



PASSOVER

Passover Day 8; Acharon Shel Pesach
H2O: Would You Like Tap or Bottled Water?
What Water Teaches Us About Moshiach
April 7, 2018

H2O: WOULD YOU LIKE TAP OR BOTTLED WATER? WHAT WATER TEACHES US ABOUT MOSHIACH

ABSTRACT

Today's Haftorah dramatically depicts the future of the world. Who is not familiar with the expression: "And a wolf shall live with a lamb" and other such images from today's reading?

But there is one thing that glaringly jumps out in these verses: the reference to water. First, we read about the splitting of the sea that will occur in the final redemption: And G-d shall dry up the tongue of the Egyptian Sea, and He shall lift His hand over the river... and He shall beat it into seven streams. Then we read: The world will be filled with divine knowledge as the water covers the sea. And finally: we shall draw water with joy from the fountains of the salvation.

Why water?

We can perhaps find the answer in the modern obsession with bottled... water.

Whenever you go to a restaurant, the first thing they ask you is: Would you like bottled water or tap water?

And, in restaurants that know what they are doing, the waiters are trained to sound condescending, making anyone who dares opt for tap water feel like a cheap child that has no taste.

The reason restaurants do this is margins; business 101. Tap water is free: it cost the restaurant nothing and they sell it for nothing, which means they lose money on the manpower it takes to offer and pour that water.

Bottled water on the other hand is a major moneymaker. A bottle of water cost the restaurant a dollar and they sell it for seven. That's five bucks clean profit after you factor in all of the costs, storage, and manpower.

Say a restaurant turns a hundred tables per diem. If, on average, each table orders a bottle and half of bottled water, that's a cool \$750 bucks profit in that one day alone. But if all tables select instead tap water, well, that's a major opportunity lost for the fine establishment.

This is why restaurants push bottled water over tap, and make you feel like a barbaric caveman if you shun the bottle and embrace the tap.

Within this water ritual lies a deep secret about Moshiach, when divine knowledge will saturate earth like water covers the sea, and when we shall draw water with joy from the fountains of the salvation.

Exile is like bottled water. Redemption is like water straight from the source.

1. The Economics of Water

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This is why restaurants push bottled water over tap, and make you feel like a barbaric caveman if you shun the bottle and embrace the tap.

(Expert waiters are especially savvy when dealing with dates, aware that no man wants to come across as a cheapskate miser by ordering tap...)

2. Water and Torah

What does a crash course in hospitality and water economics have to do with the eighth and final day of Passover?

If anything yesterday was the anniversary of the splitting of the sea. Today should be a "dry" sermon. Why all this watery talk?

The Torah is analogous to water. Just as water naturally runs and rushes from a high place to a lower place, so too does Torah come from a high place and descends to a low place, sourced in the heights of G-d and flows into the lows of earth.

And, as Rabbi Akiva famously said: taking a Jew out of Torah is like taking a fish out of water; just as water is the life source of the fish, without which it cannot survive, so too Torah is the life source of the Jews, without which we cannot survive.¹

Still, what does this have to do with Pesach, especially the last day of Pesach?

¹ Berachot 61a.

3. Haftorah: Water and Redemption

When you read today's Haftorah, the connection between this day and water begins to crystallize.

Today's Haftorah is Isaiah's famous Messianic vision. Who is not familiar with the expression: *And a wolf shall live with a lamb², and a leopard shall lie with a kid...* and other such images from today's reading?

But there is one thing that glaringly jumps out in this vision: its references to water.

First, we read about another splitting of the sea that will occur in the final redemption: *And the Lord shall dry up the tongue of the Egyptian Sea, and He shall lift His hand over the river with the strength of His wind, and He shall beat it into seven streams, and He shall lead [the exiles] with shoes.³*

Then it continues to describe some of the characteristics of the Messianic reality:

They shall neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mount, for the earth shall be full of divine knowledge as water covers the sea bed.⁴

And then, what exactly will we be doing in times of Moshiach?

And you shall draw water with joy from the fountains of the salvation.⁵

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4. The Moshiach Seudah

The Baal Shem Tov instituted a messianic custom celebrated later today. Called the *Moshiach Seudah*, the "Messianic Feast," we sit down to a celebratory feast as Passover comes to a close, eating Matzo, drinking four cups of wine, singing *niggunim* (melodies), and sharing words of spirit and redemption.

The Baal Shem Tov, the revealer of the *Moshiach Seudah*, asked Moshiach: "When will you come?" Moshiach replied: "When your wellsprings spread outward."

Here too we see the reference to water: Moshiach will come when your wellsprings will spread outward. Reminiscent of the verse in the Haftorah: *the earth will be full of divine knowledge as the waters covers the sea.*

² Isaiah 10:6.

³ Isaiah 10:15

⁴ Isaiah 11:9.

⁵ Isaiah 12:3.

Both our Haftorah, which is a vision of Redemption, and the Baal Shem Tov, who instituted the Feast of Redemption, associate Redemption with water. Perhaps we can appreciate a hint of the essence of Redemption by understanding the nature of water.

5. Total Immersion

Water has fascinating properties. As opposed to a solid object, we can immerse ourselves in water and be completely submerged, covered from head to toe.

This type of immersion is identified with the concept of *bittul* – a Hebrew word which loosely means to immerse yourself in a higher presence, humbly suspending (or transcending) your self and ego in face of something greater than yourself. Totally committing to a cause that is greater than you. When you do that you become submerged in the cause, like a fish completely submerged in water, where the cause is more important than your personal interests.

Like a fish in water, this *bittul* connects you to your life source – an integral connection, to the extent that you cannot separate the fish from the water, the Jew from Torah, as Rabbi Akiva explained. This is why immersion in a mikveh, a ritual bath, is called *tevilah*, which has the same letters as *ha'bittul*.⁶

Water is thus the best metaphor for us being completely connected with our purpose, with our source, with the divine.

And this is why we begin our lives submerged nine months in the embryonic fluids of our mothers wombs, where we, like a fish in water, are totally covered, protected, nurtured, sustained – totally connected with our source.

This prepares and empowers us with the ability to maintain the connection when we leave the womb and enter the dry and arid land of material existence. With the goal of watering and irrigating our physical lives with the moisture of Torah waters and spiritual vitality, pure waters of knowledge.

Until the point when the earth will be filled with divine knowledge as the waters cover the sea⁷ in the final redemption – when the world and each of us will be redeemed from the tentacles of materialism as an end in itself, but rather the occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d.⁸

⁶ *Siddur im dach* 159d.

⁷ See Rambam end of Hilchos Mikvaos.

⁸ Rambam Hilchos Melochim 12:5.

6. Waters of Redemption

The Haftorah literally lays out the path and process of Redemption.

If we follow the Hafotrah's water trajectory, first there will be *v'hechrim*: G-d will dry up the water so that there will be a pathway through it for all the exiles to cross the water and enter the holy land. After years of exile and oppression, the people cannot suddenly enter and be submerged in a world filled with divine knowledge as the waters cover the sea. So the first thing G-d will do is clear a path for the people, so they can travel through the waters of divine knowledge without being overwhelmed.

Then, the next step, is *umala*, and the earth will be filled, submerged and covered with this divine knowledge like water covers the sea. After the exiles return and no one is left hungry, thirsty, broken, lost, forsaken, hurt, then they are ready to contain the complete flow and saturation. Put another way: first G-d will heal all the wounds, return all the exiles, then, once all are safe and secure, divine knowledge will permeate and bedeck existence.

But then we arrive to an even deeper level. Divine knowledge saturating all of existence is a *quantitative* Messianic change. The Haftorah says there will be a qualitative change as well, one we recite in every Havdalah service. *Ushavtem... And you shall draw water with joy from the fountains of the salvation.*

Ushavtem Mayim literally translates as "and you shall draw water." But Rashi quotes the Targum's translation of the two words: *Ushavtem Mayim – U'tekablan Ulpan Chadat*, "and you shall receive a new teaching."

And Rashi continues: *From the fountains of the salvation - For their heart will be dilated through the salvation that came to them, and secrets of the Torah that have been forgotten during the exile, because of the troubles, will be revealed to them.*

In addition to divine knowledge being the natural reality everywhere, saturating all of existence (like water covers the sea), we will also receive a *new* and *unprecedented* revelation and teaching, secrets unknown and forgotten will be revealed.

This is *sasson*, true joy and celebration.

How does all of this come about? How does Moshiach come? *K'sbeyefutz'u*, when the wellsprings spread outward:

When we do everything we can today to teach, disseminate and spread the wellsprings of Torah (compared to water), and especially the inner dimension of Torah – we prepare the ground to receive the watery blessings

of divine knowledge, in all three stages: 1) G-d creating a path through the water, 2) the word being saturated with these waters of divine knowledge, and 3) drawing new levels and dimensions of knowledge from the fountains of salvation.

7. Yizkor

Those of us whose parent or parents have gone their way to a higher world, will soon be saying Yizkor. In this solemn prayer we mention by name and remember our loved ones.

But Yizkor, which means to remember, is far more than memory. It is also about connecting. We connect to their souls. And how do we connect? When our loved ones were souls within bodies we were able to see and hear them, to touch and embrace them. When they are only souls without bodies, the only way to connect with them is with our own souls.

When you are more soulful, more spiritual, your soul connect with the souls of your loved ones.

The mystics compare souls without bodies to souls immersed in the divine waters. When a soul is living in a body on earth, it is like a land mammal traversing the land. When a soul leaves its body it is like a fish submerged in its spiritual waters. And like fish we cannot see these souls for they are completely covered in the divine waters of divine knowledge. They spend all their time studying and being immersed in these waters.

As we read and relive the story of water in our Haftorah, we are reminded of the soul/water connection we make with the departed souls of our loved ones. They are actually not departed. These souls have only departed the physical land realm and have entered the spiritual water realm.

And we connect with them by immersing ourselves and spreading the wellsprings outward. Thereby preparing ourselves and the world to all the three stages described in the Haftorah. And to the time when we will be reunited, also on bodies on earth, with our loved ones.

8. Conclusion: Bottled, Tap, Or Untapped?

After this watershed discussion, would you like bottled water or tap water?

Perhaps, with a healthy pour of poetic license, we could say that Torah in exile is analogous to bottled water, bottled at the source, of course, but bottled nonetheless. In exile, Torah and G-dliness are not the norm, not

the common reality, and thus have to be contained in bottles. Perhaps, they are also packaged and branded in fancy green glass bottles with French and Italian names to make it appealing to people.

Because Torah and divine knowledge are not the natural state of an exile mentality and existence, it must be marketed and sold to people for them to truly appreciate it. Torah as natural tap water no one will drink, it's too plain or boring or cheap. But Torah packaged and bottled as Pellegrino or Perrier? Now that is drinkable!

But in the near future, in the times of Moshiach, the Haftorah tells us things will be the exact opposite. Torah will be like tap water – simply open the faucet and the water will naturally flow. As a matter of fact, it's there even without turning the faucet, for knowledge of G-d is everywhere like the water covers the sea.

Water companies and restaurants want to make a few bucks so they convince their customers and patrons that bottled water is better because it's rarer and more expensive. But in reality, how could natural, pristine water get better sitting in some unnatural plastic or glass bottle. The term 'bottleneck' or 'bottled up' refers to restriction and confinement. Taking infinitely flowing water and putting in a bottle does not make it better or more precious, anymore than putting fresh air in a locked chamber makes it fresher and less stale.

But, businesses need their margins to survive. This is exile, where things must be branded, marketed, bottled and packaged to appeal to the customer.

Not so in times of Moshiach. In redemptive times, there are no customers because everyone is an owner. *No longer shall one teach his neighbor or [shall] one [teach] his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know Me from their smallest to their greatest.*⁹

No rabbi has to sell Torah, but merely teach and discuss, dialogue and celebrate together. When the entire world is filled with divine knowledge as the water covers the sea, even the bottles themselves are made of water, even the vessels are water, everything is saturated with G-dliness and knowledge.

And this is why, when the wellsprings are spread to the farthest reaches, Moshiach will come. Moshiach, by definition, is when the wellsprings of Torah and Chassidut – the knowledge of G-d – are spread across the four corners of the world.

When water is reality, then it is even higher than tap water. It is untapped water. It is infinite water, always renewing, always flowing, always one with the source, always new and innovating.

This is what we drink in our Haftorah. This is what we taste in the Moshiach Seudah.

⁹ Jeremiah 31:33.

A world where we draw water – Targum: *“learn new lessons” – with joy from the fountains of the salvation.*

Happy Passover and Chag Kosher v'Sameach!

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