

**"Are We In Galuth? - The Approach of HaRav David Bar-Hayim To  
Geulah"**

*By Yair HaKohen*

I was privileged not long ago to have a conversation with the head of Machon Shilo, the Ba'al Nusach Eretz Yisrael, HaRav David Bar-Hayim.

I told him that I had been party to a different conversation in which a good Jew made the claim that those of us who live in Eretz Yisrael do not live in "galus" geographically but we do in terms of the period of time in which we live. I asked HaRav Bar-Hayim if he necessarily had a problem with what this Jew had postulated. In the past I had heard the Rav state that there is no halachic category of "atchalta d'geulah" and therefore we need not feel the need to use such terminology. Furthermore, I had heard the Rav state that theoretically we can not be completely certain that geulah-related processes such as the existence of a Jewish sovereign State or the State's possession of certain lands are irreversible ones. That is, hypothetically, Jews could have to return to Brooklyn or Marrakesh. Of course, the Rav also stated that such a possibility seemed quite remote-but the point was that he did not believe it was correct to confer irreversibility upon these processes. I then pointed out to the Rav that there is universal agreement that the "geulah shleimah" (complete redemption) has not yet taken place, i.e. the Temple for example has not yet been rebuilt, and if we combine this fact with his other aforementioned views perhaps it is not incorrect to state that we live in a period of time which can still be characterized as galuth.

The Rav clearly dismissed characterizing our period in history as galuth. He told me that galuth and geulah are mistakenly viewed as the equivalent of a light switch which is either turned on or off. Today we live in an era in which elements of geulah clearly exist. The existence of a sovereign Jewish State where the majority of the world's Jews live makes it absurd to say that the Jewish nation is "in galus". The fact that Jews who generally without any good excuse choose to remain in places outside of Israel does not make this otherwise. Actually, the fact that nearly all Jews who live in galuth do so voluntarily makes it quite illogical to claim that we are "in galus." If a spirit of teshuvah were to spread among Jews in America and other countries and millions would make aliyah then we could undoubtedly upgrade our current situation into a much better one. That potential does exist and thus the absurdity of describing our period as "galus" as though a Divine Decree were somehow rendering impossible a steady progression into what all would consider "geulah shleimah."

The Rav's point is that there exists such a thing as "shades of gray" when it comes to geulah and galuth. The need to view the concepts of geulah and galuth simplistically results from a widespread lack of sophistication. This lack of sophistication has had unfortunate consequences in creating unrealistic eschatological expectations when relating to recent realities.

Among the national religious the expectation of irreversibility of geulah processes has led to crushing frustration and despair among some for whom the surrender of land to our enemies was perceived as an impossibility. For many years many in the national religious camp who felt that the State of Israel marks the "atchalta d'Geulah" took as a given that the next stages of our history can only bring further progress. Therefore, they reasoned, territorial withdrawals simply could not happen since that would constitute a reversion to a galuth reality which we have left behind. For such people, the lack of willingness to adopt a more nuanced approach towards geulah created the illusion that reversals such as the Oslo withdrawals and destruction of Gush Qatif could never happen. And, as in the past, unreasonable messianic expectations have led to post-traumatic distress.

Among the Haredi population the perception that we are "in galus" even as we live in Eretz Yisrael has created indifference towards our national aspirations. Why join the I.D.F., fight for Eretz Yisrael, or unabashedly support the settlement enterprise when in any case nothing has changed? Facts such as the existence of Jewish sovereignty, the unprecedented migration to Israel in the last century, the revival of the Hebrew language are not all that relevant in the mainstream Haredi mindset. These facts do not serve as an inspiration to upgrade our national status in a proactive fashion. Yes, there are Haredi idealists who wish to see more and more Jews observing mitzvot in order to "bring Mashiach" but the prospect of engaging in projects to upgrade the national infrastructures which have been created is something towards which only the national religious seriously aspire. A simplistic approach towards geulah has prevented a very large religious population from being galvanized and motivated to create a truly Jewish State.

Not enough has been said regarding the tragedy that is Habad and how its false messianism has also been encouraged by widespread lack of sophistication regarding geulah. Habad is an excellent example of what happens when one takes the "light switch" understanding of geulah and galuth to an extreme. If geulah is a completely new reality which arrives in an instant, with mashiach so to speak landing in a spaceship and the Temple falling from Heaven, then one need not be surprised when a movement takes this irrational approach a step further, utterly and completely rejecting all surrounding realities, interpreting halachic writings of Rambam as poetry, and to a large extent refusing to acknowledge that Rabbi Schneerson is no longer alive. When one creates a conceptual dichotomy between geulah and galuth such that the latter refers to

our current reality and the former to an otherworldly reality of a completely different nature, then it only requires a hop skip and a jump to enter the realm of fantastic, dream-like thinking. According to the Rambam one of the criteria for identifying a messianic candidate is his engaging in fighting the wars, i.e. literal wars, of Israel. Habad thought it logical to claim that Rabbi Schneerson fit this criteria though he clearly did not lead the State of Israel in any wars whatsoever. Such an approach which is completely disconnected from the facts is the culmination of a haredi approach which shows no willingness to view current national realities in an objective manner.

Rav Bar-Hayim has told me that it would be accurate to understand the word "geulah" in reference to current events as meaning a process of "redeeming". Our job is to engage in "geulah", and not merely to engage in observations of where exactly we are on the galuth-geulah timeline. We must do all those things which are incumbent upon us as a result of them being missswoth. Waiting for mashiach or even praying for mashiach is insufficient. We must do all those missswoth which we are capable of doing. And finally, we must remember a vital point which Rav Bar-Hayim has made repeatedly. Speculating about how precisely to categorize eschatologically the period in which we live is a counter-productive distraction. What is of utmost significance is our actions.