

"GOD (RE)CALCULATES THE END"

Will Redemption Ever Come?

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Sometimes, it feels like redemption will never come. We have waited so long already. But what is the realistic expectation here? If God is waiting for us to suddenly fix all the ills of society or ourselves, if God is waiting for us to suddenly be worthy, when is that ever going to happen? It sometimes feels like we are going to have to keep on waiting... forever.

And yet, we can be surprised. Redemption can come early. The Haggadah reminds us that when we talk about ultimate hope, the forces propelling us toward redemption are already in motion, and are often moving faster than we would ever have thought possible.

The redemption from Egypt took place exactly like this. Its duration and end were already promised by God to Abraham, that his descendants would be slaves for 400 years (Genesis 15:13). The Haggadah refers to this with its description of God as one who "חשב את הקץ" - calculated the end¹:

שהקדוש ברוך הוא חשב את הקץ
לעשות כמה שאמר לאברהם
אבינו בברית בין הבתרים...

The Holy Blessed One calculated the end, to act in accordance with what God had said to Abraham our father in the covenant between the pieces...

And yet, when we actually do the calculations (based on the ages of our ancestors and their time in Egypt from the Torah), we do not end up with 400 years in slavery, but rather 210! There are many ways to begin to

reconcile this issue.² But a *midrash* suggests that, in fact, redemption came early—and not because the Israelites suddenly became worthy or acted any differently. Redemption came early because of factors totally beyond their control.

**פסיקתא דרב כהנא (מנדלבוים)
פיסקא ה - החדש הזה עמוד 88**
"קול דודי הנה זה בא מדלג על
ההרים מקפץ על הגבעות" (שיר
השירים ב:ח)...

ר' יהודה א' "קול דודי הנה זה
בא," זה משה. בשעה שבה משה
וא' לישר' בחדש הזה אתם נגאלין
אמרו לו, רבינו משה, היאך אנו
נגאלין, לא כך אמ' הקדוש ברוך
הוא לאבינו אברהם "ועבדום
וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה"
(בראשית ט:יג), והלא אין בידיו
אלא מאות ועשר.

א' להם, הואיל והוא חפץ
בגאולתכם אינו מביט
בחשבונותיכם, אלא "מדלג על
ההרים מקפץ על הגבעות"

**Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 5
(Mandelbaum, p. 88)**
"Hark! My beloved! There he comes, skipping over mountains, leaping over hills" (Song of Songs 2:8)...

R. Yehudah says: This refers to Moses. In the moment that Moses said to Israel, "In this month, you will be redeemed," they said to him: "Our teacher Moses! How are we going to

be redeemed? Didn't the Holy Blessed One say to Abraham our father, 'They will enslave them and make them suffer for 400 years' (Genesis 15:13)? But it has only been 210 years!"

[Moses] said to them: "Since God desires your redemption, God is not looking at your calculations, but rather 'leaps over the mountains, and skips over the hills.'"

Playing off the imagery of God (represented as the lover in Song of Songs) "skipping" and "leaping," this *midrash* suggests that, even though the Israelites didn't deserve early release, the Israelites benefitted from God's desire to free them.

One medieval commentator applies this *midrash* to our Haggadah phrase:

שיבולי הלket
והיה מחשב על הקץ לדלגו
ולקפצו

Shibbolei Ha-Leket, ed. Buber, p. 95b
God (re)calculates the end [of slavery], skipping and leaping over it.

Rather than a static "God calculated (חשב) how long slavery was going to be," the author of the Shibbolei Ha-Leket suggests that this phrase is actually a constant activity: "God is always מחשב - calculating and re-calculating - the end." In this way, it

1 Some texts of the Haggadah have מחשב instead of חשב. See the version quoted by Shibbolei Ha-Leket below. This will be critical for understanding the force of the Haggadah's sentence.

2 Most commentators start counting the 400 years from the birth of Isaac. When Isaac was sixty, he gave birth to Jacob (Genesis 25:26), and when Jacob was 130 he went down to settle in Egypt (47:9). This leaves 210 years of actual slavery. Exodus 12:40 says that Israel lived in Egypt 430 years before leaving. Most commentators start that timing from the promise made to Avraham at the covenant of the pieces, supposedly thirty years before Isaac's birth.

could turn out that God “skips and leaps over” the original term of slavery.³

Of course, if God is willing to recalculate the period of slavery in Egypt, might not God recalculate the end of our current suffering, and

SOMETIMES THE TIME FOR REDEMPTION HAS SIMPLY COME, AND IT COMES EARLIER THAN EXPECTED

speed the final messianic redemption of the whole world? Just as in Abraham’s case, the Talmud records a tradition where our end of days is fixed and known ahead of time.

תלמוד בבלי מגילה יז:
אמר רבא: מתוך שעתידין ליגאל
בשביעית...

Talmud Bavli Megillah 17b
Rava (some texts: R. Hiyya bar Abba) said: In the future, redemption will come in the seventh (cycle)...

Rava (or R. Hiyya bar Abba) could be referring to the seventh annual cycle, the Shemittah year, or to the seventh millennium. Either way, redemption comes at a pre-appointed time.

So, is there any hope for us? Is it possible that God will “skip and leap” to save us, to shave off a few hundred years, so we can finally be redeemed?

The context of Rava’s statement suggests: yes! This section of the

Talmud justifies the order of the different *berakhot* in the daily Amidah, generally based on verses from Tanakh or on logic. The *sugya* notes that, while the *berakhah* of redemption (Geulah) is the seventh blessing of the 18,⁴ it really should have been the eighth, because it would have made more sense *after* the *berakhah* for healing (Refuah), which is number eight in our Siddur.⁵ In other words, this blessing of redemption should have come later in the Amidah, but it shows up a whole *berakhah* early. Surprise is the intended effect here: redemption comes earlier than expected—perhaps even when we least expect it.

Just as for our ancestors in Egypt, then, even though there is a fixed amount of time before our own redemption will come, there is always hope that the full sentence will be commuted. Even if we don’t manage to change ourselves and our world such that we deserve redemption, it is possible that God will nevertheless decide to redeem us.

Indeed, if redemption were entirely dependent on human behavior changing, which we often think of as the only way to redemption, we might lose hope of ever being redeemed. But perhaps that is not the only path. Sometimes the length of suffering is shortened, through no actions of our own.⁶ Sometimes, the time for redemption simply comes earlier than expected. And this should always give us hope. ♦

3 The commentary then goes on to explain that the numerical value of the word קץ (end), 190, is exactly what God took off the 400 years to arrive at the actual number, 210.

4 Originally, there were 18 blessings in the Amidah. A 19th was added during the talmudic period in Bavel, which we say to this day.

5 The proposed order is based on Psalms 103:3-4, which mentions “healing” before “redemption”: “...the One Who *heals* all your diseases; the One Who *redeems* your life from the Pit...”

6 Classical sources also play with this idea. See Midrash Tanhuma Shemot 20 (parallel in Shemot Rabbah 3:2), that concludes, “whether [Israel] does Your will, or whether they do not do Your will, You will redeem them.” See also R. Meir’s position in Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 97a, that Israel will be redeemed even without doing *teshuvah*.