

Every Life's Breath...

Periodical devoted to the inner dimension of Torah.

Nishmas Kol Chai
Kayitz 5775 -2-

Adam Friedman, Editor
Raffi Leicht, Editor
Dovid'l Weinberg, Editor

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(917) 294-1429
NishmasPublications@gmail.com
Jerusalem - New York

Order Department:
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Tunneling to Yerushalayim*

Rav Moshe Weinberger

As Tisha B'Av this year coincides with Shabbos, it is observed motzei Shabbos and Sunday. Therefore, like the year 5772, when this drasha was originally given, Shabbos is both Tisha b'Av and erev Tisha b'Av.

After forty years of wandering in the Sinai desert, Moshe Rabbeinu begins to reflect on the Jewish people's journey from *Mitzrayim* to the Land of Israel with the words, "Eleven days from Chorev [*Sinai*], by way of *Har Seir* until *Kadesh Barnea*."¹ Rashi explains that "The [Jewish people] traveled [the entire eleven day journey] in three days. That is the extent to which the Divine Presence exerted itself for your sake to hasten your arrival in the land. But because you sinned, He led you around *Har Seir* for forty years."²

In other words, what began as an eleven day journey, providentially became a three day journey, and was, regrettably, transformed into a forty year voyage in the desert. Therefore, the next pasuk continues, "and it was in the fortieth year..."³

The Hidden Tunnels

In Megilas Eicha, we read, "He has enclosed my ways with hewn stone, He has made my paths crooked"⁴ Commenting on this pasuk, the Midrash⁵ recounts, that there were simple working Jewish men and women who lived in Tzipori, Teveria, and even further north, in Gilad, who used to travel to *Yerushalayim* every *erev Shabbos* to light candles and learn Torah in the *Beis haMikdash*, and then return home before Shabbos.

As it was impossible in those days to make such a journey in one day, they traveled via a system of enigmatic and underground tunnels. These tunnels can no longer be found because "there were tunnels

there, but they were concealed.” It is here that “He has enclosed my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked.”⁶

These simple Jews had such a strong longing to be in the *Beis haMikdash* in *Yerushalayim*, that *Hashem* opened up a miraculous path for them in the form of those *mechilos*, tunnels. In explaining this Midrash, the Maharal writes:

*This Midrash contains an inner meaning, different from the simple understanding. There is no doubt in my mind that this deeper meaning is its [Midrash] explanation. There are certain things that remain concealed, hidden, and unrevealed, to the degree that they seemingly do not exist at all. Like the Ten [Lost] Tribes, whose [spiritual] force remains in potentia, until the future (leAsid - referring to the end of days), when their [spiritual] force will be revealed, and their physical reality will move from potential to an active state. So too these tunnel ways, hidden and concealed under the Land. Hashem brings everything from a dormant state of potential into an active state of reality - this is a specific quality of the Land [of Israel], to go from potential to active.*⁷

Completing the mystery, *Chazal* tell a story of a man who found himself in a tunnel, going in the opposite direction of his home. This man, who lived in Eretz Yisrael, was plowing with his ox, when the ox wandered off. He chased after it, and followed it into a tunnel. Upon emerging from the other side of the tunnel, he found himself in unfamiliar territory - people looked different and no one spoke his language. He stopped a crowd on the street and asked where he was. The crowd responded, “Bavel,” and took their turn in asking the man where he was from. He tried to explain that he was from Eretz Yisrael, and that on that very same day he had suddenly arrived in Bavel. Bewildered, the Babylonians, asked him how he got to Bavel in less than a day? The man turned back to show them the tunnel from which he emerged, but he was unable to find it. *Chazal* close the story with the above cited verse, “He has enclosed my ways with hewn stone, He has made my paths crooked.”⁸

The first story told of people who wanted so badly to reach *Yerushalayim*, that *Hashem* created a miraculous path to the *Beis haMikdash* for them. In the second story, on the other hand, someone who was already in Eretz Yisrael spent his time chasing cows and other facets of corporeality, until those same tunnels led him into exile. Alas, we all have our “oxen,” and like the man in the story, we do not know how to find our way back to Eretz Yisrael, to holiness.

Leaving the Mindset of Exile

The distance between exile and redemption is exceedingly vast; but, more than the physical distance that accompanies exile, it is the distance between our minds and our hearts that we struggle with. With great desire for Eretz Yisrael, our path to the Land was transformed from an eleven day affair, into a pleasant, three day stroll. But when we went off track and began chasing the wrong things, that path suddenly became a forty year journey, followed by two thousand years of exile, from which we do not know how to return. There are many political and economic obstacles to our return to the Land of Israel, but the main obstacles are inside of us, in our minds and in our hearts.

Rav Yehuda HaLevi *zt”l* longed for Eretz Yisroel so much that he wrote “My heart is in the East, and I am at the end of the West.”⁹ With great longing, one can overcome all obstacles and bypass all stumbling blocks in order to return home. Because of his great desire, even though travel to Eretz Yisrael was extremely dangerous in those days, Rav Yehuda HaLevi found a “tunnel,” and made his way back home.

Exile and destruction have destroyed the paths back to Eretz Yisrael and redemption. But *Chazal*¹⁰ have revealed to us that with the arrival of the final redemption, the ten lost tribes will return to Eretz Yisrael,

by way of these tunnels, from the other side of the *Sambatyon* River. In addition, *Chazal*¹¹ inform us that at the time of the redemption, the *tzadikim* who have left the world will come to life and return to Eretz Yisrael via these same tunnels, “[*Hashem*] will create tunnels for them in the earth.” Rashi explains that “They will stand on their feet and walk to Eretz Yisroel in tunnels where they will emerge and come out.”¹² The great desire that gives rise to these tunnels is so powerful that it can even bridge the distance between this world and the next, bringing the lost tribes and the *tzadikim* who have left the world back to Eretz Yisrael.

Through these teachings, Chazal have revealed to us, that the distance between exile and redemption, this world and the next, and the mind and heart, is not as far as we think.

Promised Land

Moshe Rabbeinu reminds the Jewish people that the Promised Land is waiting right around the corner. “See that I have placed the land before you; come and inherit it... See that *Hashem*, your G-d, has placed the land before you; ascend and inherit it as *Hashem*, the G-d, of your fathers has spoken to you. Do not be afraid and do not fear.”¹³ All that is required is to not be afraid. We did not get lost in the desert because of the other nations there, for political reasons, or any other reason. Rather, our journey turned into a forty year trip because of our mindset. Moshe explained to them, “You did not want to ascend...This is why you did not believe in *Hashem*, your G-d.”¹⁴

The Tale of the Goat

Shmuel Yosef (“Shai”) Agnon *z”l*, the famous Nobel Prize winning and G-d fearing writer, wrote a story called “The Tale of the Goat” (“*Maaseh haEiz*”), inspired by all of the Midrashim about the mysterious tunnels.

He told of an old man who was very sick. His doctors told him that he needed goat's milk, so he bought a goat. A short time after he bought the goat, she disappeared for a few days. Wherever they searched for her they could not find her. But after a few days, she returned on her own with an udder full of milk so rich and delicious that it tasted like it came from *Gan Eden*.

Whenever the milk ran out she would disappear for a few days and could not be found until she returned on her own with udders full of the most delicious milk. One day, the man's son formulated a plan. He tied a rope to the goat's tail and when she left in the middle of the night, he felt the tug of the rope and followed her. He followed her into a tunnel, one of the tunnels and they walked through the tunnel for many hours.

When they came out on the other side, they found themselves on beautiful lush hills with trees and plants blossoming everywhere. He saw Jews but they did not understand Yiddish. He asked them in Hebrew where he was and they explained that they were in the Land of Israel, near *Tzfas*. He wanted to remain there for the day and then return to bring his parents to Eretz Yisrael but he saw people preparing for Shabbos and realized he would not be able to make the journey back home in time for Shabbos. So he wrote a note to his parents telling them that he was fine and actually in the Land of Israel. They should just follow the goat and she would bring them to Eretz Yisrael to live with him. He placed the note in the goat's ear and allowed it to return as he went to live in *Tzfas*.

When the goat returned home to the shtetl without his son, the boy's father was broken-hearted. He did not find the note and assumed that his son had been torn apart by some wild animal in some forest where the goat led him. Ripped by grief, he brought the *shochet*, the ritual slaughterer, to kill the goat that brought him so much pain. As they

were skinning the goat after slaughter, the note fell out of its ear. Seeing his son's handwriting, the father read the note and realized that in his grief and haste, he had killed his only key to returning to his health, Eretz Yisrael, and to his beloved son.

The opening and pathway to redemption still exists; we do not see it or think about it, but it is there and can be unlocked if we desire to return. Until we arouse that desire to its fullest expression, Tisha b'Av will remain a day of pain and sorrow. Still, we must remember and believe, even on Tisha b'Av itself, that the redemption is truly close and attainable.

Ribbono Shel Olam, increase our desire for a world in which Your Presence is revealed, a world in which we merit to return through those hidden tunnels to *Yerushalayim*, with the coming of Mashiach, may it be soon in our days.

Tunneling to Yerushalayim

*Adapted for Nishmas Kol Chai (vol. 2 - Kayitz), with permission and guidance from Rav Weinberger, from Binyomin Wolf's write-up of the Rebbe's morning drasha from Parshas Devarim/Shabbos Chazon 5772. A cache of Binyomin wolf's write-ups can be found at www.dixieyid.blogspot.com.

1. Devarim 1:2.
2. *ibid.*
3. Devarim 1:3.
4. 3:9.
5. See Eicha Rabbah and Y. Maaser Sheni 5:2
6. *ibid.*
7. See *Maharal, Netzach Yisrael, ch. 34.*
8. Y. Maaser Sheni 5:2.
9. "My Heart is in the East" ("*Libi baMizrach*"), by Rabbi Yehuda haLevi.
10. Pesikta Rabasi 32:10.
11. See Kesubos 111a, Yalkut Shimoni (Yeshaya) 431.
12. Kesubos 111a.
13. Devarim 1:8, 21.
14. Devarim 1:26, 32.