

Waiting for Miriam in the Desert

Waiting for Miriam

When Miriam was afflicted with tzaraas (leprosy) because she had spoken lashon hara (gossip) about Moshe Rabbeinu, she had to wait outside of the Clouds of Glory for seven days. The entire Jewish encampment waited until she was healed and allowed to return into the Clouds of Glory before ensuing their journey towards Eretz Yisrael.

Rashi notes that this was a reward for her because, decades earlier, she had waited for her infant brother Moshe. Moshe had been hidden in the reeds at the edge of the Nile due to Pharaoh's decree that all Jewish baby boys be tossed into the Nile. Miriam had concealed herself and lingered in the area to ensure his wellbeing. As a reward for waiting for her infant brother, Miriam now merited that the entire Jewish nation waited for her.

It is possible, notes the Satmar Rebbe, that if the Jewish people would not have waited for Miriam, the sin of the spies would never have taken place.

Because the Jewish people tarried in the wilderness for an extra seven days, they sent the spies to scout Eretz Yisrael seven days later than they would have, and therefore the spies returned on the eve of Tisha B'Av.

The power of the Satan and the forces of evil are very strong on Tisha B'Av. This was a strong factor that caused the spies to fall into sin, and malign Eretz Yisrael. The Jewish men also forgot the kindness of Hashem and cried senseless tears upon their fate of entering the land He destined for them.

Hashem has a Plan for the World

King David states, "נורא עליליה על בני אדם", 'His [Hashem's] awesome conspiracies are upon mankind.' The Midrash² explains that Hashem's plan for the world was that death should exist. Adam's eating from the forbidden fruit merely set the ready plan into motion.

We are accustomed to thinking that if Adam would not have eaten from the forbidden fruit there would be no death. However, this is erroneous. Adam was created destined to err and suffer the consequences for the duration of history. This is how it *had* to be. Hashem's awesome conspiracy trapped Adam into eating from the forbidden fruit in order that the plan of creation should be fulfilled.

The selling of Yosef by his righteous and holy brothers was also part of the plan of Hashem. Hashem made them sell him in order that the Jewish people should endure the Egyptian exile; the tribes really had no choice. The sin of Moshe and Aharon at the מריבה was also in this category.

In these cases, the free-will that mankind enjoys was removed from the individuals involved so that Hashem's plan for creation should be executed.

The sin of the spies was also in the category of sins that were part of Hashem's unfathomable plan of history. Therefore, Hashem specifically arranged that the spies should return from their expedition on Tisha B'Av, the forces of evil should overwhelm them, and the Jewish people should sin.

Miriam's Part in the Sin of the Spies

What remains difficult to understand is why did the sin of the spies have to occur through the righteous Miriam? The Gemara³ teaches that Hashem has evil people carry out any evil He deems necessary.

The sin of the spies and the senseless weeping of the Jewish people that accompanied it are the spiritual root of the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people from Eretz Yisrael. "You cried senselessly on this night; I will establish this night for you to weep for the destruction of the Temple," Hashem declared.

The termite that ate at the spiritual foundations of the Temple was the sin of lashon hara (gossip). We could therefore consider that the first germ of the roots of the destruction of the Temple - the waiting of the Jewish

people for seven days for Miriam – was because she had been stricken with tzaraas due to the sin of having spoken Lashon Hara.

However, this answer would cause us to wonder: Can it be that Miriam's reward for waiting for Moshe – having the Jewish people wait for her – caused her to be a link in the chain of events that led to the exile?! How could that be considered a reward? Miriam would have gladly forgone the privilege of having the Clouds of Glory wait for her, and would have happily waited in the wilderness herself, in order not to be a factor that led to the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people.

Moshe Rabbeinu and the Seventeenth of Tamuz

Moshe postponed the giving of the Torah for an extra day in order that every single Jew should be completely pure. The Mogen Avraham notes that the fact that Moshe pushed off the giving of the Torah for one day alludes to the rabbinic institution of the additional day of Yom Tov that Jews in exile observe.

The Chasam Sofer questions, what is the connection between Moshe pushing off the giving of the Torah one day and the rabbinical enactment of a second day of Yom Tov for Jews exiled from Eretz Yisrael?

He explains that due to Moshe Rabbeinu having delayed the giving of the Torah by one day, he returned from his forty day stay in heaven, not on the sixteenth of Tamuz, but on the seventeenth of Tamuz. The power of the Satan is very strong on the seventeenth of Tamuz. On that day, the Satan was able to confuse the Jewish people and they therefore committed the sin of the Golden Calf and the Luchos were broken.

Had the giving of the Torah been on the day originally designated by Hashem - posits the Chasam Sofer - Moshe Rabbeinu would have returned on the sixteenth of Tamuz, completely avoiding the fiasco that occurred on the next day.

This is why the postponement of one day in the giving of the Torah hints to the second day of Yom Tov observed in exile. As a result of Moshe delaying the giving of the Torah, the sin of the Golden Calf occurred and the utopian state achieved by the Jewish people during the giving of the Torah was interrupted. The Luchos were broken and this introduced centuries of spiritual struggle which resulted in exile.

Moshe Rabbeinu delayed the giving of the Torah for a very lofty reason – so that the Jewish people should be pure for receiving the Torah. How can it be that the pure intentions of the righteous Moshe Rabbeinu should lead to the disaster that occurred on the seventeenth of Tamuz?

The Greatness of the Seventeenth of Tamuz and Tisha B'Av

A great future awaits the twenty-one days between the seventeenth of Tamuz and Tisha B'Av. These twenty-one seemingly dismal days are equivalent to the twenty-one exalted days between Rosh Hashana and Shemini Atzeres⁴.

Prophet Zechariah predicts, "צום הרביעי וצום החמישי ... יהיה לבית-יהודה לששון ולשמחה ולמנוחה ולמנוחה⁵", 'The fast of the fourth [month, The Seventeenth of Tamuz,] and the fast of the fifth [month, Tisha B'Av] ... will be for the house of Yehuda joy, happiness and holidays.'

The Rebbe of Bluzhov would prepare his unusually marvelous Torah expositions for Sukkos during the nine days. The Rebbe of Plontch would demonstrate what Tisha B'Av will look like after the redemption. He would hold the kiddush cup in his hand and recite kiddush saying, "ותתן לנו מועדים לשמחה את יום חג התשעה באב הזה...", 'and You gave us holidays for joy, this day, the chag of Tisha B'Av...'

Tisha B'Av is the birthday of Mashiach⁶. Essentially, it is a very meritorious day. Even today, it is referred to as a Moed, and we don't recite Tachanun, as on any other holiday.

Today, Pesach is an exalted holiday of redemption; but it was not always so. It was on Pesach that Hashem relayed the bitter prophecy of the Egyptian exile to Avraham Avinu. It was only after the Jews were redeemed from Egypt, that Pesach assumed the character of a joyous holiday and was transformed, "מיגון לשמחה ומאפילה לאור גדול"⁷, 'From melancholy to happiness, and from darkness to great light.' Until the exodus from Egypt, the great light

hidden in Pesach was concealed and the Patriarchs, the tribes, their children and their grandchildren mourned then, because it was the day in which the bitter news of the Egyptian exile was relayed.⁸

Just as Pesach was before the redemption from Egypt, so is Tisha B'Av today. For now, Tisha B'Av is a day of mourning; but when Mashiach will come, it will be revealed as a day of exalted joy.

The Greatness of Tisha B'Av is Hidden

Externally, Tisha B'Av is a day of the destruction of the first two Temples. However, the potential for the rebuilding of the Third Temple lies deep within it.

Each of the letters of the words תשעה באב can be spelled out. The hidden part of each of these letters, which we don't see in the word תשעה באב, are the letters, ת(ת) יו(ש) ין(ע) ין(ה) א(ב) ית(א) לף(ב) ית. These are gematria (numerically equal to) בית השלישי, the Third Bais HaMikdash (they both equal 1067). Hidden in Tisha B'Av is the light and ecstasy of the Ultimate Redemption that will unfold with the building of the Third Bais HaMikdash.

The Shabbos before Tisha B'Av is called, שבת הזון because we read the Haftorah of 'הזון ישעי' [the prophet] Yeshaya saw. The Kedushas Levi reveals a deeper meaning in the name of the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av. הזון – means seeing, and on this Shabbos every Jew is shown the Third Bais HaMikdash in its splendor (according to his spiritual capacity).

The Tisha B'Av Person

There exists a person who is a Tisha B'Av. Like Tisha B'Av, the forces of evil are very strong within him and he is a rasha. He is evil and it seems as if he has no redeeming quality. However, just as the day of Tisha B'Av has the great light of the Third Temple shining beneath its surface, so does this Jewish rasha have a great light hidden in him.

This light is the inextinguishable pilot light of Judaism. It is the seed of Jewishness which each Jew inherited from Avraham Avinu.

King David said of the rasha, "עוד מעט ואין רשע"⁹, 'there is still a little bit left [in the evil person] which is not evil.'

Tisha B'Av of Time and Tisha B'Av of Person are the Salvation of Each Other

Due to the Jewish people waiting in the wilderness for Miriam for seven days, the spies' sin coincided with Tisha B'Av.

The characteristics of Tisha B'Av reflected the condition of the spies. Both appeared evil and under the control of the Satan. However, in both of them a great and holy light shone.

Had the spies sinned on another day, whose external appearance reflects its essence, they would have been doomed. The fact that their sin occurred on Tisha B'Av was their salvation. The nature of Tisha B'Av, tremendous goodness covered in evil, highlighted the superficiality of the sin of the spies.

When two items of similar characteristics coincide, they reinforce each other. The Tisha B'Av reinforced the essential goodness of the spies, and the spies reinforced the fact that a great light is hidden in Tisha B'Av. Through the coinciding of the spies with Tisha B'Av, they are both rectified.

The Prophet Yeshaya referred to Mashiach when he said, "כי ילד ילד לנו, בן נתן לנו"¹⁰, 'For a child was born to us, a son was given to us.' By not traveling further until Miriam was ready, the Jewish people merited the hidden potential of Mashiach that is in Tisha B'Av, the birthday of Mashiach. Therefore, "והעם לא נסע עד האסף מרים"¹¹, 'and the nation did not travel until Miriam rejoined them,' is gematria "כי ילד ילד לנו בן נתן לנו" (the both equal 842).

This indeed was a great reward for Miriam the Tzadekes.

Moshe's Great Accomplishment in Delaying the Giving of the Torah

If Asara B'Teves would occur on Shabbos, we would be obligated to fast; because on that day the exile began, with the blockade of Yerushalayim - and the beginning has prime importance¹².

Conversely, on the seventeenth of Tamuz, the first seeds of redemption were planted with the marriage of Boaz to Rus.¹³ On the seventeenth of Tamuz, the process of redemption began, and therefore the light of redemption that lies hidden within it is very powerful.

Had Moshe Rabbeinu returned from Heaven on the sixteenth of Tamuz and broken the Luchos then, it would have been catastrophic; there would have been almost no hope of a rectification. However, because Moshe delayed the giving of the Torah by one day, the shattering of the Luchos occurred on the seventeenth of Tamuz, a day replete with great potential for redemption from disaster; and with its merit, the shattered Luchos will one day be made whole again.

King Shaul Prepared Purim

Another approach to the benefit the Jewish people derived by having waited for Miriam is as follows:

King Shaul was commanded to annihilate the entire nation of Amalek. However, he allowed King Agog to live. When he greeted Shmuel after the war, he said, "הִקִּימוֹתִי אֶת דְּבַר ה'"¹⁴, 'I fulfilled the command of Hashem.'

Shaul's words are puzzling. He had violated the command of Hashem by allowing Agog to live. Why did he state that he had fulfilled the command of Hashem?

The Rebbe of Rizhin explains that Shaul was referring to the fact that he had set the Purim miracle into motion. The Midrash states that the night which Shaul had allowed Agog to live, he fathered a child from which Haman would descend. Through their terrifying encounter with Haman and the subsequent salvation, the Jews reaffirmed their acceptance of the Torah with a renewed fervor as the Megilah relates, "וְקִיְמוּ וְקַבְּלוּ הַיְהוּדִים"¹⁵, 'The Jewish people upheld and accepted upon themselves.' The Gemara¹⁶ infers from this verse that they upheld the Torah they had already accepted. At the giving of the Torah they had accepted it with fear. As a result of the miracle of Purim, they reaccepted it with love.

When Shaul told Shmuel הִקִּימוֹתִי אֶת דְּבַר ה', he was referring to the קִימוֹ וְקַבְּלוּ הַיְהוּדִים, that would be the outcome of his having allowed Agog to live.

Miriam Ensured that the Purim Miracle should be able to Take place

The twenty-third of Sivan is a pivotal day in the story of Purim. On that day, the miraculous salvation of the Jews was set into motion as the second letters - which informed the Jews in the empire of Achashveirosh of their right to fight back - were sent. It is regarding this day that the Megilah states, "For the Jews there was light, happiness, Joy and preciousness"¹⁷.

Had the Jews not waited seven days for Miriam, they would have sent out the spies on the twenty-third of Sivan and the pristine essence of the twenty-third of Sivan would have been marred and rendered unfit for its important role in bringing the great light of the Purim miracle into effect.

By having the Jewish encampment wait for her, Miriam ensured that the miracle of Purim would be able to occur, and thereby the Jews would lovingly reinforce their acceptance of the Torah.

The lashon hara spoken by Miriam was, "כִּי אָשָׁה כּוּשִׁית לְקַח"¹⁸, 'He took a Kushite woman.' These words are gematria King Shaul's proclamation that he ensured a Purim for Jews - "הִקִּימוֹתִי אֶת דְּבַר ה'" (they both equal 1204). Both Miriam through the lashon hara she spoke, and Shaul by allowing Agog to live, ensured a Purim for the Jewish people.

Drying the Tears of Tamuz and Av

Each month of the year corresponds to a different one of the organs of a person. Tamuz and Av correspond to the two eyes¹⁹. These eyes have witnessed much tragedy, and the Prophet Yirmiyahu lamented that "עֵינַי עֵינַי יִרְדָּה"²⁰ מֵיַם, 'Water descends from both of my eyes,' in reference to the tears that Tamuz and Av shed.

The most crucial aspect of our service of Hashem in these months is to dry the tears of Tamuz and Av by avoiding the proliferation of immoral sights that abound in these months. Thereby, the two eyes that are Tamuz and

Av are rectified and are transformed into the eyes upon which Yeshaya prophesized "כי עינין בעינין יראו בשוב ה' ציון"²¹, 'For they will see with their own eyes the return of Hashem to Tzion.'

Each of the twelve months also corresponds to another one of the twelve tribes. Tamuz and Av correspond to Reuven and Shimon. The names of the leaders of the tribes of Reuven and Shimon are אליצור בן שדיאור and שלומיאל. Their names are gematria "שפן"²², 'One who closes his eyes from seeing evil, he will dwell on high' (they both equal 1199). The key focus in these months is to avoid immoral and forbidden sights.

Our Connection to Tamuz and Av

The months of Tamuz and Av are at the end of the calendar year. (Elul is already the beginning of the coming year.) Our generation is at the end of history; we are souls of Tamuz and Av. When we connect to the essence of these days, the goodness hidden in both – ourselves and the days of Tamuz and Av – is reinforced and we can both be transformed into shining goodness.

The Greatness of This Shabbos

This Shabbos shines with the light of Purim, because it is in this week's parsha that Miriam, through speaking lashon hara, protected the twenty-third of Sivan so that the miracle of Purim should be able to take place.

This Shabbos is also filled with the wisdom of Torah, as the parsha opens with the mitzvah of kindling the lights of the menorah, and the Midrash²³ states that one who meticulously lights candles of mitzvah will merit sons that are Torah Scholars. If one can merit children who are filled with the wisdom of Torah through kindling lights of mitzvah, he himself will certainly be filled with Torah.

ויהי"ר שנוכה ליהודים היתה אורה וגו' ויקוים "והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול ובאו האבדים" גימ' "שלושה ועשרים בסיון".
יבוא אליהו לבשרנו יבוא משיח צדקנו במהרה בימינו. אמן.

May we merit [the fulfillment of] "For the Jews there was light etc" and "It will be in that day a great Shofar will blow and the lost ones will come" which is Gematria the twenty third of Sivan (they both equal 1389). May Eliyahu come to herald [the redemption]. May Mashiach come, swiftly in our days. Amen

¹ תהלים טו:ה

² תנחומא וישב פרק ד'

³ תענית דף כ"ט ע"א

⁴ מהרש"א, בכורות דף ח'

⁵ זכרי' ח:יט

⁶ מדרש איכה בפתיחתא

⁷ הגדה של פסח

⁸ חתם סופר

⁹ תהלים לז:י

¹⁰ ישע' ט:ה

¹¹ במדבר יב:טז

¹² אבודרהם

¹³ חתם סופר

¹⁴ שמואל א' טו:יג

¹⁵ ט:כג

¹⁶ שבת דף פ"ח ע"א

¹⁷ ח:טז

¹⁸ במדבר יב:א

¹⁹ אר"ל

²⁰ ירמיהו א:טז

²¹ ישע' נב:ח

²² ישע' לג:טז, טז

²³ אוצר המדרשים חנוכה קטע י"ז