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Sanhedrin Daf 97

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Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamot of

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May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for their neshamot and may their souls find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

The Gemara begins a lengthy discussion about Moshiach: Rav Nachman asked Rabbi Yitzchak: “Have you heard when Bar Nafli will come”? Rabbi Yitzchak said to him: “Who is bar Nafli”? Rav Nachman said to him: “The Moshiach”. Rabbi Yitzchak asked: “Do you call the Moshiach Bar Nafli”? Rav Nachman answered him: “Yes, for it is written: On that day I will establish the booth of Dovid that is fallen (hanofeles).

Having ascertained the meaning of Rav Nachman’s question, Rabbi Yitzchak now answers it:

Rabbi Yitzchak said to Rav Nachman: This is what Rabbi Yochanan said: In the generation when the son of Dovid [the Moshiach] will come, the number of Torah scholars will decrease. And as for the rest of the people, their eyes will become worn out through grief and anxiety. Numerous troubles and harsh decrees will be constantly appearing anew. Before the first trouble is over, a second one will hasten to appear.

The following Baraisa describes the seven-year cycle preceding the Moshiach’s arrival: The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: The seven-year cycle when the son of Dovid will

¹ One must wonder what is the significance of the Gemara relating the chronology of events that precede the arrival of Moshiach? Furthermore, it appears from the words of the Gemara that initially there will be great suffering in the world, but in the latter part of the seven-year cycle, matters will improve. This runs in direct contradiction to the Gemara that states: Rabbi Elazar was asked by his students: what can a person do to be spared the travail of the Moshiach? And he responded: One should occupy himself in the study of Torah and acts of kindness. Rabbi Elazar’s statement indicates that Torah study and acts of kindness are the only solution to be spared the travail of the Moshiach. From the Gemara here it appears that Torah study will be a way of life.

come. In the first year, this verse will be fulfilled: I will bring rain on one town, and on one town I will not bring rain, i.e. there will be a sufficiency in some areas and famine in others. In the second year, the arrows of famine will be sent forth, i.e. there will be a limited famine in all areas. In the third year there will be a great famine; men, women, and children will perish, and so will pious people and people of good deeds; and Torah knowledge will be forgotten by its students. In the fourth year, there will be a sufficiency but not a complete sufficiency. In the fifth year there will be a great sufficiency; people will eat, drink, and rejoice, and Torah knowledge will return to its students. In the sixth year there will be sounds. In the seventh year there will be wars. In the aftermath of the seventh year, i.e. the eighth year, the son of Dovid will come.

The Gemara asks: Rav Yosef said: But there have been many such seven-year periods, and the Moshiach did not come after them!

The Gemara answers: Abaye said to Rav Yosef: Were there sounds in the sixth year and wars in the seventh? Furthermore, did the events to which you refer occur in this order?¹

The Maharal writes that the Messianic Era is distinct from present day life in that the Messianic Era is more spiritual. Although this may seem obvious, the Gemara teaches us that we have to focus on the benefits of Moshiach’s arrival. Although there will initially be tremendous hardships before Moshiach arrives, immediately prior to his arrival, the Jewish People will be brought closer to spirituality. This then is the explanation for Rabbi Elazar’s statement: One should occupy himself in the study of Torah and acts of kindness. To be spared the travail of Moshiach, i.e. the time period before he arrives, one should study Torah and perform acts of kindness. Although we are always obligated in this, it is even more incumbent upon us before Moshiach arrives to prepare ourselves accordingly. Only those who prepare themselves before the Shabbos will merit eating on Shabbos.

Scripture states: That Your enemies have taunted, O Hashem, that they have taunted the footsteps of Your Moshiach.

The Gemara cites another Baraisa that describes the pre-Messianic era: It was taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Yehudah says: In the generation when the son of Dovid will come, the meeting place will be used for licentiousness, the Galilee will lay waste, and the Gavlan will be desolate. The people of the border will wander from town to town and not be granted favor. The wisdom of scholars will decay, those who fear sin will be despised, the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog, and the truth will be absent, as it is stated: And the truth will be absent, and he that turns away from evil will become foolish.

The Gemara asks: What is the meaning of: and the truth will be absent (nederes)?

The Gemara answers: In the academy they said: It teaches that truth will be formed into groups (adarim) and go away.

The Gemara questions the next part of the verse: What is the meaning of: and he that turns away from evil will become foolish?

The Gemara answers: In the academy of Rabbi Sheila they said: This means that whoever turns away from evil will be considered foolish by the rest of the people.

Having mentioned a situation in which truthfulness will be absent, the Gemara digresses to relate a story about people who spoke only the truth: Rava said: At first I used to say that there is no truth in the world (i.e. there is no person who speaks only the truth). But then one of the rabbis said to me, and Rav Tavus was his name, and some say that Rav Tavyomei was his name, that even if they would give him all riches in the

world, he would not tell a lie. He related the following story to me: Once, I visited a certain town by the name of Kushta whose inhabitants would not tell a lie, and none of the people from there died before his time. I married a woman from among them, and I had two sons by her.

The narrative continues in the third person: One day, his wife was sitting and washing her hair. Her neighbor came and knocked on the door, asking to speak to her. Thinking that it would not be proper to tell the neighbor that his wife was washing her hair, he said to the neighbor: "She is not here". Subsequently, his two sons died. The people of that town came to him and asked him: "What is the reason for this"? He told them what had happened. They said to him: "We beg you, leave our town, and do not incite death against these people"!²

The Gemara resumes its discussion about the pre-Messianic era: It was taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Nehorai says: In the generation when the son of Dovid will come, young people will shame the old, old people will rise before the young; a daughter will stand against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog; and a son will not be ashamed before his father.

Another Baraisa about the pre-Messianic era: It was taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Nechemia says: In the generation when the son of Dovid will come, insolence will increase, honor will dwindle, the vine will produce its fruit, yet wine will be expensive, the entire kingdom will convert to heresy, and there will be no rebuke.

The Gemara notes that this Baraisa supports a certain Amoraic view: It supports the statement of Rabbi Yitzchak, for Rabbi Yitzchak said: The son of Dovid will not come until the entire kingdom converts to heresy.

Furthermore, falsehood is common, and truth is rare. Falsehood (i.e. the letters Shin, Kuf, Reish) stands on one foot, and truth (i.e. the letters Alef, Mem, Tav) is well grounded. This is because truth has a stand, and falsehood cannot be sustained.

² The Gemara states: the letter Shin connotes falsehood, and the letter Tav is truth. The reason for this is because the letters of falsehood (Shin, Kuf, Reish) are close together in the alef-beis, and the letters of truth (Alef, Mem, Tav) are far away from each other in the alef-beis.

The Gemara provides a scriptural allusion to this point: What is the verse? All of it has turned white, it is pure.

The following baraisa interprets a verse that refers to the redemption: The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: Scripture states: For Hashem will judge His people etc. (i.e. He will bring the redemption) when He sees that the hand is going and no one is being protected or helped. This verse teaches that the son of Dovid will not come until the informers have become numerous.

Another explanation: He will not come until the students of Torah have become few.

Another explanation: He will not come until the preutah has gone from the purse.

Another explanation: He will not come until the Jews despair of the redemption, as it is stated in the verse: and no one is being protected or helped, which implies that, as it were, there is no supporter or helper of Israel.

The Gemara records an incident: This last point is related to that which Rabbi Zeira said. When Rabbi Zeira found the Rabbis dealing with this matter, he said to them: "Please, I beg you not to delay the coming of the Moshiach, for we have learned in a Baraisa: Three things come when they are not expected. They are: the Moshiach, a find, and a scorpion."³

The Gemara discusses a related topic: For six thousand years will the world exist, and for one thousand years it will be destroyed, as it is stated : Hashem alone will be exalted on that day.

A dissenting view: Abaye says: For two thousand years it will be destroyed, as it is stated : After two days He will revive us;

³ Rabbi Zeira requested that the Rabbis not deal with the discussion of Moshiach's arrival, because it is like a lost article. One only finds something where he cannot expect to find it. This is allegorical to the arrival of Moshiach. The Medrash states: I have found Dovid, my servant³. Where did I find him? In Sodom. This statement offers us a

on the third day He will raise us up and we will live in His presence.

The Gemara cites support for Rav Katina's view: It was taught in a Baraisa in accordance with the opinion of Rav Katina: Just as the Sabbatical year causes cessation one year out of seven years, so too the world ceases one millennium out of seven millennia, as it is stated : Hashem alone will be exalted on that day, which indicates that there will be a "day" when the world is desolate. And further it says : A psalm, a song for the day of the Sabbath, which is interpreted as meaning a "day" that is completely a Sabbath. And it says : For a thousand years in your eyes are like a bygone yesterday, which indicates that the "day" referred to in the previous two verses is a millennium.

The following Baraisa gives the earliest possible date of the Moshiach's arrival: The academy of Eliyahu taught the following Baraisa: The world is destined to exist for six thousand years: the first two thousand years were of nothingness-the second two thousand years were of Torah-the third two thousand years should have been the days of the Moshiach, but because of our sins, which are numerous, the years that have gone from the Messianic Era have gone.

Eliyahu said to Rav Yehudah, the brother of Rabbi Salia the pious: The world shall exist not less than eighty-five jubilees, and in the last jubilee the son of David will come. He asked him: At the beginning or at the end? — He replied: I do not know. Shall [this period] be completed or not? I do not know, he answered. Rav Ashi said: He spoke thus to him: Before that, do not expect him; afterwards you may await him.

The Gemara cites another prediction concerning the redemption: Rav Chanan bar Tachalifa sent the following message to Rav Yosef: I met a man in whose hand there was a scroll, written in Ashuri script and in the Holy Tongue. I

glimpse into the understanding of what will occur when Moshiach arrives. His arrival will be at the least expected time, and in a certain sense, in Sodom like times. We are witnessing today a rebirth of Sodom, as immorality is on the rise, and the world is reeling in corruption and falsehood.

asked him, "From where did you get this scroll"? He answered me: "I was hired as an aid to one of the soldiers of Rome, and I found it among the hidden treasures of Rome". And in it was written: After four thousand two hundred and ninety-one years from the world's creation, the world will end. During some of them there will be the wars of the great sea creatures. During some of them there will be the wars of Gog and Magog. And the rest will be the days of the Moshiach. And the Holy One, blessed is He, will not renew His world until after seven thousand years.⁴

The Gemara records a different version of the scroll's text: Rav Acha the son of Rava said: "After five thousand years" is what was stated in the scroll.

The following Baraisa underscores the futility of attempting to predict the date of the redemption: It was taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Nassan says: This verse pierces and plummets to the depths! For there is another vision of the appointed time; it shall speak of "the end", and it shall not lie. If it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not delay. This verse implies that the date of the redemption is concealed from us. Thus, it is contrary to our sages who expounded the verse: Until a time, and times, and half a time, to determine the date of the redemption. It is also contrary to Rabbi Simlai, who expounded the verse: you fed them bread of tears; you made them drink tears for a third, to determine the date of the redemption. And it is contrary to Rabbi Akiva who expounded the verse: there shall be another one, it shall be slight, and then I will shake the heavens and the earth, to determine the date of the redemption. In fact, the verse

⁴ The Gemara appears to attribute validity to the scroll because it was written in Ashuri script and in the Holy Tongue. Nonetheless, it is perplexing that this scroll would be used as proof for when Moshiach will arrive.

There is a story told that written on the Western Wall is a verse that states: You will see and your heart will exult, and your bones will flourish like grass. It seems that a Jew visiting Eretz Yisroel engraved this verse on the wall to serve as a reminder to the Jewish People that there is hope for the salvation. This is in line with the verse where it is said: Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings You have established strength, because of Your enemies, to silence foe and avenger. The Gemara states: From the time the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed,

expounded by Rabbi Akiva refers to a different matter altogether- namely, that after the second Temple is built, the first Jewish kingdom will last seventy years, the second Jewish kingdom will last fifty-two years, and the kingdom of Ben Koziva will last two and a half years.

The Gemara discusses the verse cited at the beginning of the Baraisa: What is the meaning of: It shall speak of the End, and it shall not lie?

The Gemara answers: Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: May the very essence of those who calculate "Ends" suffer agony! For they say: "Since the date of the End that we calculated has arrived and the Moshiach did not come, he will never come"! Rather, one should wait for him, as it is said: if he tarries, wait for him. Lest you counter that we are awaiting the Moshiach, but Hashem is not awaiting him, Scripture therefore states: And therefore Hashem waits to grant you favor; and therefore He is exalted to grant you mercy. And if you ask that since we are awaiting the Moshiach and Hashem is awaiting him, who is preventing his arrival, the answer is that the Divine Attribute of Justice is preventing him from coming. And if you ask that since the Divine Attribute of Justice prevents him from coming, why do we await him- the answer is that we await him in order to receive reward, as it is stated: Fortunate are all who wait for him.

The Gemara digresses to record another teaching based on this verse: Abaye said: The world is comprised of not less than thirty-six righteous people in each generation who receive the

prophecy was removed from the prophets and given to fools and young children. The Maharal explains that fools and young children are pure and innocent, and this allows them to receive prophecy.

Perhaps this is the key to understanding the Gemara. The predictions are consistent with everything mentioned until now. What is striking is that even a scroll found among the hidden treasures of Rome has meaning when we seek hope and inspiration. All that is required to witness the ultimate redemption is pure faith. We must believe that the One who redeemed us from Egypt and revealed His presence even to babes and sucklings will display an even greater show of strength when He brings us back to Eretz Yisroel and the Bais Hamikdash will be rebuilt forever.

countenance of the divine Presence, as it is stated: Fortunate are all who wait for him, and the word lo, (for Him) has the numerical value of thirty-six.

The Gemara challenges Abaye's teaching: Is this so? Why, Rava has said that the row before the Holy One, Blessed is He, is comprised of eighteen thousand, as it is said: Surrounding are eighteen thousand.

The Gemara answers: This is not a difficulty. This [Abaye's teaching] refers to persons who view the Divine Presence as though through a clear screen; whereas this [Rava's teaching] refers to persons who view the Divine Presence as though through an opaque screen.

The Gemara raises another difficulty with Abaye's teaching: But are there so many who view the Divine Presence clearly? Why, Chizkiyah has said that Rabbi Yirmiyah said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: I have seen the people of the highest level, and they are few. If they are a thousand, I and my son are among them. If they are a hundred, I and my son are among them. If they are a hundred, I and my son are among them. If they are two, they are myself and my son. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai considered it possible that only two people were of this supreme level. How, then, could Abaye be certain that there are never less than thirty-six?

The Gemara answers: This is not a difficulty. This [Abaye's teaching] refers to those who may enter only with permission; whereas this [Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai's statement] refers to those who may enter without permission.

The Gemara resumes its discussion about the advent of the Moshiach: Rav said: All the "Ends" have passed, and the matter of the Moshiach's arrival depends only on repentance and good deeds.

A dissenting view: But Shmuel says: It is enough for the mourner to endure his period of mourning.

The Gemara notes that this issue has been debated by Tannaim: This dispute between Rav and Shmuel is parallel to the following dispute between Tannaim: Rabbi Eliezer says: If the Jewish People repent, they will be redeemed, and if not, they will not be redeemed. Rabbi Yehoshua said to Rabbi Eliezer: If they do not repent, they will not be redeemed?! Rather, the Holy One, blessed is He, will appoint a king over them whose decrees will be as harsh as those of Haman, and the Jewish People will repent. And in this way G-d will bring them back to the right path.

Another [Baraisa] taught: Rabbi Eliezer said: if Israel repent, they will be redeemed, as it is written: Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Rabb Yehoshua said to him, But is it not written: you have sold yourselves for naught; and you shall be redeemed without money? You have sold yourselves for naught, for idolatry; and you shall be redeemed without money — without repentance and good deeds. Rabbi Eliezer retorted to Rabbi Yehoshua: But is it not written: Return to me, and I will return to you? Rabbi Yehoshua rejoined — But is it not written: For I am master over you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion? Rabbi Eliezer replied: But it is written: in returning and rest shall you be saved. Rabbi Yehoshua replied: But is it not written: Thus said the Lord, The Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nations abhorred, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship? Rabbi Eliezer countered: But is it not written: if you will return, O Israel, said the Lord, return to me? Rabbi Yehoshua answered: But it is elsewhere written: And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that lives forever that it shall be for a time, times and a half and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. At this Rabbi Eliezer remained silent.