

Sodom, Bain HaMitzarim and Our Generation

Introduction

The Torah delineates the borders of Eretz Yisroel beginning and concluding with the Dead Sea at the south-eastern border¹.

Today, the region of the Dead Sea is barren and desolate. However, it was not always this way. The Dead Sea was once the fruitful paradise of Sodom² which Hashem destroyed due to its corruption.

Sodom is where the first destruction in Eretz Yisroel took place. It is also used as an example of the punishment that will befall the Jewish People if they sin³.

Isn't it a bad omen to begin and end the borders of Eretz Yisroel with the site of the first destruction that took place in its territory?

The Potential of Bain Hamitzarim

The three weeks between the seventeenth of Tamuz and the ninth of Av is a period of mourning known as 'Bain HaMitzarim.' On the seventeenth of Tamuz, the walls of Yerushalayim were breached and on the ninth of Av, the Bais HaMikdash (Temple) was destroyed. During Bain HaMitzarim the power of evil is very strong.

The prophet Yirmiyahu laments "כל רודפיה השיגוה בין המצרים", all those who pursued the Jewish people, succeeded in reaching her during Bain Hamitzarim. Our enemies inflicted us with great tragedies during this period.

The Maggid of Kozhnitz quotes the Maggid of Mezritch, who explains this verse in a novel way: All those who pursue her - the Shechina (Divine Presence), will reach her during Bain HaMitzarim. Anyone who seeks G-dliness during this period will succeed in attaining his goal.

It is true that serving Hashem is particularly difficult during Bain HaMitzarim because of the supremacy of the evil forces. However, those who persist - despite the difficulties - are guaranteed that they will attain closeness to G-d.

The three weeks of Bain Hamitzarim are the most difficult of the year but their potential is enormous.

Bain Hamitzarim in the Future

On the sixteenth of Tamuz, the lowest elements of the Jewish People demanded that Aharon Hakohen create a Golden Calf for them. Aharon responded "הג לה' מחרה", 'Tomorrow will be a Holiday for Hashem.'

Simply understood, he was stalling for time, hoping that Moshe would return in the interim. On the morrow, there was no holiday; instead the terrible sin of the Golden Calf took place with its catastrophic repercussions.

However, Aharon did not merely attempt to avert disaster; he also alluded to the future. Prophet Zechariah proclaimed, 'The fast of the fourth [month, Tamuz] and the fast of the fifth [month, Av] will be [transformed...into days of] ששון ושמחה, joy, happiness and holidays'.

When Mashiach will come, the seventeenth of Tamuz and the ninth of Av will no longer be fast days; they will be transformed into the greatest holidays of the calendar. The three weeks of Bain HaMitzarim will shed their mournful character and will be the most elevated of the year.

It was this festival - that will be on the seventeenth of Tamuz when Mashiach will arrive - that Aharon referred to when he said, "Tomorrow will be a holiday for Hashem."

The Shabbosos of Bain HaMitzarim

The weekdays of Bain HaMitzarim are currently the lowest and saddest days of the year. However, every Shabbos, the world is elevated and we experience a preview of the era of Mashiach. The radiance of Bain Hamitzarim - so thoroughly obscured during the week - shines through on Shabbos.

Friday night, we console Yerushalayim, "רַב לַךְ שָׁבַת בְּעֵמֶק הַבְּכָא", 'You stayed in the valley of tears long enough;' you will soon arise from your seat of mourning.

The Maor VaShamesh, interpreted this stanza as follows: רַב לַךְ - great is, שָׁבַת - the Shabbos, בְּעֵמֶק הַבְּכָא - that occurs in the valley of tears – in the depth and gloom of Bain Hamitzarim.

The three Shabbosos of Bain HaMitzarim are the most exalted of the year because then we experience a foretaste of the great festival they will be when Mashiach will come.

The Seed of Mashiach must be Hidden

The Satan knows that he will cease to exist when Mashiach will come. Therefore, whenever a person who contains the seed of Mashiach is about to be born, the Satan protests; "The Jews aren't worthy, the world isn't ready etc." The Satan raises a ruckus and tries to harm the fetus.

Since Hashem conducts the affairs of the world with fairness, Hashem would take the Satan's objections into account and that could delay the development of Mashiach. Therefore, Hashem conceals the carrier of Mashiach in circumstances so lowly, that it would not dawn upon the Satan that he could emerge from there. Once the carrier of the seed of Mashiach is already born, it is too late for the Satan to do anything about it.

This phenomenon repeated itself many times throughout Jewish history¹.

Mashiach was Hidden in Sodom

Mashiach is a descendent of King David. The Matriarch of the Davidic dynasty is Ruth, who was a Moabite convert. The Moabite nation is very lowly because it descends from the illicit union of Lot and his eldest daughter.

The daughter of Lot had been born and raised in Sodom and carried within herself the seed of Mashiach. Hashem had first hidden the seed of Mashiach in the evil city of Sodom, and then in the lowly nation of Moav.

Hashem considers King David a 'find' and declares, "I **found** David my servantⁿ." The Midrash^b elaborates, "Where did I **find** him? In Sodom."

A person does not 'find' a diamond in its setting on the ring; that is where it is supposed to be. However, finding a diamond in the trash is indeed a find - it is a very great surprise. Hashem hid his treasure, the seed of Mashiach, in the garbage heap of Sodom.

Boaz and Ruth

Ruth's marriage to Boaz was a crucial juncture in the development of Mashiach. She was to transfer the spark of Mashiach from Moav to the family of Peretz ben Yehuda, from whom Mashiach descends.

She presented herself to Boaz in a manner unlike the refined way Jewish marriages are arranged (although it was permissible according to Jewish Law). When the Satan saw this, he immediately assumed that Mashiach could not possibly be created from this match. Thus, the seed of Mashiach was clandestinely transmitted.¹

Hiding King David

The Satan was constantly scrutinizing the family of Peretz to see if the seed of Mashiach was being transmitted. When King David was born, the Satan disregarded him because he was 'Admoni' - red with bloodlust - like the murderer Eisav. The Satan was at peace; David, it seemed, could not father Mashiach.

What the Satan did not know, was that David Hamelech used his 'Admoni' personality for the cause of holiness. He was "אדמוני עם יפה עינים", 'Ruddy with beautiful eyes.' Torah leaders are referred to as 'the eyes' of the people. David only killed the enemies of the Jewish people with the permission of the Torah leaders of his time.

King David was concealed from the Satan under the façade of Eisav.

As David's greatness began to be revealed, there was once again a need to distract the Satan. Therefore, Doeg, the (unworthy) leader of the Sanhedrin, started questioning if it was permissible for the descendants of Ruth to marry into the Jewish People.

The Satan would never suspect that someone with a questionable status is the father of Mashiach.

Sodom will be Elevated Together with Bain HaMitzarim

In the future, Hashem will reward those who fulfilled the Mitzvah of Sukkah in the 'Sukkah of Sodom,' the Pesikta D'Rav Kahana informs us². Sodom will become a place of pleasure for the tzaddikim.²

Geographically, the Dead Sea/Sodom is the lowest point on Earth. Chronologically, Bain Hamitzarim is the lowest point in the year. We can conjecture that when Mashiach will come and Bain Hamitzarim will be elevated, the Dead Sea will likewise be raised on high.

¹ When Ruth came to Boaz he told her to come back the next day because, "No one should know that [you] come to the גרן, granary.' The place where the Bais HaMikdash is built was originally a גרן. According to mystical teaching, the Bais Hamikdash is called גרן (רגל הישרה).

When Boaz told Rus that it must remain a secret that she came to the גרן, he was referring to concealing the creation of the Davidic dynasty who would build the Bais HaMikdash.

² The 'Sukkah of Sodom' is synonymous with the 'Sukkah of David,' which refers to the kingdom of Mashiach. The Sukkah of David, i.e. his kingdom, begins in Sodom, encircle Eretz Yisrael and concludes in Sodom. The most prominent point of this Sukkah is Yerushalayim. It is fascinating to note that the Dead Sea, the origin of the Sukkah of David, is the closest place to Yerushalayim, its center. The desert surrounding the Dead Sea, which was once Sodom, can be viewed from any elevated point in the city.

Sodom was a fruitful paradise before Hashem turned it over and it became full of salt and sulfur. When Mashiach will come, Hashem will once again transform Sodom and it will become a flourishing garden.

The prophet Yeshaya foretold of the rejuvenation of Sodom. "ויישם מדברה כעדן וערבתה כגן ה'יב"ה, 'He will fashion the wasteland [Sodom] into the [Garden of] Eden, and the Aravah [a reference to the area surrounding the Dead Sea] to be like the garden of Hashem.' Yeshaya continues, "ששון ושמחה ימצא בה וכו'", 'Joy and happiness will be found within her, gratitude and voices of song.'

When Mashiach will come, Bain Hamitzarim will be transformed into a time of ששון ושמחה, and Sodom to a place of שמחה.

Beginning and Ending the Borders of Eretz Yisrael with Sodom

The kingdom of G-d was manifest upon the throne of David and his successors. When Mashiach will again occupy the position of his forbearers, Hashem will once more openly reign as king.

Sodom, the harbor of the seed of Mashiach, represents the Kingdom of Hashem.³ By beginning the borders of Eretz Yisroel with Sodom, moving westwards away from Sodom, encircling the entire land and ultimately returning to Sodom, the Torah expresses an everlasting truth:

The Kingdom of Hashem may be exiled from Eretz Yisrael. It may even travel a long, winding journey across millennia and continents together with the exiled Jewish nation. However, it will ultimately return to its original position.

"וישובו בנים לגבולם", 'The children (the Jewish people) will return to their land,' and then the kingdom of Hashem will be restored.

The Greatness of Our Generation - the Last Generation

The lowest point in history is our generation, the last before the coming of Mashiach. Our generation bears to fruition the end of Maseches Sotah which describes the state of the generation preceding Mashiach's arrival.

³ This explains why Avraham was crowned as king when he arrived in Sodom.

(רש"י טו:ז. עמק שוה הוא שם אחר לסדום – ראה מדרש רבה מ"ב סימן ה')

Avraham is also the father of Mashiach. Sodom is the place of Mashiach. When two entities with dormant similarities meet, they awaken within each other the similarity they share. This can be understood by observing two pianos that are stationed near each other. When one strikes a key on the first piano, the second one will play the same note, albeit softer. When Avraham - the patriarch of the Kingdom of Mashiach - came to Sodom - the original harbor of Mashiach - the kingdom within him was aroused, and it was recognized by the nations who crowned him king.

This also explains why Lot was elevated to a position of leadership the day before the demise of Sodom. Before a person dies, he is judged if he had fulfilled his unique mission on earth. The same is true regarding a place. The day before Sodom was destroyed it was judged whether it had fulfilled its purpose. Its task had been to safeguard the seed of Mashiach. "Had it succeeded in its mission?" the angels debated.

"Yes." they concluded.

"How?"

"Through Lot and his daughters."

The incongruity of an ordinary man housing the seed of Mashiach arose, and it was decided that Lot would be promoted to a position of leadership.

We understand this last section of Maseches Sotah better than any generation prior to us could have. The insolence, shocking immorality, and other unfortunate realities of our times, explain this piece of Gemara better than any commentator could have.

The struggles of a Jew who wishes to cleave to Hashem in our times seem insurmountable. The shamelessness of our fellow citizens of planet Earth presents tremendous tests to our spiritual fortitude.

What Bain Hamitzarim is within the calendar year, and what Sodom is from a regional perspective, our generation is in the course of history; we are all at the lowest point. However, it is precisely from the lowest point that Mashiach emerges.

Through intense Torah study, exerting ourselves in prayer, and by giving Tzedakah, we will lift the veil of darkness and uncover the spiritual heights attainable only by those who labor under these difficult circumstances.

ויתקיים, שתחדש לנו החודש הזה לששון ולשמחה ולמועדים טובים

May it be fulfilled, that this Month be renewed for us to Joy, Happiness and Festivals.

¹ במדבר לד:ג-יב

² בראשית יג:ד

³ דברים כט:כב

⁷ איכה א:ג

^ה שמות לב:ה

¹ זכרי' ח:יט

¹ ילקוט ראובני

^ה תהלים פט:כא

^ב בראשית רבה נ:י

¹ בראשית רבה סג:ח

פסיקתא דר"כ כ"ז א'

^ב ישעיה' נא:ג

^א ירמיה' לא:טז