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ISRAEL AND THE DIASPORA: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN "GOLA" (EXILE) AND "GEULA" (REDEMPTION)

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The Meanings of Exile and Redemption / "Light unto Israel": The Orthodox Fallacy / "Light unto the Nations": The Secular Fallacy / Israel: The World's Center for Jewish Spirituality

The controversy raised periodically over questions pertaining to the appropriate relationship between Israel and the diaspora seems trite, self-contradictory, and, hence, superfluous. Thus, opinions ranging from those who advocate complete negation of the Jewish diaspora to those who demand equal representation of diaspora Jews in the Israeli decision-making machinery are voiced from time to time.

While the call for equal representation draws on the claim that, *de jure*, it is largely the diaspora that carries the burden of (UJA) taxation, those in Israel insist that one cannot compare the donation of money to the shedding of blood. Ironically, in view of the unfortunate increasing number of yordim (Israeli emigrators-defectors), one could solve the above problem by implementing an "exchange" program. Accordingly, diaspora Jews, who are presumably more efficient businessmen than Israelis, would run the Israeli

economy and administration on an "exchange" basis, thus, spending sufficient time and money working in Israel (while their Israeli counterparts try to make it abroad) and this would presumably entitle them to decision-making rights in Israel. While such an ironic "exchange" idea is obviously a satiric utopia, an examination of the more serious questions defining the differences and inter-relationships between the self-actualization of one's Jewish identity in Israel and in the diaspora is not a simple matter. In broader terms, what are the grounds for Jewish spiritual actualization in the diaspora?

The Meanings of Exile and Redemption

Prima facie, it is very tempting to define diaspora Jewish self-actualization in spiritual terms by following the syllogistic play on words available in the association between gola (diaspora) and geula (redemption). Accordingly, it might be suggested that while most

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nations assimilate once they are exiled from their native land, Jews insert the Hebrew letter "aleph" in the word gola to form the word geula in order to start all over again the spiritual ascent from "aleph" (the beginning). This geula-ascent via the gola-descent conception might hence legitimate the assignment of a spiritual meaning to self-actualization of Jewish identities in the diaspora. Thus, it is not the material Babylonian tower but the spiritual Babylonian Talmud which will predominate vis-a-vis the Jerusalemite Talmud. A careful examination of authoritative biblical interpretations concerning these concepts will reveal, however, that in conjunction with the gola, the word geula may be understood only as a material self-actualization of one's Jewish identity.

"Light unto Israel": The Orthodox Fallacy

Let us examine how the word geula is used in the Torah. In Leviticus it is stated unequivocally:

If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem (goalo) it, then shall he redeem (vegaal) that which his brother sold. And if the man have none to redeem (goel) it, and himself be able to redeem it, then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of Jubilee; and in Jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession (Leviticus, 25: 25-28).

Thus, contrary to the spiritual meaning which is usually attributed to the word geula (redemption), a straight-forward reading of the above biblical passages must be understood in monetary-material terms. Moreover, even if one follows such an authoritative biblical commentator as the Or Hachayim, who interprets the term geula that we read in Leviticus as referring to the obligation to redeem the Land of Israel, one can find no clear indication that it is the spiritual effort of the people in the gola which might hasten the geula.

This idea the Or Hachayim expresses

clearly when he comments on the notion of Jubilee which the Torah introjects into the stipulations pertaining to the geula process:

And if his hand will not find sufficient (sources) to return, namely if the Master (G-d) will realize that the people (Israelites) have no strength to endure more and their debts (sins) multiply...then that which is sold shall remain...until the year of Jubilee which constitutes the time limit for redemption in time and then he...shall return to his possession (house, land, Israel) because the end of the galut is there even if G-d forbid Israel will be completely wicked.

The idea that the spiritual efforts associated with the observation of the commandments is not obligatory for Jews residing in the diaspora is most clearly formulated in the popular interpretation forwarded by Nachmanides in relation to another verse in Leviticus: As is well-known, Nachmanides interprets the verse "That the Land spew not you out also, when ye defile it" (18:28) by offering the following widely cited comments:

Any one who lives in the diaspora has no G-d...and it is said in Sifre (in regard to the verse cited in "Shema Yisrael"): "ye perish quickly from off the good land....Place these words of Mine upon your heart," etc. is not binding in the diaspora...and it was explained in regard to them so that they (the commandments will not be new for us when we return to the Land (of Israel) because the essence of all the commandments is for those that sit in the land of G-d.

What comes through clearly from the above citations and Nachmanidesian interpretations of verses appearing in "Shema Yisrael" and others is that, according to major trends in Orthodox Judaism, self-actualization of one's Jewish identity in the spiritual sense, emanating from one's efforts to observe the commandments (which include studying the Torah), is only permissible as a rehearsal or as a preparatory device for returning to Israel. This self-actualizing definition, which predominated the Jewish ghetto, neither aspired to redeem the Land of Israel nor affected the geula process (as Or Hachayim implied), but it fallaciously assumed that Jewish

self-actualization in the gola may be achieved by observing the commandments, i.e., by being a "light unto Israel."

"Light unto the Nations": The Secular Fallacy

Let us now examine how secular Judaism defined self-actualization of one's Jewish identity in the gola. One of the major problems that secular Jews faced in Europe after their emancipation evolved from their identity crisis. If their emancipation in terms of acquiring equal rights depended on their acceptance of the Hegelian idea of progress, then by definition Jewish self-actualization is anachronistic and obsolete.

Let us explicate this inevitable conclusive proposition. The process of secularization which characterized the emancipated Jews, who could now leave the ghetto to study in the universities, obviously required a new definition of Jewish self-actualization in the diaspora. Thus, if one discards the particularistic actualization of Jewish chosenness via the active observation of the 613 commandments, then how can one express his Jewish identity?

The avenues open for an emancipated Jew are either to assimilate (as unfortunately many did) or to adopt a universalistic definition of Jewish identity which would concur with the new secularized humanistic status of these Jews. Indeed, one may notice how Isaiah's imperative: "I will also give thee for a light unto the nations" (Isa. 49:6) constituted the basis for defining the new role of the secular Jewish humanist. Thus, nineteenth century leaders of Reform Judaism or twentieth century socialists defined the Jewish raison d'etre and identity in the Isaiahan universalistic terms of Jews being a "light unto the nations." The Jewish reform leader Samuel Holdheim stated, for example, that: "It is the messianic task of Israel to make the pure knowledge of G-d and the pure law of morality of Judaism the common possession and blessings of all the peoples of the earth" (see Plaut, 1963:138). Similarly, the socialistic historian Rappoport explained Jewish active revolutionism in Russia as follows: "From Isaiah down to Lassale, the cry for justice and equality has been reiterated by Jews, but it has

always been universal...such is part of the mission of Israel" (1918:259).

This new spiritual definition of Jewish identity in terms of the universalistic mission to be a "light unto the nations" appeared, however, to be the most tragic misinterpretation of the Hegelian idea of progress which these Jews had to accept as a condition for their emancipation.

As is well known, it was on the basis of Hegel's philosophy of history that such notorious historians as Arnold Toynbee claimed that Jewish existence represents a fossilized archaic form of persistence because Jews have outlived their mission in the process of historical progress. Moreover, Hegel himself saw in the emergence of Christianity out of the self-destructive de-chosenness of Judaism, a natural dialectic process of linear progression by which Christianity became an elevated form of Judaism which outlived itself. "The Chosen family and its possession of Canaan was taken from the Jewish people...it was left for the Romans to annul its individuality. The Temple of Zion is destroyed; the God-serving nation is scattered to the winds....All that remains to be done is that this fundamental idea should be expanded to an objective universal sense, and be taken as the concrete existence of man -- as the completion of his nature" (Hegel 1900, 412).

If emancipation demanded acceptance of Hegel's notion of progress, which meant that the Jews have outlived their historical mission because Christianity has become an elevated form of Judaism, then defining the identity role of Jews in the diaspora as universal teachers of morality and spirituality is diametrically opposed to the idea of progress. Consequently, if the spiritual role of being "a light unto the nations" is a fallacy because emancipated Jews in the diaspora may be accepted only as individuals who have outlived their Jewish spirituality, then we come back full circle to ask whether the dialogue between gola and geula must lead to a material definition of Jewish identity in the diaspora. In other words, if a spiritual definition of Jewish Orthodox self-actualization by observing the commandments in the diaspora may be termed as the fallacy of being a "light unto Israel," and if, similarly, the

secularized form of being a Jewish spiritual "light unto the nations" may also be conceived as a fallacy, would this mean then that the diaspora Jews must see themselves as the Zebuluns whose task is to provide material support for the Israeli spiritual Issachars? In other words, does the scenario portrayed above lead to the inevitable perpetuation of the Jewish mid-rashic legend based on the Bible according to which the tribe of Zebulun, presumed rich merchants because they engage in seaborne commerce, supports their brothers the tribe of Issachar whom the Bible describes as "dwellers in tents," interpreted as the tents of Torah where they study. Studying the Torah in turn benefits Zebulun.

Israel: The World's Center for Jewish Spirituality

While it would be obviously unrealistic and unwise to ban or abandon the Babylonian spiritual Talmud in order to save the Babylonian material tower, the conclusion that Israel must remain the center for Jewish spirituality is inevitable. Whether conceived in Achad Haam's terms or in any other sense, this would mean that Jews may acquire spiritual and material assets all over the world, but unless they spend time in Israel, the meaning of this acquired knowledge may not be fully internalized. Does this declaration represent a naive statement of wishful thinking?

The present writer believes that it is neither naive nor unrealistic. The Talmud states Avirah de'Eretz Yisrael Machkim (Baba Batra, 158:b), which means the air or rather the aura of Israel wisens.

In concrete terms this would mean that unless one breathes the daily problems Israel faces, unless one touches the stones of Jerusalem, one may not understand the debate between Rome and Jerusalem.

Consequently, it is not only a UJA kind of material support for Israel which should be reserved for the diaspora Jew but the realization that modern Jewish study centers must be built in Israel and that every ancient Jewish manuscript or papyrus must be purchased and stored in Israel. Accordingly, it would be senseless to preach against the self-actualization of Jewish identity via the observance of the commandments or to teach only material roles

in order to deemphasize Jewish spiritual morality in the diaspora. However, both secular and observant Jews of the gola must understand that their material geula may function to strengthen their own spiritual Jewish identity only if they experience personally some of the problems evolving from mitzvot hateluyot ba-aretz, i.e., the active imperatives emanating from being in Israel, whether defined in religious or in secular terms.

Practically, this would mean that concerted efforts must be invested in establishing centers for teaching and experiencing in Israel various aspects of Jewish life and its cultural heritage. It is generally agreed that most one-year programs for studying and living in Israel usually exert more lasting impacts on molding the Jewish identities of Jewish youngsters than do ten years of Jewish preaching. While, accordingly, adults could usually not take a year off, the idea of combining a vacation with studying and experiencing Judaism in Israel might be both realistic and appealing. Such spiritual centers could be implemented on differential levels to suit educational background and/or physical needs for those who can afford them.

Thus, the materialistic "exchange" conceptualization of the gola-geula dialogue becomes, in essence, a means for spiritual actualizing salvation for diaspora Jewish identity.

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