

EXILE □ CHAPTER 1

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

The idea of redemption in general sits very well with contemporary society in particular and with humankind as a whole. After all, it's rooted in the notions of progress, growth, and advancement; and it speaks both to the soul's timeless need to bloom, and to the very essence of modernity which is to progress and to be free.

Needless to say it has been a major motif in Jewish history since the expulsion from Israel and the destruction of the second Holy Temple in particular in 70 C.E. (which of course forced the whole issue to the forefront); but the idea of redemption appeared even beforehand, in the body of the Torah.

We're told there that there would come a time when we'll indeed be in exile, when things will become horrible and we'll be moved to fully repent in the hopes of returning home, and when we'll indeed be collected from around the world and be redeemed (see Deuteronomy 30: 1-5). So we see that the ideas of exile and redemption are fundamental to our people.

Now, on one level we could think of exile as a chronic disease and redemption as its miraculous cure. For while the only thing darker, more wretched and grim than a serious illness suddenly come-on is a serious illness gone chronic. Since almost everything that had been natural and commonplace in the victim's life is now gone and may never be again; and only alien, harsh, and foul days lay ahead. And indeed, exile has been just that. We've "learned to live with it" by now, to be sure, and managed to compensate for the losses, but that doesn't deny just how harsh and obdurate it has all been. Our having survived it just speaks to the human ability to adapt and to the depths of G-d's mercy.

And despite the fact that we'd hoped for a quick "cure" when we'd first been banished and never expected to be in exile for two-thousand years, here we are nevertheless.

In any event, we've been assured over and over again that we'll be "healed" in due course -- promised that what has hurt so much, has been so vile and foul, has brought on such grief, and forced us to forego so much that others far healthier than we enjoy every day, would all be gone.

That's to say, we've been assured that the Moshiach (Messiah) will finally come; that we'll indeed be the nation we couldn't be until that will have happened; and that, at last, we'll be able to bask in the Light of Life that is G-d's Presence, which we haven't been able to for so long.

The Tradition has been largely clear about the way it will all come about, and about many of the why's and wherefore's (which we'll delve into to some degree in this section). But a lot of the background information has been left out -- the clandestine workings of this and that in the heavens that would need to be set off for redemption to come about in the everyday world. For we're taught in fact that everything has its roots in the heavens which has to be set off first before anything down-to-earth can emerge.

So that's where Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's Discourse on The Redemption comes in: it fills in those details and then some; and it also tells us what we have to look forward to, which few other works do.

Let's start off by depicting the exile state, lay out the process of redemption as it's usually presented, and then go on from there to fill in those gaps.

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