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Teshuva: The Obligation and its Result: Redemption Chomas Daas Fortress of Faith Chapter 13

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Teshuva: The Obligation and its Result: Redemption

By the Chofetz Chaim

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When we reflect about the present world situation we find that it is very, very dreadful indeed. Its suffering are so numerous that it is impossible to list each one separately.' The chapters of rebuke found in B'chukosa and Kee Sovo have been literally fulfilled in our day.

However, it is important to comprehend those passages in V'eschanen which, according to the Midrash Rabbas D'vroim, refer to the time of the Final Redemption. They read as follows:

"And the L-rd will scatter you among the nations...But you will seek from there the L-rd your G-d and you will find Him if you beseech Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have overtaken you in the end of days, then will you return to the L-rd your G-d and you will hearken to His Voice. For a Merciful G-d is the L-rd your G-d..."

The Alm-ghhty, may His Name be blessed, who knows both what was and what will be, and who foretells the future before it happens, had Moses relate to Israel in this chapter: if they sin, the manner in which they will be dispersed: the way in which they will repent; and how they will be redeemed. That they will sin, "and they will do evil"; then, "and the L-rd will disperse you among the nations"; and finally, "when you are in distress..."

"Rabbi Eliezer said, when they were redeemed from Egypt, they were redeemed because of five things: because of distress, as it says, "and the children of Israel moaned..."; because of repentance, "and their cry ascended..."; because of mercy "And the L-rd saw the children of Israel..."; because the time had come, "And the L-rd knew..."; ...In like manner, the Future Redemption will transpire because of distress, "when you are in distress..."; because of repentance, "then you will return unto the L-rd your G-d..."; because of mercy, "for a merciful G-d is the L-rd your G-d..."; because of the merits of your forefathers, "he will not forget the Covenant of your forefathers..."; "In the end of days," indeed, because the time had come."

To understand this statement we must realize that all five factors aid in bringing the Redemption. If, however, Israel attains a perfect repentance that by itself will give rise to the Deliverance even before the specified time, as it says, "Today, if you hearken to His voice." On the other hand, if the repentance is not a complete one, all five factors are necessary for Redemption,

Therefore, let us not be puzzled as to how we will merit Redemption in this generation. Let us not ask, are we not unworthy and inferior to the previous generations who attained a much greater excellence in the service of Gd? Because the answer is a simple one – in their day the time for Redemption had not yet arrived. It is also possible that their sufferings did not attain the degree of intensity they have

attained today.

But now, all of the signs mentioned in Sanhedrin (97) which herald the Redemption have come upon us, even of being dispersed and of wandering to the ends of the earth for we satisfy the passage, "If your outcasts be at the ends of the heavens." We can be hopeful, therefore, that all of the prerequisites have come about and, with a little repentance, we can look forward to an immediate Redemption. The sufferings have become so dreadful, and the dispersion has been so prolonged that we can say with obvious certainty: we have reached the period known as the "end of days." [acharees hayamim]. Thus, without doubt it is our duty to awaken and to repent now, for this will surely hurry the Redemption: "and when you will return unto the L-rd your G-d, and hearken to His voice according to all that I command you today....then the L-rd will return your captivity and have mercy upon you."

Whenever Israel is beset with sufferings they have an obligation to repent since it is repentance which brings their sufferings to an end. The Rambam makes this clear, in the Laws of Fasting, Chapter 1. ("If they do not cry out and do not entreat but say this happened to us because of natural causes and this misfortune is but an accident, this is the path of cruelty. It causes them to cling to their evil deeds and leads from this misfortune to new misfortunes. It is what the torah means when it writes, "If you walk with Me with accidents, then will I also walk with you with accidents in fury," i.e. when I will bring some hardship upon you in order that you repent, if you say it is an accident I will intensify that 'accident' with fury.") Certainly, then, today when the sufferings follow each other with such rapidity – which in itself is one of the signs of Redemption, as our sages say, "If you see sufferings come in a constant flow, like a river, wait for him..." – it is imperative for each individual to awaken himself to repent and to alert others as well, if he but have the ability (We explained this at length in the first six chapters.)

The merit of T'shuva will surely cause the Alm-ghty to have mercy upon us. He will remember us with the Covenant of our fathers, and redeem us with an everlasting Redemption, as the passage declares: "And then you will return unto the L-rd Your G-d and hearken to His Voice....for a G-d of mercy is the L-rd your G-d and He will not forget the Covenant of your fathers..."

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1. The reader must not be misled by our statement that 'we have reached the 'end of days' and think that we mean to confine 'the end' to our immediate period. This is not so because the precise 'end' will remain locked in secrecy until the Light of His Salvation actually shines forth. Nevertheless, we can say about our age in a general way that it is definitely the period of "Messianic Labor" since all the signs of that period, as mentioned in the Gemorah, have come to pass. It is impossible, however, to say how long this period will last. It is in G-d's hand alone to terminate the 'labor' and to hurry the birth. (As everyone knows, the Vilna Gaon writes that the entire period of the exile is likened to a pregnancy, and its close, when the 'end' is near, is likened to the 'labor pains'.)

In my opinion, this is the meaning of: "I am the L-rd in its time I will hurry it." Everyone is familiar with the commentary of our sages on this verse and its simple meaning can be understood similarly.

That moment designated for the Redemption is not limited to a specific day, but to an entire period, one which may last several months (as actually happened at the exodus from Egypt). After it says, "And they heard that the L-rd remembered their affliction" there, nevertheless, began a period of very severe birth pains which enveloped them for six months. During that time the severity of their afflictions was most extreme, as the Midrash explains, and concerning that period, Scripture writes, "My dove is in the cleft of the rock...", or several years, G-d forbid, with the Redemption possible at the beginning, mid-point, or, G-d forbid end of that period. It is comparable to the birth of a child. Although it ordinarily takes nine months to give birth, nevertheless it is possible to have a child at the beginning of the ninth month. However, this is all dependent on the Will of G-d and the merit we can engender from below.

This then is what the passage means: "I am the L-rd; in its time I will hurry it," i.e., when the

time suitable for the Redemption comes to pass, the L-rd in His Mercy will seek to hasten and hurry it and not wait for the last moment.

Thus we must strive to engender His Mercy from below in order that He hasten our Deliverance.