

GE'ULAH: THE ROOTS OF EXILE

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Abba Chalifah asked R' Chiyah bar Abba: The Torah counts seventy [children of Israel who arrived in Egypt], but when you count them, there are only 69! [Bava Basra 123a]

After failing to satisfy him with his answer, Abba Chalifa answers his own question, calling his answer "a pearl" of wisdom.

So I have heard from R' Chama bar Chanina: [The seventieth] one is Yocheved, who was conceived on the way, and born between the walls [i.e. at the moment the Jews passed through the border of Israel/Canaan and entered Egypt].

It is indeed an ingenious answer. Sixty-nine Jews left Israel, yet seventy came down to Egypt. But, asks R' Moshe Wolfson Shlita, every question and every answer through which we understand the holy Torah is a "pearl." What is was so dear to Abba Chalifa about this answer that when R' Chiya tried to dismiss the question, he responded, "Do you mean take away my beautiful pearl?"

The Midrash proposes another answer to the Gemara's question. It submits that Serach, daughter of Asher, was the missing seventieth soul. This is puzzling: Serach is in fact numbered explicitly among those who descended to Egypt, yet despite her presence, there are only 69!

The Yafeh Toar answers that Serach was exceedingly noble; she lived extremely long; she was the one who told her grandfather that Yosef lived; and she was one of the few people in all of history that entered Gan Eden alive... Therefore, she's counted twice. The fact that one person counts as two does resolve the contradiction, but the 'math' required seems even more exceptional than the truly amazing individual Serach was.

One of the well known halachic phenomena of the Jewish calendar is that the first day of Pesach and Tisha Be'Av (the ninth day of Av, on which the First and Second Temples were destroyed) always occur on the same day of the week. This is noted by our Sages in a play on the Hebrew alphabet: Alef / Tav - the first day of Pesach (alef) determines Tisha Be'Av (tav). The allusion continues with Beis / Shin - the second and second-last letters corresponding, etc.

It is important to understand that this is not simply a matter of coincidence upon which Chazal (our Sages) built a memory device, but rather an indication that the two days are in some way inexorably bound. The idea is simple, yet immeasurably deep.

The churban (destruction) and exile represented by Tisha Be'Av must by definition have its root in

the exodus and redemption of Pesach, the day on which Hashem removed us from Egypt and from slavery. The fact that the first night of Pesach determines and directs Tisha Be'Av testifies unequivocally that without ge'ulah, salvation, there can be no exile. While it may at times be exceedingly difficult to perceive, ultimately it will be revealed that even the darkest moments of exile and destruction were rooted in redemption, and were in the most hidden of ways laying the groundwork for an even greater freedom and exodus.

Yocheved's birth bein ha-chomos, between the walls, represents the same concept. Even as the Jews were being driven from their homeland (Canaan), the groundwork for redemption was being laid in the conception of Yocheved, mother of Moshe, Aaron and Miriam, who were the messengers of the final exodus from Egypt. At the very moment the Jews stepped foot into Egypt she was born - so that not even one moment of exile should pass without the seeds of redemption already beginning to sprout. The most unadulterated point of any organism is in its roots, its source. That ge'ulah is always found at the root of galus affirms that even at its darkest, most powerful moments, exile at its source is no more than an offspring of redemption. This, he says, is the "pearl" Abba Chalifa held so dear, for it holds the key to Jewish suffering and strength over the past 2,000 years.

While Serach was no doubt a great tzadekes (righteous woman), the fact that she "entered Gan Eden while alive (i.e. she didn't experience physical death, see Targum Yonasan)" is quite exceptional, even for tzaddikim of her caliber.

The Ma'or Eynayim (parshas Vayeitze) writes that one who bears good tidings merits to have the neshama (soul) of Eliyahu Ha-navi attach itself to him. Eliyahu is the 'Father' of all good tidings, the one who will announce Mashiach and the ultimate redemption. It is impossible to bear truly good tidings without his assistance.

Yaakov Avinu, the last of the forefathers, was the source of Israel. Avraham and Yitzchak both bore children whose destiny was not ours. Yaakov bore 12 children - the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The Ba'al Ha-Tanya writes that Yaakov's neshama was the source of all Jewish souls for eternity, and contained an element of every single soul.

Serach had a mission. Yaakov, her grandfather, was mourning over Yosef in his mistaken belief he was dead. Yosef, by the way, carries the 'first half' of the ultimate redemption, for the coming of Mashiach contains (to the extent we can express it) two elements, that of Mashiach ben Yosef and that of Mashiach ben David from the tribe of Yehuda.

Serach had the exceptional merit to bear the good news for Yaakov, father of Israel: Yosef lives! If the soul of Eliyahu attaches itself to those who bear good tidings, how great must be his connection to one who brings joy to the father of Israel, that his son, source of the ultimate redemption, is alive! This, he says, is why Serach entered Gan Eden alive. Because at that moment she became eternally bound with Eliyahu, who himself never died, and "never tastes the taste of death and burial." The fact

that she counts as two - because she bore good news to Yaakov and entered Gan Eden alive - is not to say that a 'really important' person counts twice. The 'second Serach' was the soul of Eliyahu with whom she became bound. She was indeed one that became two.

According to the Midrash, it was not Yocheved but Eliyahu that was the seventieth Jew. Its message, though, is identical to that of the Gemara: Jewish exile can only take root through ge'ulah, whether in the form of Eliyahu, the father of all good tidings who will bear the ultimate message of ge'ulah, or that of Yocheved [Emunas Itechal]. Have a good Shabbos. Text Copyright © 2007 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **Torah.org**