



A Bittersweet Guarantee

Navigating prophecy can be tricky. The dramatic shift of the past century hasn't ever occurred before and we possess no tradition or roadmap for direction. Moreover, redemption, by its very nature, isn't logical and can't be dissected analytically. Redemption will always lie beyond the reach of human cognition. We attempt to redeem our world through human effort and, when inevitably we come up short, Hashem descends into our realm and redeems it for us in a manner beyond human faculty and beyond human analysis. It is the unknowability and irrationality of redemption which renders it redemptive.

Unlike halacha, geulah doesn't inhabit the realm of the rational and isn't lodged in the logic of the mind. Halacha can be carefully mapped, its rituals quantified,

and its application reasoned. Redemption is a great leap into the unknown of history and will never be driven by logic or ration. It is lodged in the collective Jewish heart and the soulful song of our troubled common historical journey. Pioneers of Jewish redemption must walk through a door into the unknown. Walking through that door requires both faith and imagination.

Though geulah is uncharted territory, we do have a general road map and a generalized sense of where this process is heading. We have B"H entered the fourth and final chapter of history. The first historical phase of 2500 years was characterized by theological confusion and moral mayhem. Only a few individuals discerned their Creator peering back at them through the veil of Nature and through the chaos of violence. Mass revelation at Sinai, in the year 2448, launched a 1300-year golden era of revelation, prophecy and Jewish monarchy. This period provided us Messianic horizons, but sadly, this potential was repeatedly squandered. Regrettably, we ceaselessly forfeited our invitation to a better future and, tragically, we were cast out of history into a two-thousand year trek through the wilderness of time. After 2000 years of waiting, we have finally advanced to the final phase of history. It may take some time, but the road back to utopia has shifted into full gear. We have turned the handle and entered a new room of history. How long it will take us to

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traverse this room is anyone's guess.

How do we know? Perhaps a third exile awaits us, crouching unseen in the jungle of history, ready to pounce and overwhelm our meager accomplishments. Ironically, the reassurance that we will not suffer a third exile is encoded within the gloomy tochacha sections of the Torah which describe our expulsion into exile. At the very moment that Hashem scatters us into the diaspora, He embeds deeply-coded clues for our return. On the way out, He waives us back in!

A careful analysis of the differences between the two tochachot yields an important clue. The Ramban discerns close to a dozen differences between the first tochacha storyline and the second tochacha narrative. Based on these discrepancies, he associates the first tochacha in Bechukotai with the first exile and the second tochacha in Ki Tavo with the long exile of 2000 years.

Remarkably, this assignment of an "exile" to each of the two respective tochacha sections implies that there will never be a third exile. If the potential for a third churban existed, there would have been an additional tochacha section in the Torah. By providing coded descriptions of each exile the Torah assures us that there will not be a third churban.

The former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Herzog, stressed this message of reassurance at a very frightening moment of Jewish history. On the eve of the six-day war he traveled to Australia to fundraise. Hearing that the Suez-canal had been sealed by the Egyptians and realizing the eventuality of war, he hurriedly traveled back to Israel. Sojourning over Shabbat in New York he spoke to

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the community about the inevitability of war. Hearing these ominous warnings, the community began to shudder at the prospect of a second Holocaust – this time in the Land of Israel. He assured them that such a calamity could not possibly unfold, as we have a masorah of two exiles but not three. This masorah and his message are rooted in the analysis of the Ramban.

This tradition is comforting and reassuring, but also dangerously seductive. Such is the way of redemptive euphoria: it is like lightning in a bottle- it can electrify history, but it can also electrocute it. If, indeed, we are here to stay and are guaranteed against a third churban, perhaps we can act brazenly or irresponsibly on our path to our assured future. If we know where this all ends, perhaps, we can take risks and chances since Hashem will always “have our back”. After all, there can’t be a third churban.

True, we know exactly where we are heading, but we *don't* know how long it will take to get there or how rocky the road may be. The eviction of 7 million Jews from the Land of Israel would entail, chas v'shalom a churban and we are guaranteed against it. However, the road to full redemption can be peaceful and smooth or it may be jagged and painful. Under the intoxicating spell of redemption our behavior must remain, responsible, measured and humble. We may know the final chapter of the book of history, we may have reached the final section of that book. But there are still many many chapters to be written. Let us write them carefully with a stable hand and courageous heart. And most of all with humility and gratitude that Hashem placed these pens in our hands. ■