



No Fish for the Ill

Two Spiritual Ailments

What seems to be a rather bizarre description of the end-time before Moshiach is illuminated by the Rebbe in a special reshima. Written by the Rebbe in Lisbon, Portugal just before embarking on the ship to the United States in 5701.

THERE WILL BE NO MORE FISH

A number of extraordinary events will have to transpire before Moshiach arrives to transform the world completely. The Gemara tells us about one particular astonishing event: “[Moshiach] Ben Dovid will not arrive until a quest will be made in the pursuit of fish for a sick patient, yet no fish will be found.”

When reading this passage, the question immediately arises: what could possibly be the connection between the disappearance of fish and the arrival of Moshiach?

MOSHIACH’S TWO CONTRARY NAMES

To better understand the connection between these two events, we must first examine the diverse names of Moshiach, specifically the name “Ben Dovid” used in this passage.

There are various names used in reference to Moshiach. The superior of them all is the most frequently used term “Moshiach,” which means “anointed one.” From time immemorial, Jewish kings were anointed for leadership with a special “anointing oil.” By definition, the term “anointed” alludes to someone selected for greatness. In addition, kings were anointed only if they were elected to a position of leadership by virtue of their personal greatness alone. Hence, if a king would pass away and his son succeeded him by default, he would not be anointed with the special oil, since he was chosen by virtue of his father’s leadership, not by his own qualities. If however there was a competitor to the throne, and only after extensive dialog and deep scrutiny

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גאנזבורג
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

נדפס על ידי ולזכות
צאצאיהם שיחיו לאורך ימים
ושנים טובות ובריאות

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was the son restored to the throne, the son *would* then be anointed with the special oil, since he was reinstated on the merit of his personal reputation and importance.

Hence, the term “anointed” or in Hebrew “Moshiach” connotes personal prestige and prominence of the highest order.

The least prestigious of titles used in reference to Moshiach is the term “Ben Dovid,” or “Son of Dovid.” This term was used in the above quoted passage from Gemara describing the vanishing of fish prior to the coming of Moshiach.

The term “Son of Dovid” is the precise contrary to the term Moshiach. Moshiach alludes to personal prominence, whereas “Ben Dovid” demonstrates that Moshiach was selected not by virtue of his own qualities, but by virtue of the greatness of his ancestor, Dovid Hamelech. He is therefore referred to not by his own name but by his ancestor’s name—that he is the descendant of Dovid, by virtue of whom he was selected.

In that same vein, in the Gemara we find a number of young pupils who were yet to obtain Rabbinic ordination, who were called not by their own names, but by their fathers’ names, such as “Ben Zakkai,” “Ben Zoma,” or “Ben Azai,” since they were not yet personally prominent but were recognized for the prestige of their

fathers. Therefore, the term “Son of Dovid” is not quite the most honorable title with which to refer to Moshiach.

However, aside from the above mentioned translation of “Son (or descendant) of Dovid, the title “Ben Dovid” can also be translated in an alternate manner. A “*Ben Chorin*,” literally meaning a “son of the free,” isn’t the “son of a free individual,” but rather it means that he subscribes to and lives in the style of the liberated populace and that he himself is a free individual.

Likewise, not only does the term “Ben Dovid” imply that he is a descendant of Dovid, but moreover that his personality resembles Dovid and he lives in the style of Dovid.

What is Dovid’s style? Dovid was humble, small and insignificant in his own eyes; like he says in Tehillim, “And I am [like] a worm, not a man.” At times he was seen so by others as well, as we see when he was referred to as “Dovid the small one.” So the term used for Moshiach “Ben Dovid”—meaning someone like Dovid who was small and unassuming, alluding to the concept of *bittul* and *mesiras nefesh*—is in direct contrast of the esteemed title “Moshiach,” anointed one, selected for prominence.

Interestingly, it is specifically when foretelling the tragic heartbreaking events that will occur prior to the advent of Moshiach that we find the low-profile title “Ben Dovid” being used.

These two names used to describe Moshiach express the two extremes that Moshiach will possess—greatness and esteem on the one hand, as well as humility and self-nullification on the other.

MOSHIACH: TWO DIVERSE POSSIBILITIES

Just as in the case with the extreme contrast in Moshiach’s names, the concepts and events pertaining to the

final redemption can transpire in one of two very diverse methods. Which path the *geulah* will take is dependent on the situation of the Jewish people and the world at the time of Moshiach’s arrival.

If the Jewish people will be at their lowest point and entirely undeserving of salvation to the extreme, Hashem will feel forced to send Moshiach to His unworthy people because of how catastrophic the situation has become. Because the world is undeserving, Moshiach will be revealed in the form of his lesser name, “Ben Dovid.” His revelation will therefore be on low key, on a lower spiritual level and with less pomp and splendor.

However, if Jewish people will be exceptionally meritorious and will be rightfully deserving of Moshiach, Hashem will send Moshiach to His people with joy, and he will be revealed in the form of his greater name, “Moshiach.” He will redeem the Jewish people with great spiritual revelations and with much pomp and glory.

With these guidelines we will be able to understand this passage of the Gemara in two alternate ways, depending on the situation of the Jewish people prior to Moshiach’s coming.

FISH: THE ATONEMENT FOR SIN

If the Jewish people will be at their lowermost point, forcing Hashem to redeem them, the generation will certainly not be on a high spiritual level full of intense love, fear and yearning for Hashem. Rather they will be at a much more inferior level, merely trying to fulfill Hashem’s will and overpower their evil inclination.

In that case, the “patient” of which the Gemara speaks is an allusion to someone who has transgressed, causing ailment to his soul. The patient will have to do *teshuvah* in

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order to cure the spiritual disease that the sin has brought onto his soul.

In truth, every Jew is connected to Hashem and by nature cannot do anything sinful to separate himself from the source of his own existence. If a person transgresses, it is because he mistakenly imagines himself to be a separate entity from Hashem and is oblivious to the fact that he is directly dependent upon Hashem. The sickness can only be cured by eradicating its source, which is by impressing upon the person that he is one with his Creator and is nullified to Him.

This is where the fish comes in. The Ramban writes that the reason why we are forbidden to consume non-kosher animals, especially those that are cruel, is because our character traits are molded very much by the food we eat. Consequently, eating wild animals could create a cruel temperament in one who consumes it, while calm animals cause a calm and peaceful temperament.

If there is a need to cause a person to appreciate that he is nullified, dependent and inseparable from Hashem, the natural choice would be to serve him fish. Why fish? Fish are always in the water, usually totally concealed by the water, and their greatest fear is that they might be forcibly pulled out of the sea. This is because unlike those who walk the earth, the fish truly feel how they are rooted in the sea—the source of their existence—and they feel part and parcel of the sea, which conceals

and inclusively nullifies them. They instinctively feel that they are directly dependent upon the sea, and that the moment they leave the water they will surely die.

Hence, it is specifically fish that has the power to create an understanding that a person is nullified to Hashem, and that he cannot possibly sin or do anything damaging to separate himself from his lifeline.

Before the coming of Moshiach, the Jewish people will be in desperate need of discovering this sense of nullification and connection to Hashem in order to eliminate the possibility of sin, yet search as they might, it will not be found. This indicates that the generation has deteriorated to an extreme and is entirely unworthy of redemption, in which case Hashem will redeem them simply for His own sake. This will cause Moshiach to reveal himself on a lower spiritual level, using the smaller title “Ben Dovid,” as the generation on its own will be undeserving of redemption.

FISH: THE KEY TO TRUE BITTUL. OR IS IT?

This is what will occur if the generation is totally unworthy. If however the generation prior to Moshiach's coming will be incredibly meritorious, the situation will be entirely different. The Jewish people will be on a lofty spiritual level, serving Hashem with true love and fear. They will have reached all forty-nine of the fifty gates of spiritual wisdom, but they will have yet to reach the fiftieth gate, which will cause them to be totally unsatisfied with their present lofty situation, holy as it may be, and sick with passionate yearning to be fully connected to Hashem.



In order to heal the ailment of these righteous people, the root of the problem must be eradicated. There is still a “flaw” in their *avodah*, so to speak, spiritual and whole as it will be, as there is a high spiritual level that these *tzaddikim* have yet to attain. Although they serve Hashem with “*ahava beta’anugim*,” an intense love and pleasure in their connection with Hashem, they still feel to a miniature extent that they are a separate entity who loves Hashem. They have not yet reached the point where they are completely nullified and feel included in *Elokus*, completely losing any sense of individual existence. To attain this lofty level of *bittul*, they will search intensively for fish, which as we explained earlier, is known for its sense of total nullification and inclusiveness in its source, which would cause these *tzadikkim* to lose any sense of self and to be entirely nullified in *Elokus*.

But there is just one problem. They will find the fish to be

deficient and unhelpful for the patient. Sure the fish might be swimming freely, but they won’t be able to help the person reach this high spiritual level, since he is looking for something so sublime that even the fish cannot provide it. The *tzaddik* is yearning for a complete and total nullification to Hashem on the highest level, and even the fish—which are seemingly the epitome of nullification, and seem to have no separate existence for themselves but are included in the sea—at the end of the day do not possess that ultimate level of nullification for which the *tzaddik* is yearning, and therefore it cannot satisfy or heal him.

A generation in which longing for nullification to Hashem is the source of its illness, and even the most nullified creature such as fish is not on the sublime level for which the people are reaching, is truly a meritorious generation by all counts.

That generation will be deserving of the immediate coming of Moshiach, who will reveal himself with great excitement and grandeur.

But the question still remains if the generation is so meritorious and deserving of Moshiach’s greatest revelations, why is the seemingly low-key title “Ben Dovid” used for such praiseworthy a generation? The answer is because the term “Ben Dovid”—as we explained before—is among other things a testament to Moshiach being similar to Dovid Hamelech, who was humble and completely nullified to Hashem. For a generation whose only goal in life is to reach total nullification to Hashem, the title “Ben Dovid” is quite appropriate, and the *mesiras nefesh* and *kabbolas ol* of the term “Ben Dovid” reaches up to the highest of levels within Moshiach.¹ **T**

1. Adapted from Reshimos choveres 11.

