

# Salvation and Redemption in the Judaic Tradition

David Rosen

In presenting Judaic perspectives on salvation and redemption, distinction must be made between the national dimensions on the one hand and the personal on the other, even though the latter is of course seen as related to the national whole, for better or worse (see TB *Kiddushin* 40b).

## Individual Salvation

### Biblical Teachings

Redemption and salvation imply the need for deliverance from a particular situation, condition, or debt. The Hebrew word for redemption, *gō`ullāh*, implies “the prior existence of obligation.” This word is used in Leviticus to describe the financial redemption of ancestral land from another to whom it has been sold (see Leviticus 25:25); the financial redemption of a member of one family bound in servitude to another family because of debt (see Leviticus 25:48–49); and the redemption of a home, field, ritually impure animal, or agricultural tithe that had been dedicated to the sanctuary by giving its financial value plus one-fifth in lieu thereof (see Leviticus 27).

In the case of a male who died childless, his brothers assumed an obligation to “redeem” the name of the deceased—that is, to save it from extinction by ensuring the continuity of his seed, lands, and filial tribute (see Deuteronomy 25:5–10; Ruth 4:1–10). In a case of murder, the *gō`ēl* was the blood avenger who sought to requite the wrong by seeking blood for blood, redeeming thereby, if not the “wandering soul” of the deceased, certainly the honor that had been desecrated (see Numbers 35:12–29; cf. Deuteronomy 4:42).

When translated into the realm of divine activity, because God is Lord of the Universe and owns all, the notion of redemption from debt or obligation is irrelevant. Rather, it is through divine involvement in the release and deliverance of the oppressed and vulnerable that God is seen as Redeemer, liberating people from their tribulations (see 2 Samuel 4:9; 1 Kings 1:29; Psalms 11:6; 119:134), and as Savior/Guardian of the orphan and widow (see Job 19:25; Psalm 68:6; Proverbs 23:10–11). However, in a deeper theological sense, every person is seen as condemned through his or her sins, not in any inherited or vicarious sense, but simply because of the consequences of sin and the fact that “there is no person who does not sin” (1 Kings 8:46; Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Just as the term *sin* is used in the Bible in terms of dereliction of duty toward others (see Judges 11:27; 1 Samuel 2:25; 2 Kings 18:14), so sin in the religious moral context is seen as the dereliction of the individual’s duty toward God in terms of covenantal obligations (see Psalm 25:5–7; cf. 2 Samuel 12:13 and Jeremiah 14:20–21). It is, however, not seen as a tragic necessity but always as the fruit of will, and thus its guilt is always deserved. Because one can choose to do good, each individual is answerable for his or her wrongdoings.

As sin therefore is seen as rebellion against God, the consequences should be extremely severe. Thus the idea that punishment for sin is death (see, for example, 1 Samuel 2:25; cf. Deuteronomy 29:19) is embodied in the formula that “each man shall die for his [own] sins” (Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; cf. Numbers 27:3). The law of retaliation (*talion*) demanded that the offender should be punished according to his sin, although the possibility existed for substitution (see 2 Samuel 12:13–14), as well as for transferring the guilt to a scapegoat and expelling it (see Leviticus 16:22).

The sin offering was accordingly seen not only as purification for the individual, but above all as a means of obtaining God's forgiveness by serving as a "ransom," or *kōfer*, for the sinner, which thus granted "atonement," or *kapparah*. *Kōfer* was the legal term for the ransom or gift that was both to compensate and appease; in the case of manslaughter, restitution could be made by a gift to the victim's family of an ox (see Exodus 21:30), while such *kōfer nefesh*, "ransom for a life," was not permissible in the case of murder (see Numbers 35:31–32).

Every such sacrifice may be considered as a ransom, or *kōfer*, in the original sense of making a propitiatory gift for the purpose of atonement (*lākapper*; see Leviticus 17:11). This idea of atonement is rooted in the perception of sin as causing a rift with and a distance from God and thus of the need to reconcile the soul of the sinner with God. In order to overcome this sense of estrangement from God, the sinner offers expiatory sacrifices not simply to appease God, but to place the sinner's soul in a different relation to him.

The continued spiritualization of atonement accordingly leads to the perception of sacrifice as peripheral to, symbolic of, or at least an extension of the essential internal process. Thus repentance itself is seen as having power to effect a reconciliation between the erstwhile sinner and the merciful God, who eagerly anticipates and accepts the sincere contrition of the penitent (see, for example, Isaiah 55:7; Jeremiah 4:1; Ezekiel 18:30–33; Jonah 3:10; Micah 7:18–19). In relation to this idea, as expressed in the Pentateuch, with Moses' intercession on behalf of the errant Israelites, the essential divine attributes of compassion, forgiveness, loving-kindness, and tolerance are revealed (see Exodus 34:1–9; Numbers 14:17–20). The value of an atoning sacrifice in this light is thus understood to be both an appeal to God's forgiving mercy and an inspiration to the sinner to duly repent. But it is sincere repentance and God's abundant love and compassion rather than the sacrifice that effect the reconciliation, the full "at-one-ment."

While a variety of idioms are used to describe repentance, they are all subsumed by one verb, *shûv*, meaning "return," which is prevalent in the Bible and from which flows the rabbinic concept of *təshûvāh*. The word combines within itself the two essential requisites of repentance—namely, to turn away from evil and to turn toward the good (see Isaiah 1:17; 33:15; 58:5; Jeremiah 7:3; 26:13; Amos 5:14–15; Psalms 15; 24:4; 34:15–16; 37:27). The motion of turning implies that through such effort—a power that God has given to all humankind—sinners can redirect their destiny.

That this concept was not a total prophetic innovation but goes back to Israel's ancient tradition is clear from Amos's use of it as understood, requiring no need for explanation (see Amos 4:6–11). This text, furthermore, expresses the idea of divine punishment as an incentive to repent and gain salvation, an idea that features prominently in Job (see Job 34:14–33; 36:2–21). Aside, therefore, from its independence from sacrifice, salvation from sin is thus perceived as overwhelmingly within the hands of the human person to achieve. Naturally this idea acquired substantial impetus during the exile, when the form of sacrificial atonement was not available. Accordingly, prayer assumed a growing importance as a vehicle for reconciliation with God, as is seen through the book of Psalms (see Hosea 14:3); other means included fasting and *ṣədāqāh* ("charity," or, better, "righteous response"; see, for example, Isaiah 58:1–3; Daniel 4:24; Joel 2:15–18; Zechariah 7:5).

## Rabbinic Teachings

While the rabbis taught that all of Israel are allocated a portion in the world to come (see M *Sanhedrin* 10:1), it is only through obedience to the divine covenant, the Torah, that the attainment of such is guaranteed (see *Sifre* Deuteronomy 34:5; TB *Sanhedrin* 100a; TB *Avodah Zarah* 31; TB *Ta'anit* 11a–b; cf. *Leviticus Rabbah* 27).

Because the human being is created with free will and is therefore culpable for his evil deeds (see *M Avot* 3:15–16) and because there is not a righteous person on earth who does only good and sins not (see *Ecclesiastes* 7:20), the attribute of divine justice would condemn all (cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 8:11). However, divine justice is perceived by the rabbis as functioning in tension with the divine attribute of mercy. The latter provides from the very outset the means to ensure salvation for all in the form of repentance, *təshûvāh* (see *TB Pesahim* 54a; *TY Pe'ah* 17:1; *Genesis Rabbah* 1:4, 12; *Lamentations Rabbah* 3:5; *Midrash* on *Psalms* 57:90; cf. *Pesiqta Rabbati* 158b).

Perhaps an awareness of the historic development of the idea of salvation from sin is expressed in the following passage: “They asked Wisdom ‘What is the sinner’s punishment?’ She said to them, ‘Evil pursues sinners’” [*Proverbs* 13:21]. “They asked Prophecy ‘What is the sinner’s punishment?’ She said to them ‘The soul that sins, it shall die’” [*Ezekiel* 18:4]. “They asked Torah ‘What is the sinner’s punishment?’ She said to them ‘Let them bring a guilt offering and it shall atone for him.’” “They asked the Holy One Blessed Be He ‘What’s the sinner’s punishment?’ He said to them, ‘Let him repent (do *təshûvāh*) and it shall atone for him’” (see *TY Makkot* 2:6). Thus in the aforementioned tension, it is the divine attribute of mercy that gains the “upper hand” as God awaits and assists the sinner to return to him (see *T Sanhedrin* 8:3; *TY Makkot* 2:6; *TY Berakhot* 4:2; *TB Rosh ha-Shanah* 17–18; *TB Pesahim* 119a; *TB Yoma* 86a, b; *Sifre* 60b; *Sifra Behukotai* 8:6; *Canticles Rabbah* 6:1; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7; *Exodus Rabbah* 19:3; *Numbers Rabbah* 10).

The perceived power of repentance is expressed in the words “The sinner who repents is on a [spiritual] level that the completely righteous [who have never sinned] cannot reach” (*TB Berakhot* 34b). In consonance with biblical teaching, such repentance is seen as dependent on sincere contrition, confession, and commitment not to backslide (see *Sifra Aharei Mot* 2:4; *Sifra Behukotai* 6:34; *Sifre* 5:5; *TB Ta'anit* 16a; *TB Hagigah* 5a; *TB Yoma* 86b; *TB Berakhot* 12b; *Pesiqta Rabbati* 198b; cf. Maimonides, *Yad*, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2), and in the case of sins against other persons, additional requirements include reparations (where necessary) and seeking appeasement (see *Sifra Aharei Mot* 8:1; *M Yoma* 8:9, and *Bava Qamma* 8:7; Maimonides, *Yad*, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2). Accordingly, the fulness of *təshûvāh* depends on following the “right” path. “On public fast days the elders of the congregation would declare ‘Brothers it is not said of the men of Nineveh’ and ‘God saw their sackcloth and their fasting,’ but ‘And God saw their deeds that they had turned from their evil ways’” (*Jonah* 3:10; see *M Ta'anit* 2:1).

Such is the power of repentance that not only can a sincere act of repentance for one sin in itself atone for all one’s sins (see *TB Berakhot* 12b), but sincere contrition even on the deathbed of the most errant sinner has the ability to guarantee his salvation—that is, a portion in the world to come (see *T Kiddushin* 1:15; *TB Kiddushin* 40b; *TB Avodah Zarah* 17a; *Genesis Rabbah* 65:22; *Ruth Rabbah* 6:2). While repentance, like obedience, is best undertaken out of love of God, even repentance from fear is better than none at all (see *TB Yoma* 86b). The rabbis do not see the latter as ideal, but they do not deny its efficacy.<sup>1</sup>

As George Moore has correctly pointed out, it is this idea of repentance that “may properly be called the Jewish doctrine of salvation.”<sup>2</sup> However, it must be reiterated that repentance is not a process by which one makes initial entry into the grace of God and enjoys the benefits of his mercy, but rather a means by which one is *restored* to that proximity. “There is no failing in man, whether collectively or as an individual, which requires special divine intervention and which cannot be remedied, with the guidance of the Torah, by man himself.”<sup>3</sup> “To use other language, one is already ‘saved’; what is needed is the maintenance of a right attitude toward God[, even though w]ithout it, the mercy of God is of no avail.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition, as in Job, the power of suffering is recognized as an impetus to atonement and also as an atonement in and of itself (see *Mekilta Yitro* 10; *Sifre* Deuteronomy 32; TB *Berakhot* 5a), particularly for the righteous, thus ensuring their full reward in paradise (see *Genesis Rabbah* 33; *Leviticus Rabbah* 27; TB *Kiddushin* 40b). Death itself is seen as atoning for sin (see *Mekilta Yitro* 7; *Sifre* 4:7; TB *Yoma* 86a; TB *Berakhot* 60a); this understanding seemingly developed from the idea that capital punishment at the hands of the court, as any other legally sanctioned punishment, atoned for the sin, provided that the offender had repented (see *MSanhedrin* 6:2; *TSanhedrin* 9:5).

It might also be mentioned that we find within rabbinic thought the concept of Gehinnom (Gehenna, or purgatory) as atonement, purification, and thus salvation for the wicked, who when purified ascend to the Garden of Eden (paradise) (see *Eduyyot* 2; *Yalqut* Isaiah 26; *Numbers Rabbah* 81). The power of the atonement, with its ultimate consequence for the soul's salvation (that is, entry into paradise), is also ascribed to poverty (see *Pesiqta Rabbati* 25:165a); sharing one's table with the poor (see TB *Berakhot* 55a; *Tanhuma Vayishlach* 6); life-transforming events (see TY *Bikkurim* 3:65; *Midrash Samuel* 17); living or being buried in the land of Israel (see *Genesis Rabbah* 96; TY *Kil'ayim* 9:32; TB *Ketubbot* 111a); and the very study of Torah, which is declared to be more effective than the sacrifices of the temple when it is accompanied by good deeds (see TB *Rosh ha-Shanah* 18a; TB *Yevamot* 105a; *Leviticus Rabbah* 25).

## National Salvation

### Biblical Teachings

In premonarchic Israel, the concept of salvation is identified with the national well-being and security of the tribes that have settled the land and enjoyed the bounty of the earth in safety; it refers to the "victoriousness" of the people whose enemies are humbled and subservient, as described in Moses' blessings: "Happy are you O Israel, who is like you, a people saved [*nôsha*'] by the Lord" (Deuteronomy 33:29). The idea is subsequently related to deliverance from religioethical degeneration and the consequences of disobedience to divine charge.

In early prophetic literature, the threefold formula of warning against sin, punishment for disobedience, and deliverance becomes a recurrent theme. Even when the children of Israel as a whole are threatened with divine destruction as punishment for the sin of worshiping the golden calf, this is qualified by the guarantee of continuity and destiny through Moses himself (see Deuteronomy 9:14; cf. Exodus 32:10 and Numbers 14:12). These motifs are woven through the fabric of the book of Judges, and similarly the prophetic protest that defied kings and condemned dynasties aimed its destructiveness at salvation.

The view of the covenantal relationship as conditional upon the people's obedience, with expulsion from the land as the penalty for their disobedience, apparently drew its impetus from the Aramaean wars. With the ravaging of the people and the land came the perception that incurring divine wrath could ultimately lead to Israel's exile (see Deuteronomy 4:16; cf. 28:36, 64; 29:24–27; 31:29). Such punishment seemed designed to evoke contrition leading to divine salvation. The guarantee of the latter lies both in the character of God and in the covenantal relationship between him and Israel. Because God is merciful, "He will not forsake you nor destroy you and will not forget the Covenant of your Fathers which he swore unto them" (Deuteronomy 4:31). Thus a transformation in Israelite eschatology transfers the premonarchic view of salvation to the future as a hope for Israel's national salvation (see 1Kings 19:10, 14).

The term *yəshu'āh* (similarly, *təshū'āh*), originally meaning freedom and ease from restrictions and narrow straits, was understood in the sense of victorious deliverance from one's enemies (see Judges 10:12; 1Samuel 2:1; 14:45;

2Samuel 22:51; Isaiah 49:8). One who leads to victory is therefore the *mōshīa'*, that is, savior (see, for example, Judges 3:9, 15; 6:36, 37; cf. 1Samuel 25:26; Psalm 44:4), and the prayer *hōshī'āh-na'* (hosanna, for example, in Psalm 118:25) means “give victory.” Probably the king was greeted thus. Accordingly, the ultimate Savior who gives victory is naturally seen as God himself and is thus described as *Elohei Yishenu*, “our victorious God” (1Chronicles 16:35; Psalm 79:9).

With exile, this concept of “victorious salvation” came to be understood in terms of the survival of the remnant and the return of “the saved.” God was accordingly seen as the Savior who preserves the remnant, ingathers the exiles, restores the people to its land and glory (see Isaiah 12:2; 43:3, 11; 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60; 62:11; Jeremiah 31:10; Zechariah 8:7), and ultimately ushers in an era of human perfection and universal harmony in a world imbued with the spirit of God (see Isaiah 11:10; 52:10; Zechariah 14:9, 16).

The terms *yēshu'āh* (“salvation”) and *gē'ullāh* (“redemption”)—as applied to the messianic advent—are identical. In the same way that God is the *mōshīa'*, he is the *gō'ēl*, or Redeemer (see Isaiah 41:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 52:9; 60:16; 62:11–12; 63:9; Psalm 74:2). It was, moreover, natural for the people to perceive the God of Israel, Father of orphans, Defender of the widows (see Psalm 68:6), and Redeemer of the afflicted (see Job 19:25 and above on individual salvation) as having a special responsibility to redeem them (see Isaiah 35:10).

Both the roots \*YŠ' and \*G'L (as with \*PDH, meaning “to release”) refer to a deliverance that results in the well-being of its beneficiaries. This idea was extended to apply not only to the physical deliverance of Israel but also to its spiritual redemption from sin (see Psalm 130:8) as well as its renewal (see Jeremiah 31:30–34; 32:39–40; Ezekiel 11:17–20; 36:26; 37:23–28). The role of the Messiah, therefore, is not that of the Redeemer. God alone is the Savior. While the former is established as shepherd of God's ock (see Ezekiel 34:23), the national hope for redemption was centered on God himself. Notable in this regard is the frequent absence of a messianic personality in prophetic visions of redemption, which is similarly the case in apocryphal works such as Tobit and Ben Sira.

## Rabbinic Teachings

The term *gē'ullāh* in rabbinic literature is applied almost exclusively to national redemption, which is synonymous with national freedom. In accordance with biblical prophecy, the rabbis looked forward to a regenerative messianism in which the Israelite monarchy is reestablished, the nation is delivered from foreign servitude, the exiles are ingathered, and the temple is finally rebuilt. Their aspirations were not altogether free from the utopian and apocalyptic trends cultivated in certain circles and some of these ideas were tainted with an antinomious or an anarchistic bias. Nevertheless, fundamentally the Sages retained their realistic orientation toward a religious-national-political restoration.<sup>5</sup>

However, in their historiosophy, the rabbis introduced a bold mystical element into the concept of redemption with the suggestion that the divine presence itself is in exile with the people of Israel. Thus, in redeeming his people, God, so to speak, redeems himself (see *Sifre* 161; *TB Megillah* 29a).

In keeping with the prophetic vision, Jewish national revival was seen as a prior condition for the realization of the universal principles that were to unite hitherto hostile nations and pave the way to a new era where goodness would reign supreme and all peoples would be gathered beneath the wings of the divine presence (see *Tanhuma* Genesis 108; *Canticles Rabbah* 1:21; cf. *T Berakhot* 7:2). One might note that in viewing Israel as a vehicle for the ultimate redemption of all mankind, even exile itself was seen as having a redemptive value; for example, “Israel

was only exiled among the Gentiles in order that proselytes would join them” (TB *Pesahim* 87b; cf. *Leviticus Rabbah* 6:5).

### The Initiative in National Redemption

Within biblical literature we find a tension—if not disagreement—regarding where responsibility for the redemptive initiative lies. Indeed, these differences of perception may be seen as distinguishing different trends of thinking on the subject within rabbinic thought, within medieval Jewish philosophy and mysticism, and even within the differing Jewish religious attitudes toward the modern political reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel.

In the case of personal salvation, even though such is made possible by divine grace and mercy, the active initiative must be taken by the human individual—“there is no atonement without *təshûvāh* (repentance)” is the rabbinical dictum that sums up the biblical concept.

#### Biblical Teachings

The requirement of *təshûvāh* is also made with regard to national salvation. However, there is a difference of opinion concerning to what extent national salvation is dependent on repentance. Clearly, in the earlier scriptures it was seen as fundamental. For Amos, salvation from exile and destruction depends on repentance. “Seek good and do not do evil, in order that you shall live, and it shall be so [that] God the Lord of Hosts shall be with you as you have said. Hate evil and love good and present justice in the gate. Perhaps God the Lord of Hosts will be gracious towards the remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:14–15; cf. 4:9–11). In this view, the consolation of redemption is only for the righteous.

The promise in the thirtieth chapter of Deuteronomy similarly places the onus on the people: “And it shall come to pass when all these things will come upon you, the blessing and the curse, and you will take it to heart amongst the nations where the Lord has cast you away there. And you will return to the Lord your God. ... And the Lord will return your captivity” (Deuteronomy 30:1–3). In the same way, although in Hosea we encounter the covenant born out of divine promise not to destroy Ephraim and to ingather the exiles (see Hosea 11:8–11), the initiative that brings about redemption is first and foremost the repentance of Israel: “Return O Israel to the Lord your God for you have stumbled in your iniquity” (Hosea 14:1).

Isaiah also sees redemption as coming through repentance and righteousness: “Zion will be redeemed by justice and those in it who repent by righteousness” (Isaiah 1:27). However, in contradistinction, in the latter part of Isaiah in particular, the advent of redemption is brought by divine initiative alone. Such is the overwhelming nature of the punishment that it is God alone who can redeem. Even when Israel acknowledges her sins, it is not she who initiates the process of salvation, but rather God’s commitment to justice that is portrayed as leading him to wondrously redeem Israel (see Isaiah 59:12–20; cf. 54:8; 60:10).

Yet the prophet Micah articulates the idea of the divine initiative in redemption with innovative force. While he asserts the overall primacy of humankind’s freedom of choice, Israel’s national survival is seen as an act of God’s grace, and through his redemption, Israel obtains an eschatological remission of her sins: “Who is God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression of the remnant of His inheritance. He does not maintain His anger forever because He delights in lovingkindness. *He will return* and have mercy upon us, He will subdue our iniquities and You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18–19, emphasis added). Similar emphasis on divine grace as the essential active ingredient in redemptive atonement is expressed in the book of Psalms (see, for example, Psalm 130:7–8).

The question of initiative is resolved by Jeremiah through seeing the people's repentance as the beginning of salvation (see Jeremiah 24:7; 29:10–15), from which comes full divine redemption that brings (in keeping with Micah) forgiveness and purification from sin (see Jeremiah 33:8; 50:20) and finally a new and everlasting covenant (see Jeremiah 32:40; 50:5; cf. 31:32). Conversely, in the book of Lamentations the process of this redemptive tension is viewed as commencing with God: "Return us to you, O Lord, and we shall return; renew our days as of old" (Lamentations 5:21).

The tension is less balanced in Ezekiel's prophecy of redemption. He does on one occasion place the initiative before the people, calling on them to transform their own hearts and spirits and thus guarantee their salvation (see Ezekiel 18:30–31). However, Ezekiel 11:17–20 portrays the initiative as divine; moreover, it is only after the ingathering by God himself that the people's conversion takes place. This is clearly the dominant view of the prophet, and it is expressed even more powerfully in Ezekiel 36 and 37. Above all, the redemption of Israel is portrayed as resulting not only from divine impetus, but from the divine "need" that God's name be sanctified among the nations (see Ezekiel 36:22–23). This rationale for redemption reflects the tradition that appears in Exodus 32:12 and in Numbers 14:13–16 (see Deuteronomy 9:28 as the argument that led God to reconsider his decision to destroy Israel). Accordingly, redemption for the sake of God himself overshadows the idea of human repentance in Ezekiel.

### Rabbinic Teachings

The question of initiative in the process of redemption led to much discussion and argument among the rabbis. The major text on the subject in the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 97–98, highlights the differences of opinion. The earliest of the discussions and opinions that appear in the text are from Rabbi Eliezer, the son of Hyrcanus, and Rabbi Joshua. Rabbi Eliezer declared that "if Israel repents, they will be redeemed, if not they will not be saved." In other words, salvation depends first and foremost on Israel's moral initiative. Rabbi Joshua, however, adds that "if they do not repent, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sets up before them a king whose decrees are as severe as those of Haman, and Israel will repent [will do *təshûvāh*] and be rehabilitated" (TB *Sanhedrin* 97b). Repentance is indeed an essential requirement, according to Rabbi Joshua; however, God is seen here as the initiator of negative historical experience, which draws the people back toward him.

The positions became sharper in the debate that follows between Rav (also known as Abba Arikha) and Samuel, two of the greatest Babylonian sages of the third century c.e. Rav maintains that "all appointed times of redemption are over and the matter only depends upon repentance and good deeds." Regardless of past redemptions, he says, ultimate salvation depends on Israel's initiative. Samuel, on the other hand, declares that "it is enough for the mourner to remain in his mourning" (TB *Sanhedrin* 97b). In other words, Israel's task is simply to loyally survive her historic predicament, but the initiative for redemption comes from God.

Rav's position is supported by Rabbi Joshua, the son of Levi, in the story of his encounters with the prophet Elijah and the Messiah—he concludes that the Messiah will come "today, if Israel but hearkens to God's voice" (Psalm 95:7). This view is reiterated concisely by Rabbi Jonathan: "Great is [the power of] *təshûvāh* that it brings redemption" (TB *Yoma* 86b; cf. *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 43).

Differences of opinion may be seen throughout the various comments of the rabbis concerning national redemption. However, the divine supernatural perspective proportionately outweighs the human natural approach with an abundance of descriptions concerning the social disasters, spiritual decay, and disintegration that will precede redemption (see, for example, TB *Sanhedrin* 97a; *Sotah* 40b).

This perception is behind the declaration that Israel is under oath not to go up and forcibly reconquer the Holy Land (see TB *Ketubbot* 111a), and it is arguably this approach that is further emphasized in midrashic literature,

where future redemption is compared advantageously with past redemptions. The latter did not last, according to the Midrash, because they came about through human agencies. But future redemption will be accomplished by God himself and thus be everlasting (see *Midrash* on Psalm 31:2).

Also more in consonance with the supernatural approach is the perception of divine redemption as a response to the “merit of the Fathers,” whether it be that of the patriarchs Moses and Aaron or the elders (see *Exodus Rabbah* 15; cf. TY *Sanhedrin* 6:2; *Leviticus Rabbah* 36).

An approach that combines these two perceptions of redemption is contained in the words of Rabbi Yohanan (TB *Sanhedrin* 98a): “The son of David will come in a generation that is either completely innocent [and thus merits salvation] or completely culpable,” such that salvation will come solely through divine initiative.

However, a more integrated reconciliation of the question of initiative, in keeping with the prophetic vision of redemption as a two-way process, is alluded to by Rabbi Akiva in the Mishnah. “Happy are you, Israel. Before whom do you purify yourselves and who purifies you! Your Father in Heaven, for it is said, ‘I will sprinkle pure water upon you and you shall be pure; from all your impurities will I purify you. I will also give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you’ (Ezekiel 36:25–26): and it is said, the Lord is the *mikveh* of Israel (Jeremiah 14:8) [literally, ‘the hope of Israel,’ but used here in a play of words to mean ‘the ritual bath of Israel’]: just as the ritual bath [*mikveh*] purifies the impure, so does God purify Israel” (M *Yoma* 8:9).

Similarly, and perhaps most reflective of this tension of initiative in redemption as found within Jeremiah in particular, are the words of Rabbi Yessa (see *Canticles Rabbah* 5:3): “The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: ‘My children, open for me an aperture of repentance as small as a needle’s eye and I will open for you an opening through which wagons and carriages can enter.’” Salvation is thus portrayed as a joint endeavor, and while the initiative comes from Israel’s initial move along the path of *təshûvāh*, it is God who takes over in facilitating full redemption.

## Later Views of Salvation and Redemption

### In Medieval Jewish Philosophy

These personal and national perspectives emerge also within medieval Jewish philosophy. The viewpoint that retains basic features of talmudic soteriology on the personal level tends to see national redemption in supernatural terms. This approach is espoused by Sa’adiah Gaon,<sup>6</sup> as well as by Judah ha-Levi,<sup>7</sup> Nachmanides, Hasdai Crescas,<sup>8</sup> and Joseph Albo.<sup>9</sup>

Sa’adiah declares that since man, though created finite, is the ultimate purpose of creation, God intended from the beginning that man should attain redemption from his finite condition. For this purpose God revealed his will through the Torah at Sinai. Individual salvation is thus obtained through obedience to the divine commandments (although Sa’adiah also sees salvation as the attainment of the righteous among all peoples). However, Sa’adiah sees the messianic age of national redemption and the subsequent world of final judgment as separate miraculous events of divine initiative. In this perspective, national redemption in itself is of a supernatural character.

On the other hand, the latter is viewed as integrally related to personal salvation in the naturalist philosophical school influenced by Aristotelian and Neoplatonic concepts in Maimonides,<sup>10</sup> as well as in Ibn Gabirol,<sup>11</sup> Ibn Ezra, and Gersonides.<sup>12</sup> Maimonides sees the universe as the result of God’s goodness. However, he does not see it as



created for the sake of humankind, which he views not as the direct creation of the Godhead but rather as the product of successive series of emanations in which the material world and thus human beings are created out of matter. A mortal being overcomes its finite nature as matter by raising itself through the higher intellect via metaphysical and scientific studies. Accordingly, through transcending the material dimensions of existence and thus developing the spiritual soul, one ultimately gains immortality through the latter, which continues after the death of the material body.

In the same way, redemption is wrought not only for Israel but also for the world through a commensurate collective raising of the intellect and spirit. This is Maimonides' understanding of the nature of *təshûvāh* (Maimonides, *Yad*, Hilchot Teshuvah 6:4)—it brings salvation for both the individual and the nation (Maimonides, *Yad*, Hilchot Teshuvah 7:5; 9:2) and will take place in a “natural” way (cf. Maimonides, *Yad*, Hilchot Melachim 11:3; 12); through it all humankind will be redeemed.<sup>13</sup>

## In Kabbalah

Similar differences of perception regarding the initiative of national salvation are to be found, *mutatis mutandis*, within Kabbalah. For the kabbalists, exile reflected the impaired condition of creation. The redemption of the Jewish people and the universal recognition of the divine presence and name would bring about salvation in the sense of full reparation. Where Kabbalah went beyond the dominant traditional view of salvation was in its portrayal of the unredeemed state of humankind and the world as the result of Adam's original sin (for example, in Ra'aya Meheimna and Tikkunei HaZohar). Although not normative, this position is nevertheless based on certain rabbinic texts—for example, *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 9; TB *Avodah Zarah* 8a; TB *Shabbat* 140b.

This idea is particularly developed in Lurianic Kabbalah. While the Spanish Kabbalists saw redemption as essentially a miraculous event unrelated to human endeavor, the alternative view espoused by the followers of Lurianic Kabbalah was that redemption is no more than an external manifestation of internal *tikkūn* (“restitution” or “reconstitution”), which depends on the deeds of Israel and its way of life. Salvation is thus seen as dependent on human action, which initiates the messianic advent.

This outlook, according to Gershom Scholem, nurtured the Sabbatian debacle; thus, in reaction, the subsequent Hassidic movement sought to mute the dangers of the utopianism within the Lurianic Kabbalah that it adopted. This was done by reverting to the traditional teaching of distinguishing between national redemption and personal salvation. Salvation for the individual is thus seen as concerned with the mystical redemption of the soul and is divested of any messianic connotation. Accordingly, human initiative is limited to this realm, while God is seen as bringing ultimate national and cosmic redemption.

## Modern Zionism

Emancipation and enlightenment generated new understandings of Judaism and Jewish observance in modern society. The reformers did see this process as having “redemptive” significance for Jewry. However, they viewed this not in the traditional context of the return of the exiles to the land of Israel but rather in the context of a universal implementation of the social and civil rights and the justice to which Jews would contribute and from which they would benefit, as enunciated by the ancient prophets of Israel.

The political movement for secular national redemption—Zionism—was inspired by eighteenth-century rationalism and galvanized by nineteenth-century nationalism. Though secular, the idea was naturally expressed

within the framework of the traditional Jewish concept of a national redemptive return to the land. However, paralleling the differing perceptions of the redemptive initiative were the two diametrically opposed responses to Zionism from within the Jewish religious community.

Ultraorthodoxy rejected Zionism as running contrary to the exclusively divine initiative for national redemption, as well as embodying modern secularism within Jewry, which was seen as inimical to the traditional Jewish Weltanschauung and interests. Religious Zionism, on the other hand, perceived the secular movement as part and parcel of the manifestation of the obligatory human initiative in redemption to reestablish independent Jewish life in the land. For religious Zionism, the establishment of the state of Israel was a manifestation of the divine presence itself through secular agencies. Its followers refer to the state of Israel in prayer and religious celebration as “The First Flowering of Our Redemption.”

Ultraorthodoxy was forced by developments in Europe (the Shoah, or Holocaust, and destruction of the European centers of Jewish life and learning) and by the subsequent establishment of the state to qualify its opposition and come to terms with the state, at the very least as an “undesirable necessity.” Nevertheless, ultraorthodoxy continued to deny the state of Israel any inherent religious, let alone redemptive, character.

Both the establishment of the state itself and the incorporation of religious Zionism into the political mainstream appeared to emphatically endorse its religiopolitical approach over that of ultraorthodoxy. This success, however, was not without its price. A moderate religious nationalist activism gave way increasingly to a prophetic dispensationalist militancy, which interpreted as the overwhelming divine agenda not only the return of the people to the land, but the return of the land to the people (albeit primarily as a result of conflict) and thus the obligation to settle it. Aside from the moral consequences of making territory a primary value, this attitude placed the bulk of religious Zionism and its leadership in an increasingly extreme right-wing position on the Israeli political spectrum and undermined religious Zionism’s original aspiration to serve as a bridge between modernity and tradition within the Jewish nation.

However, not all religious Zionists took this ideological route. The religious Zionist peace movements and the new religious political party, Meimad, that joined together with the Labor Party for the 1999 elections to form one Israel, vocally inveighed against such militancy—both on practical and moral grounds. Their position reflects an activism that recognizes and places limits on the extent to which human initiative in redemption may be considered legitimate. Accordingly, this ideology of the religious peace camp in Israel may be viewed as a modern articulation of scriptural and rabbinic understanding of compromise between the divine and human initiative in the national redemptive process.

### Notes

1. See Solomon Schechter, “Repentance: Means of Reconciliation,” in *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 313–43.

2. George F. Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1:500.

3. David Flusser, “Redemption: In the Talmud,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 14:3.

4. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 178.

5. See Ephraim E. Urbach's discussion, "On Redemption," in *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 649–95.
6. Sa'adiah Ga'on, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).
7. Judah ha-Levi, *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1964).
8. Hasdai Crescas, *Sefer Or Adonai (Light of the Lord)* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1970).
9. Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-'Ikarim* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1967).
10. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).
11. Ibn Gabirol, *Mekor Hayyim* (Tel Aviv: Mahbarot le-sifrut, 1950).
12. Gersonides (Levi ben Gershom), *Milhamot ha-Shem* (Riva di Trento, 1560).
13. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3:11.