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Exile - An Opportunity to Gain from the Good of the Other Nations

We daven in *Shemoneh Esrei*, וּקְבִצֵנו יחד מֵאַרְבַּע כְּנֹפֹת הָאָרֶץ - “And gather us, together, from all four corners of the earth.” We emphasize that Hashem should gather us from all the ends of the earth.

When we went into exile, we were scattered all over the world. The Sages state that “The Jewish people did not go down into exile except for the purpose of having more converts annexed onto them.” Simply speaking, the exile has caused Jews to meet other non-Jews, and a non-Jew can become inspired by the Jewish people that he converts. For this reason alone, the Sages state that it’s worth it for us to endure exile.

But the deeper meaning is that it’s not referring to converts from the other nations. It is referring to how we can learn positive attributes from the other nations, and “convert” certain ideas of the non-Jewish world into the Jewish people and sanctify some of the ideas that they have to offer. In this way, we can gain from the world and turn certain non-Jewish ideas into holiness, so that by the time we all return to the land of Eretz Yisrael in the future, we will have gained from the other nations during our experience of exile.

Thus, when we all return to the Eretz Yisrael, it will not just be a gathering of the dispersed from all four corners of the earth in the physical sense, but it will be a return to our land after having gained certain lessons from the other nations during our stay in exile.

We find this concept in a few places. In the times of the Gemara, we find that there were certain Sages who had non-Jewish names, since they lived amongst non-Jewish countries. For example: “Rav Yochanan, Ish Socho” (Rav Yochanan, the man who comes from “Socho”, a non-Jewish place. This is peculiar, because we know that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt due to the merit of not adapting non-Jewish names.

Another example is with regards to certain songs that originated from non-Jewish composers. There were certain *tzaddikim* who would hear a non-Jew singing a tune, which the *tzaddik* sensed as something that belongs to holiness. The *tzaddik* would listen to the song and thereby sanctify the song, whereupon the song became “converted” to holiness. Some of the holiest songs we have really originated from the other nations of the world, and they were sanctified by the righteous and holy Rebbe who converted these songs to the Jewish people.

The above two examples show us that there is such a concept of gaining certain things from the

nations of the world, sanctifying the concept, and bringing it into the Jewish people, whereupon it is “converted” to become part of the Jewish nation.

There are both pros and cons that result from being exiled among the nations of the world. Some of what they have can be converted to holiness, as we explained, and on the other side of the coin, learning from the nations can have negative influences on us. However, it’s definitely a spark of the redemption, because Chazal do say that the purpose of exile is so that we will benefit from these “converted” ideas that originate from the nations. It brings us closer to redemption.

This is a lengthy topic to study - the mixture of good and evil contained in the gentile nations of the world (“*taaruvos hagoyim*”).

Although we haven’t yet merited the redemption, we still have an *avodah* to sift out all the good from the evil that we are surrounded with. Therefore, we need to gain the proper perspective on how to view this world, which is a mixture of good and evil – how to gain from what the world has to offer, while at the same time avoiding all negative influences.

The Giant ‘Melting Pot’ That Has Become Eretz Yisrael

In today’s era, in Eretz Yisrael, there are members from nations all over the world that are here. This is not the redemption which our forefathers prayed for; it is not a “gathering of the exiles” which we hope for. The fact that many nations have come to Eretz Yisrael to live here has added a whole new dimension to our exile.

When Moshiach comes, there will be peace in the world, but in today’s era that we live in, the reality is that there is no peace going on. The fact that many nations have gathered here together in Eretz Yisrael does **not** create unity between Jews and the other nations – it has only caused more strife here. We are left with nothing except a mix of many nations, and this “gathering of exiles” only serves to create more and more strife in the land. It has not caused the Jewish people to be more at peace with the other nations of the world.

How We View Other ‘Types’ of Jews

When a person lives only superficially, he naturally lives and thinks like his particular sect\community of Judaism that he grew up with. Other kinds of Jews, who are not of his type, seem strange to him - and he will tend to look down on them.

This is a bad *middah*, and it comes from our *nefesh habehaimis* – the lower, animalistic part of our soul. It is a nature in a person to simply despise others who are different than him, simply for being different.

Chazal say that in the era preceding Moshiach [our current era], truth will vanish from the world.^[1] This manifests as follows. Often, a Jew who lives a certain way will look down at another Jew simply for living a different kind of life than he does, and this is true even if the other person keeps the entire Torah and mitzvos. He has different minhagim (customs), or he has a different way of learning Gemara, etc. These can all be factors that cause a Jew to look down upon another Jew – simply for being different than him.

Accepting Other Types of Jews

How do we put a stop to this?

The superficial answer is, “We need to have more *ahavas Yisrael*” (love for Jews).

But the truth is, that the lack of unity going on amongst different kinds of Jews really has to do with the whole reason we are in exile. The exile is meant for us to open ourselves and expand ourselves, and to learn how to gain from others we come across. Just like we mentioned earlier that there is a concept of gaining from the other nations of the world, so must we learn how to gain from other kinds of Jews who are different from us. The reason we are in this exile is so that each of us can pick up different good points from other people.

Each of us is very different from one another. This is not by coincidence. The whole reason why we are in exile is to receive all the good that we can pick up from other people we come across. If we wouldn't be different, and each person would be the same, we would have nothing to learn from other people. But because we are each so vastly different from each other, we all what to learn from one another. There is much good that we can gain from other Jews who are different than us.

The whole point of exile is for us to sift out all the good from evil going on in the world. I need to figure out what my best points are, and I also need to learn from other people and complete myself.

When a person doesn't have this approach in life, he looks down on others, and he looks at others merely with conceit and hatred. These are base emotions that stem from our *nefesh habehaimis* when we don't develop ourselves.^[2]

We are in exile precisely because have to rectify our *nefesh habehaimis* - the "animal" level of the soul within us, which is the source of our base, negative emotions. We need to recognize the hatred and the conceit that we feel initially towards others. We need to ask ourselves: "Why do I feel that I am 'better' than a Jew who lives differently than I do...?"

Of course, it is also true that we need to improve our *Ahavas Yisrael*, but the deeper part of our *avodah* is that we need to reflect deeply into how we view life and come to change our entire superficial perspective that we start out having in life.

The Sages say [concerning all the arguments amongst our Sages]: "Their words, and their words, are the words of the living G-d."^[3] The reason why there are so many different kinds of Jews is exactly the purpose of our exile. We are in exile due to our very differences, and the purpose of the exile is so that we can come to understand why we have differences: it is so that we can each learn from each other and pick the good that can be gained from each Jew we come across.

We need to reveal our *emunah* in this more and reflect about what the truth is, and then we will be able to understand that the whole point of being in exile is so that we can learn how to gain from each other in spite of our differences, because each person has good points that we can gain from. Our *avodah* in exile is to learn how to gain the perspective on other kinds of Jews, and we must never feel conceit or hatred for another Jew, which are base emotions.

This is the depth behind the statement of the Sages, "The Jewish people did not go into exile except for the purpose of having converts annexed onto them." This statement hints to how we must complete ourselves by gaining from others, who each have good points that we do not have.

When we stood at Har Sinai, we each stood as "*one man, with one heart*". We were all unified with each other. As each day passes, the further we are from Har Sinai, and the less unity we have. In the current times, the disparity amongst Jews is at its zenith. A Jew these days can hate another Jew just for having a different kind of face he's not used to, or for dressing a certain way, and all other kinds of silly reasons. Without knowing how to another Jew in the proper way, we will be divided from other Jews, by default.

The Other Extreme: Being Too Accepting

Every Jew contains good points. We each have our own unique *avodah*. If such a perspective causes us to feel closer and more loving towards other Jews, it's wonderful. But, if such an open attitude towards others is causing us to doubt the way of *avodah* that we are brought up with, then it's detrimental.

It's a fine balance. We need to be accepting of other kinds of *frum* Jews, and we must understand that each sect of Jewry has its own unique form of *avodah*. But this does not mean that I have to stop my own *avodah* and change over into another's way of serving Hashem. Just because I understand how another thinks differently does not mean that I have to actually change how I think and go about my life; I can understand others, but it doesn't have to confuse me and doubt the way I serve Hashem.

We each have our own way of serving Hashem, and we must not let others' way of living get in our way and negate what we do. Maybe Moshiach will be able to come and unify all the ways of serving Hashem together into one unit, but nobody else knows how to do that. Each person has a certain way of serving Hashem, and it must be not be combined with others' ways, or else it leads to confusion and being misguided.

To our chagrin, most people are either one way or the other people. Either people are very rigid and they cannot accept how other *frum* Jews live and think differently than they do, and they simply hate other Jews who are different. Or, he goes in the opposite direction: he loves other Jews so much that he goes extreme with his *kiruv*, and he ends up connecting with all the evil he comes across. He confuses himself. There are even people involved in *kiruv* who wish to connect with souls who come from "Erev Rav".[\[4\]](#)

So we must live with a paradox. On one hand, we need to understand that each Jew has his own *avodah*. But at the same time, each of must be firm and continue our way of serving Hashem, without becoming confused with the many ways of serving Hashem that we see in others. I must understand other Jews and how they serve Hashem, but I must not get confused in the process and mix myself up in my own Avodas Hashem!

(How does one figure out the unique way in how he must serve Hashem? This is a different matter, and it too is a lengthy matter, beyond the scope of this current discussion).[\[5\]](#)

In Conclusion

When Moshiach comes, we will all be unified, and we will each see all of our good points. We will see how all the differences do not split us apart, but rather, that they all come together in harmony and serve to unify us.

The inner point of each our ways in serving Hashem is always one and the same: to do the will of Hashem. This is the inner, pure point which can bind us all together - when we are aware that we are all serving Hashem because ultimately, ***we all want to do the will of Hashem.***

Each of the 12 *shevatim* (tribes) had his specific way of serving Hashem, and none of the 12 tribes negates each other's way of *Avodas Hashem*.

A *Kohen* did the *Avodah* in the *Beis HaMikdash*, while a *Levi* did *Avodah* with singing the *shirah*. The *Levi* need not be jealous of the *Kohen*, because he has his own *Avodah*: he sings *shirah*. While he understands that the *Kohen* has a special *Avodah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* and thus he reveres him, that does not mean that he should disdain his own *Avodah* of being a *Levi*. If he does the *Avodah* of the *Kohen*, he is liable to the death penalty.

May Hashem help each of us succeed in their unique way of serving Hashem, together with feeling

love and unity with other Jews who serve Hashem differently. When we each do our own respective *avodah* - together with recognizing that other Jews also have their own special role in *Avodas Hashem* - we will all merit to reach again the unity that we felt by Har Sinai - *“Like one man, with one heart.”*

[1] Sotah 49a

[2] Refer to the book *Getting To Know Your Feelings*.

[3] Gittin 6b

[4] See the classes of ***Tefillah #085: Erev Rav Today*** and ***Chanukah #047: Greek Influence Today***.

[5] In ***Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh Vol. V***, in the section of ***Guidance In Serving Hashem***, in the section entitled ***“Your Individual Role”***, the Rov writes as follows: “Just like each person has his own individual path in learning Torah, so does each person have a different path in *Avodas Hashem*. Some people are mainly meant to work on the area of love for Hashem, while others are meant to work more on the area of fear of Hashem. There are some people who mainly have to become more thinking people, while there are others whose main task is to work at breaking their desires. There are even those who are meant to only work on exerting themselves in learning Torah, and nothing more than this is required for such people. The point is that each person is different, and there is no one way for everybody.

“No one can decide on his own what his unique role is and excuse himself from the other areas; this requires intense inner clarification. This cannot be accomplished by sitting and thinking about it for a long time. It can take months and even years to figure out what you are supposed to work on and which areas are meant for you specially to work on, what is meant for your soul. (This needs a lot of caution, because many times a person imagines that a certain area in *Avodas Hashem* is more for his soul to work on, and he feels a pull toward it, but it can really come from laziness not to work on other areas.)

“Most people are not able to improve themselves just by learning Torah alone, and they need other spiritual remedies, such as either Mussar or Chassidus. ***Each person must therefore pour out his heart to Hashem and cry to Him many tears until he merits the way how he can figure out what his unique role is on this world, and what he is meant to work on.***”

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