

A REJOINDER

Jewish history is the saga of a people which has remained one with its land through millennia of independence and foreign conquest, of uprooting and dispersion, of struggle to rebuild its statehood and of final restoration of national statehood. The land entrusted to us was a token of the Covenant made with our father Abraham, "Unto thy seed have I given this land (Gen. 15:18)." The rabbis in the Talmud wonder why the past tense *nataiti* — "I have given" is used, although God's promise refers to the future and it should read *etein* — I shall give. R. Huna in the name of R. Shemuel bar Nahman said the future tense denotes the certainty of the event (T.J. Hallah, 2:1). The promise was not conditional but absolute. As a covenanted people, the attachment of the people of Israel to the land was irreversible and enduring.

This is in keeping with what the rabbis further state: when Abraham asked "how shall I know that I shall inherit it?" he had in mind that perhaps future transgressions by Israel might cause its destruction like the generation of the Flood or the Tower of Babel. And the Lord said, never! As a token of this promise, He enjoined Abraham to take a heifer and other sacrifices which became the Covenant of Sacrifices, serving as an atonement for any transgression in the future (T.B. *Taanit* 27b). Indeed the land was a gift to God's covenanted people and our present return to it is a sign that God's covenant with us is alive and enduring.

My major criticism of Dr. Simon's article is that in his pursuit of biblical scholarship he disregards completely rabbinic interpretations of scriptural texts. It is difficult to understand how an authentic Jewish student of Scriptures can attempt to probe biblical insights without recourse to rabbinic hermeneutics. To the Christians, the Bible is a self-contained book expounded in accordance with its own sources. To the Jew, however, the Written and Oral Law are one. The reason why Rabbi Akiba emerged as the epitome of the Hebraic tradition, whose impact

on the Halakhah and *sitrei Torah*, was unrivaled was because his exegetical rules of hermeneutics unified the written and oral law for all times. By introducing the notion that the very words and letters of Scripture embody a higher language from which halakhic principles may be deduced, he paved the way for a biblical exegesis which no biblical scholar may disregard.

Dr. Simon raises the question whether the present return to Zion should be regarded as the beginning of the third and final redemption or a part of the previous settlements in the time of Joshua and in the time of Ezra. He quotes Rabbi Goren who maintains that the present return to Israel constitutes the "third redemption," grounding his argument in the rabbinic statement "that they will not settle finally in the land except the third redemption which has no end as we read 'and the third shall be left alive'" (Zech. 13:8), (Tanhuma, *Shofetim*, 9).

Disregarding Rabbi Goren's argument which is based on rabbinic sources, our author proceeds to consider the question from pure biblical sources and reaches the unwarranted conclusion that . . . "the pendulum movement between exile and redemption has not necessarily reached its end. It could, God-forbid, recur."

Clearly the position taken by Rabbi Goren revolves around a central issue in the Talmud (*Yebamot* 16a and *Shabuot* 16a) namely, whether *Kidsha l'shata*, *Kidsha l'atid labo* or *lo kidsha l'atid labo*. The land of Israel was sanctified twice, once at the time of Joshua's conquest of the land and the second time by Ezra upon the return from Babylon. The fact that there had to be a second *Kedushah* by Ezra thus nullifying the first *Kedushah* by Joshua, has led many rabbis to assert that Ezra's *Kedushah* was temporary and was also nullified by the Roman conquest. Hence a third *kedushah* will be necessary in the future with the coming of the messiah. However, Rambam (Hil. *Bet Hebehirah*, 6) maintains that there are only two redemptions and the sanctification at the time of Ezra was to last forever — *Kidsha l'shata Kidshah l'atid labo*. The reason Maimonides gives for the distinction between the first and the second return is that while Joshua's sanctification was a result of physical conquest, Ezra's sanctification was through colonization (*hazakah*). (See Rabbi

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Soloveitchik's analysis of Rambam in *Al ha Teshuba*, ed. P. Peli, p. 300.)

Clearly, then Dr. Simon's conclusion that the present restoration may not be irreversible drawn from his assumption that it should be regarded "in the perspective of our previous settlements" is completely untenable. Granted even that his assumption is correct, our present return to Israel embodies the element of finality since the time of the sanctification of Ezra. Even with the coming of the Messiah it will not be necessary to resanctify the land of Israel. And the reason for that is because the return of Ezra was marked by colonization — *hazakah* — actual possession and not destined possession of the land. Contrary to the assertion of Dr. Simon, "that before the coming of the Messiah there is no identification between the actual possession and the eternal unconditional destiny," the Halakhah, based on Rambam's decision, interprets God's promise of the land "as an eternal possession" (Gen. 17:8), as a continuous actual possession. Surely, our present return is marked by *hazakah*, actual possession which derives its sanctification from the restoration of Ezra.

Consistent with his position of *Kidshah l'shata kidshah l'atid labo*, Maimonides in *Maamar Kiddush ha-Shem* chides "those who are seduced into remaining in their places until the advent of the Messiah in the West, who will lead them to Jerusalem. Concerning them the prophet decries: "And they heal the breach of the daughters of my people very lightly saying, peace, peace, when there is no peace (Jer. 8:11). For, indeed, there is no definite time assigned for the appearance of the Messiah, and no one can state with any assurance whether his coming will be in the near future or at some remote period" (L. Stitskin, *Letters of Maimonides*, p. 67).

Consider further our author's assumption that "everyone agrees that our deeds have an influence upon hastening the messianic process or delaying it." Here again Dr. Simon either deliberately or unwittingly ignores a well-known rabbinic observation which assumes the opposite. The rabbis tell us that redemption will come in one of two ways. "In its time, will I hurry it" (the redemption) (Isaiah 60). Rabbi Yehosua ben Levi sees a contra-

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diction. On the one hand, it says "in its time" (implying that redemption can come only within a fixed and set time). On the other hand, it says, "I will hurry it" (meaning that it can come sooner). But the answer is: if we merit it, the redemption will come hurriedly; if we do not merit it, it will come only "in its time" (T.B. *Sanhedrin* 98).

Accordingly, the sages speak of two ways to usher in the messianic period. Either through meritorious deeds, by following the dictates of the Torah — then redemption will come swiftly and with glory, free of tragedy and suffering. However, if we do not merit it, then redemption will come only "in its time," and only after prior suffering and tragedy as described in the Talmud (*Sukkah* 52a&b), in the Targum and Midrashic literature. Saadia in *Emunot V'Deot* in his eighth treatise on Redemption (Chapter 6) elaborates on the nature of the prior tragedies that will befall our people prior to the messianic period. In the second instance, then, the only condition for the final return to Zion is suffering and sacrifice. Surely the unparalleled national tragedies, the two millennia of brutal atrocities and massacres, culminating in the genocide of six million Jews by the Nazis, surpasses anything our sages could have conceived as the conditional promise for redemption.

Clearly, even if we assume the return as conditional as our author maintains, in this rabbinic context there are two conditions for ushering in the messianic period. The first, stressed by our rabbis which our author reports of meritorious deeds and the other, prior suffering and tragedy which our generation has experienced in abundance. In our day, to be sure the final restoration of our people in Zion might have come sooner and without prior tragedies if we had heeded the admonition of our prophets. But now that it came "in its time," our possession of it is eternal and unconditional. It is grounded in God's covenant with Abraham, the *Berit bein habetyrim* (Covenant of the Pieces), which our rabbis interpreted as the Covenant of the Sacrifices (*loc. cit.*).

To us therefore the land of Israel constitutes the very essence of our existence. No Arab entity can have a claim to any part of its territory. Since the dawn of history, thousands of years

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ago, no people other than the Jewish people ever established or even thought of establishing a state of its own in the Land of Israel. No people except the Jewish people ever looked upon the Land of Israel as a separate entity. And justice requires that this national entity must be defended with every means at our disposal. Indeed the survival of Israel without any conditions is the highest priority and commandment for the Jew. With an impending spiritual disintegration threatening every Jewish community in the Diaspora, Israel is the only hope for the preservation of our people and of our Torah. There are two basic affirmations — *ani maamin*— that every Jew must live by today. *Ani maamin she'zot ha Torah lo tehei mehulefet* (“I believe that the Torah will be eternal”) and *ani maamim shezot haarets lo tehei mehulefet* (“I believe that the land of Israel will be eternal”).