



**GEULAS YISRAEL**

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# Religion, Science and Redemption

It was a generation with unlimited potential. For centuries, humanity labored under the curse of Kayin, aimlessly roaming earth, lonely and afraid. Things were changing. A fearless group of people traveled westerly, migrating from the uninhabitable wastelands of the East. Choosing a land suitable for human settlement, they aspired to construct the first city in history. This city would contain a tower at its center, beckoning others to join this experiment in the city on the hill.

Beyond reversing Kayin's "sentence", they were also atoning for his crime. Since Kayin's murder the world was engulfed in violence and immorality. This new generation realized that teamwork works better than violence, and cooperation, not competition produce a better result. The word **חב**, which connotes designed collaboration, appears twice in this narrative, and highlights the solidarity of purpose amongst the city founders. They spoke one language, and more importantly, imagined a common future.

What went wrong and how did this great civic experiment of solidarity go sideways?

## **Industrial Revolution**

This project wasn't just a social revolution but was also the first industrial revolution. Their technological advances may seem primitive to us, but for that era, it represented a major leap forward for Mankind. They discovered the ability to smelt clay into bricks and mortar, enabling solid construction rather than the assembly of flimsy huts. With bricks and mortar multi-story buildings could be raised and larger populations could be housed in concentrated spaces. The first city, and certainly its iconic tower, would have been impossible without brickmaking technology.

Just as important, solid construction promised shelter from future floods and mudslides. Previously, their mud and thatch houses were easily engulfed by typhoons and hurricanes, and humanity still suffered PTSD from the "Big Flood". These bricks and mortar, they assumed, would shield them from natural disasters.

Close to two thousand years after fire was delivered from God, Man finally harnessed its creative forces. In addition to providing light and heat for basic survival, fire provided the energy necessary to manufacture upgraded building materials, which were far superior to the raw elements available in Nature.

## **Man Becomes God**

Unfortunately, in the wake of this scientific revolution, humans became too godlike

to actually depend upon God in heaven. By building this tower they hoped to storm the Heavens and replace the angry god who had flooded them with human technology. Hashem intervened, confused their common language, and scattered them across the planet. What began with such promise ended in scattered disarray.

Throughout history, the impulse to discover new ideas and achieve a better understanding of our world, has often led humanity to reject religion. Religion often appears to constrain humanity's intellectual curiosity and to stifle our thirst for new ideas and for new information. Once the barrier is broken and new science is discovered, humans break free of religious conventions and restraints, believing that they are no longer in need of divine assistance. Ultimately – either by direct divine intervention or through indomitable forces of Nature- at some point, humanity is humbled and faith in God is restored.

### Science in a Redemptive Age

The history of the past four centuries feels eerily familiar. Once again, humanity has made dizzying and mind boggling technological strides and once again, science has broken free of the bonds of religion. A world of faith has yielded to a secular city. Once again events – such as the recent pandemic- remind humans of their own fragility and their dependence upon God. It seems as if little has changed. But, in an age of redemption everything is different.

### 1840

The Zohar claims that in the sixth century of the sixth millennia, or the year 1840, the gates of upper wisdoms will open, and the springs of lower wisdoms will surge,

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in preparation for redemption in the 7<sup>th</sup> millennia. The Vilna Gaon explained that “upper wisdom” refers to new Torah knowledge. Generally, we assume that subsequent generations decline in their level of Torah mastery. Yet there are historic moments in which, through divine intervention, new sections of Torah are disseminated, or upper springs unlock.

What about the lower springs? To the Vilna Gaon they refer to the seven fields of scientific knowledge alluded to in the verse in Mishlei (9:1): חֲכָמוֹת בָּנִיתָ בֵּיתָהּ חֶצְבָּה עֲמוּדֶיהָ: חֶצְבָּה- wisdom has built her house, and has carved out seven pillars. For redemption to occur, these seven fields of science, which serve as pillars of the universe, must also be mastered. Why is scientific literacy necessary for redemption?

Firstly redemption depends upon an entire world acknowledging the Jewish people as God’s chosen. When we master these general fields of science and harness its knowledge to improve the human condition the world pays attention. We are beginning to witness this prophecy, as Jews have spearheaded advances in technology and science and through these developments the world has become acquainted with the “Jewish mind”. Ironically, despite growing and persistent antisemitism, the Jewish people have reached a level of prestige which far surpasses our “standing” in previous generations.

The mastery of science is also *inherently* necessary for redemption. Everything derives from Hashem and only by understanding all of this “divinely derivative knowledge” can His will be completely understood in its unified form. Torah

represents the most accurate and complete *derivative* of Hashem’s will while science represents an inferior and lower grade derivative of the divine Will. For this reason, we devotedly study Torah’s sacred wisdoms to gain direct access to His will. But even the lower springs must be understood for redemption to arrive.

### **The Age of Audacity**

The gemara describes the Messianic period as an era of chutzpah or audacity. Intellectual courage and audacity are vital for scientific discovery. Chazal compare the Greeks to a leopard which daringly hunts its prey. The Greeks had the boldness to question the conventions and accepted paradigms of their ancient world, and through intellectual courageousness they resolved hidden mysteries of Nature which had baffled humanity. They introduced the world to a scientific method which still serves as the platform of Western science. Without their intellectual chutzpah, the world of science would not have evolved.

The past four hundred years have also been years of intellectual chutzpah. Man has unshackled himself from the Dark ages and has reshaped almost every sphere of human experience and of human thought. Yet, Man still hasn’t discovered the *Author* of all this knowledge and science. The surge of the lower springs of science haven’t been fused with the opening of the upper windows of Torah and of religion.

One day we will unite the lower springs with the upper windows, and together, these two derivative wisdoms will reveal one common Author. That will be the day of redemption and everything will feel as one. ■