it says, “on your enemies,” etc. Regarding the fulfillment of

לזה כשבא לומר תיקון התשובה סדר שלשתם: כנגד תשובת תלמוד תורה אמר תשובה ראשונה “ושבת עד ה’... ושמעת בקולו” שהוא תלמוד תורה, ולא הזכיר עמו דבר אחר, וזו היא התחלת התשובה שצריך השב לעשות, ואמר כנגדה “ושב ה’ את שבותך ושב וקבצך” וגו’ כאומרם ז”ל (זוהר ח”ג ע”ב) שבזכות עסק התורה יהיו ישראל נגאלין...

וכנגד שמירת מצות לא תעשה אמר “ומל ה’ את לבבך”, וידוע כי ערלת הלב הוא עשות רשע ואהבת הרשע שלבו של אדם מחמדתו, וכנגדו אמר “ומל וגו’ לאהבה את ה’” פירוש שתלביש האהבה אשר תיכן בך התוכן בריאתך בנעימות ידידות חיבת אלהיך, ויחד שכר לזה שיהפוך ה’ כל הצרות מעלינו על שונאינו באומרו ונתן וגו’ על אויביך וגו’, וכנגד קיום מצות עשה אמר “ואתה תשוב וגו’ ועשית את כל מצותיו” הרי זה מצות עשה, ויחד להם שכר הקרבת התועלת

positive mitzvot, it says, “and you will return... and you will fulfill all His mitzvot,” these are positive commandments, and their reward is reaping all the benefits, as it says, “I will make you prosper,” etc. כאומרו והותירך וגו' וישוב לשוב וגו'.

In order to clarify that there are three separate stages to repentance, which gradually unfold together with the redemption process, the Torah alternated the parasha of repentance with the parasha of redemption.

The Or HaHaim does not explain how or why these stages of repentance are interspersed or interdependent with the redemption process. However, as the Akedat Yitzhak argues, these processes seem to be mutual and interdependent, thus their interspersion. Why is the repentance process dependent on the redemptive process?

**Freedom  
allows  
repentance**

Firstly, it is clear that release from enslavement to the nations allows the fulfillment of mitzvot in a fuller sense, so that the further the redemption process, the more Am Yisrael can progress in fulfilling the mitzvot<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> As the Rambam writes in *Laws of Kings*, 12:4:

The Sages and prophets did not yearn for the Messianic Era in order that [the Jewish people] rule over the entire world, nor in order that they have dominion over the nations, nor that they be exalted by them, nor in order that they eat, drink and celebrate. Rather, their aspiration was that [the Jewish people] be free to [study] the Torah and its wisdom, without anyone to oppress or disturb them, and thus be found worthy of life in the World to Come.

(as the Abrabanel and the Akedat Yitzhak write in light of their harsh experience with the oppression of the nations forbidding the Jews' practice of their religion).

However, it may be that beyond technical facilitation, redemption has a more essential influence on the process of repentance: the spiritual state of freedom from oppression in exile is what allows Am Yisrael to become fully subjected to the will of God. In order to hear God's word, a person needs spiritual freedom,<sup>20</sup> and therefore, the Exodus from Egypt necessarily preceded Matan Torah.

The mitzvot  
are fulfilled  
most  
completely in  
the Land of  
Israel

Secondly, redemption is not only freedom from enslavement to the nations, but its true purpose is to allow Am Yisrael to return to their land. The Ramban

20 Because of this, Bnei Yisrael were unable to listen to Moshe's words in Egypt: "from shortness of breath and hard labor," nor could they even bear hearing the tidings of their redemption, as the Abrabanel writes:

...והן שתי סיבות, הא' "קוצר רוח" שקצרה נפשם בעמלם, והב' בעבודה קשה שהיו עושים, שלא היה להם פנאי אפילו לשמוע בשורות טובות, והיה אם כן הקוצר רוח בנפש, והעבודה הקשה בגוף.

וכך משתמע מדברי הספורנו שם (ד"ה מקוצר רוח): "כי לא נאמנה את אל רוחם, ולא נתנו לב להתבונן". ועוד כתב (בד"ה ומעבודה קשה): "כי לו לא העבודה הקשה היו נותנים לב לדברי משה והיו מבינים מטענותיו, שראוי לבטוח".

The two reasons are "shortness of breath" – they were breathless with their toil, and the second is the hard work they did, that they did not have psychological space to hear good news, and they were spiritually short of breath, and hard physical labor. This is also what the Seforno writes ad loc. (headed רוח): "for they were faithless and dispirited, and they had no heart to consider." And he also writes (headed מעבודה קשה): "if not for the hard labor they would have heeded Moshe's words and understand his claims, which were worthy to hear."

discusses the connection between the fulfillment of the mitzvot and living in the Land in several places in his commentary, for example, in parashat Acharei-Mot:

Outside of Israel, even though all belongs to His Honorable name, its purity is not complete, because of the service to its rulers and the people who mistakenly seek to serve these rulers as well... and this is discussed in the Sifri: “Even though I have exiled you from the Land to outside of it, adhere fully to the mitzvot, so that when you return they will not seem new to you”... only physical mitzvot must be observed in exile, such as tefillin and mezuzot, so that when we return to the Land, they will not seem new to us, for all the mitzvot are intended chiefly for those who live in the land of God... (Ramban, Vayikra 18:25)

...והנה בחוצה לארץ, אע"פ שהכל לשם הנכבד, אין טהרה בה שלימה, בעבור המשרתים המושלים עליה והעמים תועים אחרי שריהם לעבוד גם אותם...  
ומן הענין הזה אמרו בספרי: "אף על פי שאני מגלה אתכם מן הארץ לחוצה לארץ היו מצויינין במצות שכשתחזרו לא יהו עליכם חדשים"... אינו מחייב בגלות אלא בחובת הגוף כתפילין ומזוזות, ופירשו בהן כדי שלא יהו חדשים עלינו כשנחזור לארץ, כי עיקר כל המצות ליושבים בארץ ה'...

In the Ramban's opinion, the mitzvot are mainly intended for fulfillment in the Land of Israel; and according to this reading, we can also explain that only the return to the land of Israel (which is the first stage of redemption, mentioned in verses 4-5) enables true fulfillment of the mitzvot (as mentioned

in verses 8-10).

This seems to be a crucial development in the repentance process: redemption and return to the Land are the physical steps that allow true devotion to God and complete fulfillment of His mitzvot, which are not fully manifested outside of Israel.<sup>21</sup>

## 5. Circumcision of the Heart

And the  
Lord will  
circumcise  
your heart

At the center of the parasha of repentance (verse 6) lies the concept of “circumcision of the heart”:

The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

וְמַל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת לְבָבְךָ  
וְאֶת לְבַב זְרַעְךָ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת  
ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל  
נַפְשְׁךָ לְמַעַן חַיֶּיךָ.

This verse presents a significant step in the redemption process, as it describes a special phenomenon. On the one hand, it belongs to the subject of redemption; on the other, it describes an act that God does for Israel, not an act that Israel is to do. This raises several questions: What is the meaning of this concept, this “circumcision”? Why is there

21 Thus the words of the Tosefta can also be understood (*Avoda Zara* 7:3):

לעולם ישרה אדם בארץ ישראל ואפילו בעיר שרובה גוים ולא בחוצה לארץ ואפילו בעיר שכולה ישראל – מלמד שיישיבת ארץ ישראל שקולה כנגד כל מצות שבתורה.

A person should always remain in the Land of Israel, even in a city that is mostly non-Jewish, rather than outside of Israel, even in an entirely Jewish city – which teaches that living in Israel is considered equal to all the mitzvot in the Torah.

need for such an act after Israel has already repented so sincerely, as described in verse 2? What place does this have in the repentance and redemption process?

**Circumcision-  
exposing  
holiness**

(Actual) circumcision is a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. A *brit* is the removal of the foreskin, which serves as a cover, and removal of this cover reveals its true inner essence, which is innately holy. That is, holiness is present in every Jew from birth, but it must be uncovered; removal of the foreskin reveals the holiness within us.

“Circumcision of the heart” may be interpreted in a similar way. When Israel is scattered among the nations, their special holiness is concealed, covered over. The redemption process includes removing Israel from among the nations, and part of this process is “circumcising the heart,” removing the outer, superficial cover that separates God from His people, thus revealing the innate holiness of His chosen nation, allowing us to draw closer to Him.<sup>22</sup>

22 The juxtaposition of the words “circumcision of the heart: and the revelation of Israel’s special status is also mentioned in Devarim 10:16:

רק באבותיך חשק ה' לאהבה אותם ויבחר בְּזַרְעָם אַחֲרֵיהֶם בְּכֶם מִכָּל הָעַמִּים כִּי־זֶה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: וּמִלֶּתְם אֶת עֶרְלַת לִבְבְּכֶם וְעֵרְפְּכֶם לֹא תִקְשׁוּ עוֹד.

Only your forefathers the Lord desired, to love them, and He chose their seed after them you, out of all peoples, as it is this day. You shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart, therefore, and be no more stiff-necked.

As if to say, Because you are God’s chosen people, you must circumcise the foreskin of your hearts and return to your destiny. And it seems that this was also the “Siftei Cohen’s” interpretation:

”ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם וערפכם וגו' ". יאמר אף על פי שהקב"ה חשק באבותיכם... ובהר

Circumcision of the heart connects repentance to redemption

The redemption process mainly unfolds through Am Yisrael's actions, in an upward movement, while the redemption process mainly unfolds through God's actions, in a downward movement. "Circumcision of the heart" connects these two processes; it is certainly part of the redemption process, but it is also a part of the redemption process. During Am Yisrael's redemption, God removes all obstacles that prevent them becoming close to Him: they are freed from the nations' oppression, they return to the Holy Land, physical trials and hardships come to an end. Circumcision of the heart is an integral part of this process, when all covers and barriers that prevent Israel from drawing close to God are removed.

## 6. Mutual Return

"and the Lord will return" As we noted at the start of this discussion, the redemption process is not described using the active, causative verb form "והשיב," which means "to cause to return," but in the simple form of the verb, ושב - "and God will return":

---

בכם ואתם קודש שנאמר (ירמיה ב', ג): "קודש ישראל לה' - ... עם כל זה יש לכם ערלה, לפי שכל הדורות באו מאדם הראשון והוא היה מושך בערלתו ומחמתו באה לכם הערלה. "And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart, therefore, and be no more stiff-necked." This is said even though God desired your forefathers... and chose you and you are holy, as it says (Jeremiah 2:3) "Israel is holy unto the Lord" ... nonetheless, you have a foreskin, because every generation descends from Adam, and he would pull at his foreskin and the foreskin is a result of his wrath.

Then the Lord your God will return you from captivity and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

וְשָׁב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ  
וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצֶךָ מִכָּל  
הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְיָצֶךָ ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ שְׁמָה:...

**The Divine Presence in exile**

Rashi noted the singularity of this expression and explained (in light of Chazal’s midrash)<sup>23</sup> this as the Divine Presence’s redemption from its exile:

Our Sages learned from this that it is as if the Divine Presence is immersed in Israel’s sorrow at their exile, and when they are redeemed, it is written that it itself is redeemed, so that it returns with them. And moreover, that the day of the ingathering of exiles is so great and so difficult, that it seems to need to hold each of their hands, each in its place, as it says (Isaiah 27:12) “and you will gather Bnei Yisrael, one by one...”

רבותינו למדו מכאן שהשכינה כביכול שרויה עם ישראל בצרת גלותם, וכשנגאלין הכתיב גאולה לעצמו, שהוא ישוב עמהם. ועוד יש לומר, שגדול יום קבוץ גלויות ובקושי, כאלו הוא עצמו צריך להיות אוחו בידיו ממש, איש איש ממקומו, כענין שנאמר (ישעיה כ"ז, יב) "ואתם תלקטו לאחד אחד בני ישראל..."

According to both interpretations, the expression “and return” expresses the Divine Presence’s participation in Am Yisrael’s redemption – both according to the explanation that the Divine Presence goes out to exile with Am Yisrael, immersed in their sorrow, and according to the explanation that it descends to take each person out of exile directly

23 See *Megillah* 29a.

from the depths of exile.

שיבה - return  
as an-  
expression of  
closeness

It may be that this language also expresses another meaning: in exile, Israel is distanced from God. Their first awakening to repentance is the first step of renewed closeness to **God**, which awakens God's return to **His people** in turn.

Mutual  
return

That is, this process is not one sided; Israel do not return to God and are merely rewarded with their return to the Land, but there is a process of mutual return.<sup>24</sup> The repentance process and the redemption process are interspersed, woven together, line by line, because they are a single process, a process of Israel's return to God, and God's return to Israel. While Israel's main role is to repent, and God's main role is to redeem, this division is not unequivocal. God returns to Israel, together with them, "circumcising their hearts" to enable their full repentance, so that the encounter is mutual,<sup>25</sup> as God requests of Israel,

24 The midrash (*Midrash Tehillim* 85) is well known:

אמרו בני קרח, עד מתי אתה אומר (ירמיה ג, יד-כב): "שובו בנים שובבים"; והן אומרים לך, שוב אתה תחלה, שנאמר (תהלים צ, ג): "שובה ה' עד מתי והנחם"; ואתה אומר, לא כי אלא ישראל תחלה. לא אתה תשוב לעצמך ולא אנו נשוב לעצמנו, אלא שנינו כאחד, שנאמר (תהלים פ"ה, ה): "שובנו אלהי ישענו".

The sons of Korach said, Until when will You say (Jeremiah 3:14-22): "Return, backsliding children"; and they say to You, You return first, as it says (Psalms 90:13): "Return, O Lord, how long will it be until You have compassion"; and You say, No, for Israel must come first. No, You will not return first nor will we, but both of us together, as it says (Psalms 85:5): Return us, our God, our Savior."

25 And perhaps it can be understood from this that just as God plays a role in our repentance, so must Israel play a role in the redemption – by returning from exile to the Land of Israel.

and even promises them:

...כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי נְאֻם ה' צְבָאוֹת וְאֶשׁוּב אֲלֵיכֶם אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. (Zechariah 1:3)<sup>26</sup>

---

26 An extremely similar verse also appears in Malachi 3:7: “Return to Me and I will return to you, thus says the Lord of hosts.” It is interesting to note that these two verses appear in the prophecies of prophets of the Second Temple. During this period, Am Yisrael was in exile and was given opportunity to return to Israel, but few heard God’s call. Most of the nation remained in exile, and therefore the task of building the Second Temple took a long time. The prophets called the people to return in two senses: to return in repentance, spiritually; and to return to the Land, physically, to rebuild the House of God, for Israel must take part in both processes – in repentance and redemption.