

THE TROUBLE BREWING IN BEITAR

GOG AND MAGOG IS A SPIRITUAL WAR

In the Yikra D'Shabata,¹ R' Nachman of Tsherin expounds on the words of Rebbe Nachman about the time before redemption, when before prestige is returned to the ones who are truly deserving of it, they will first face tremendous persecution²: "This is the secret of the 'birth pangs of Moshiach' and the 'war of Gog and MaGog', because at that time, at the time before the coming of Moshiach when the prestige is meant to be returned completely to those of true [Torah] understanding there will be aroused tremendous machlokes against the talmidei chachamim as in our Sages teaching³ "in the generation in which the son of Dovid comes there will be persecution against talmidei chachamim, and as Rashi explains (in Kesuvot 112:b): 'many prosecutors and people looking to convict them will stand against them', and that this is the essential 'birth pangs of the Moshiach,' as Rashi's commentary on Shabbos 118 explains.

There, Rashi continues: "This is also true about the war of Gog and Magog that will then occur in earnest, with all the enemies gathering together to fight against Israel, but this will really be for the good of Israel, as the enemies will then be felled completely and forever [the essence of this war is the war against talmidei chachamim]."

According to the late Rav Eliezer Schick, the main thrust of the war of Gog and Magog will be Jewish heresy and the mockery of Tzaddikim, and specifically, against Moshiach himself⁴.

The Chofetz Chaim is also reported to have said that there will be a war so big, that even World War I and World War II will look like child's play, in comparison. But the thrust of this war will be against emuna (faith in God)⁵.

In March 2011, the Rav and his wife, Rebbetzin Tehillah, moved into an apartment on Kedushat Levi Street in the *chareidi* town of Beitar Illit, a 20-minute drive south of Jerusalem. After years of being inaccessible to many of his followers and the general public, hundreds of the Rav's followers joyfully followed him out to Beitar Illit, with many of them even renting apartments close by.

Crowds of people lined up outside the Rav's home 24/7, as the Rav gratefully stepped back into his public role. Difficult as the last 10 years had been, it was hoped that the worst was now behind the Rav and his community⁶. It was time to rebuild. It was time to renew. It was time to

¹ Written by R' Nachman of Tsherin (1824-1893), as a commentary to Likutei Moharan.

² From portion 66 of Likutei Moharan a very deep teaching that needs to be studied in depth to truly grasp it. The words of Rebbe Nachman in discussion "When it is time for prestige to be returned to the "mivinei mada" (those of Torah intellect) at the beginning there will be machlokes... When the persecuers get together [against the "mivinei mada"] they suck up all the waste very quickly this is what causes their downfall".

³ Gemara ksuvo 112b

⁴ P'ulat Hatzadik pg 507 note 200

⁵ Said over by Rav Chatzkel Levistein and brought in "Sh'al Avicha v'Yagedcha" Volume 2, page 57

⁶ The full story is told in Volume I of One in a Generation.

look forward to different and better times. Shortly after he'd left Jerusalem to go up to the North of Israel, the Rav had recorded a message for his students, where he told them:

"I want to make a new start now.... "It could well be that we will have to continue wandering. We learn in the Gemara, Tractate Rosh Hashanah that after they burned down the Beis HaMikdash the Shechinah experienced 10 different exiles... After they burned down the Beis Hamikdash, I started my exile in Jerusalem [by leaving the Old City]. Now, I'm already in my third exile.

"On Shabbos I was in Chanita, and now I am in Amirim, and I intend to continue wandering onward...we are living on wheels now...until we bring to fruition the vision that we had at the creation of Shuvu Banim, and that vision finally moves from potential to actuality, 'For My House will be called a House of Prayer, for all the nations'⁷..."

"We're now on the cusp of creating a completely new framework...Just strengthen yourselves, and pray for me, that all the different communities should be reunited, and through being unified the verse will be fulfilled: '[And it will happen at the End of Days:] The mountain of the House of Hashem will be [firmly established as] the head of the mountains and it will be exalted above the hills, [and all the nations will stream to it].'"ⁱ

In one of the discourses that Rav Berland gave over at this time, he referred to all the difficulties and hardships that the *yeshiva* had gone through in recent years.

The Rav said: *"Am Yisrael has been through so many hardships recently, but it's only so that each of us will learn some humility and not destroy our homes, and God's 'house' (i.e. the Temple) again, God forbid. Here in the yeshiva, we've also experienced such tests and difficult situations in recent years. But you should know that we had to go through all of these things, as it's the only way we could acquire for ourselves the spiritual vessels we need for the Third Temple, may it be built speedily in our days."*

While the Rav was still living in Beitar Illit, Israel was preparing for another election. Some of his students asked the Rav which of the religious parties they should vote for, Shas or Agudas Yisrael. The Rav replied, "It doesn't really matter who you vote for, either Shas or Agudas Yisrael. In terms of the [proposed law to conscript *chareidi* Jews into the Israeli army], it's already been decided in Heaven what's going to happen with that, and the elections aren't going to change anything."

No one really understood what the Rav meant, but after the elections it became crystal clear. For the first time in years, a government was formed in the Knesset that didn't include representatives from any of the religious *chareidi* parties. The law to draft *yeshiva* boys into the army was passed by this anti-religious government, and there was nothing any of the religious MKs could do to stop it.

⁷ A quote from *Isaiah* 56.

On January 22, 2013, a new government was elected in the State of Israel, which prompted, many of our Torah leaders to hint that this was yet another sign that *Am Yisrael* had reached that point in history known as the End of Days, just prior to Moshiach revealing himself.

The new government, which included the Yesh Atid party, and which for the first time didn't include any *chareidi* parties, quickly went about the business of trying to change the law that had enabled yeshiva students to receive a deferment from the Israel Army. Yesh Atid proposed that a maximum number of 1800 yeshiva students each year should be exempted from serving in the army – while the rest would face financial penalties and even prison sentences, if they failed to enlist.⁸

On March 12, 2014, the Knesset approved a new law that stated that non-exempt yeshiva students either had to enlist in the army or face imprisonment.

This laid the foundation for the next stage of the onslaught against the *chareidi* world in Israel, when the government tried to pull the plug on government funding to yeshivas. Many religious organizations had to close their doors, while others — and the families who relied on them — faced the harshest economic conditions in years.

Against this backdrop, Rav Meyer Maimoni asked Rav Berland during one of his *shiurim*, “[What does it mean that] Moshiach will only reveal himself in a generation where everyone is either worthy, or everyone is unworthy⁹?” Rav Maimoni pointed out the obvious problem with this statement, namely, that no generation is ever completely “only good” all of the time, or completely “only bad.” There will always be some *tzaddikim* even in the most evil generations, and some evildoers even in the most righteous generations.

Rav Berland explained that according to the *Asarah Maamaros*¹⁰, the true meaning of this passage is that before the coming of Moshiach, there will be a period of tremendous *birur*, or clarification and sorting out, where people will be forced to choose whether they want to go down the path of *kedushah* and holiness, or the opposite, God forbid — because they won't be able to sit on the fence anymore.

The Rav continued that it was going to be the same sort of *birur* process that had occurred many centuries earlier, when Eliyahu Hanavi had told the people of Israel: “How long are you going to continue to jump between two camps?! If the Baal is god, then follow him. And if Hashem is God, then follow Him!”

This process was connected to the continuing fight against Amalek, who ambushed all the weak souls as the Israelites were traveling through the desert. This test — of following wholeheartedly after Hashem and believing wholeheartedly in Him, even when we are beset with doubts and troubles — would be the final test before Moshiach comes.

And Rav Berland and his followers were about to find themselves smack bang in the middle of it.

⁸ <https://hamodia.com/2014/01/07/setting-record-straight/>

⁹ A famous statement from the *Gemara*, in *Maseches Sanhedrin* 98.

¹⁰ A famous Kabbalistic book written by the Rema of Pano, who lived between 1548 – 1620.

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One of the first things Rav Berland did when he moved to Beitar was begin a regular round of visits to the holy graves in the area. Night after night, he'd lead a convoy of cars to Hevron, to pray at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and sometimes, he'd also stop in at the radically Islamised town of Chalchul, where the Prophets Nathan and Gad were buried underneath the local mosque.

After the failed Oslo Accords, many Jewish holy sites had effectively been given away to the Palestinians, and barred to Jews. Both the secular government and the secular media viewed the holy Jewish graves located in the heart of Palestinian towns and villages as a massive security problem and were only too pleased to prevent Jews from visiting them. But while this view perhaps seemed "logical" from the purely secular standpoint of the Israeli government, from a spiritual and religious viewpoint it was akin to national suicide.

Before, during and also after Oslo, Rav Berland and many other religious leaders continued to stress that while the IDF chose not to protect these holy graves, the *Tzaddikim* buried in these places were actually the ones protecting the IDF and the people of Israel in general. If the secular government succeeded in making it impossible for Jews to legally visit these graves, the implications for Israel's national security would be very grave.

So Rav Berland and many others, including Rav Shalom Abergel, Rav Golan Mor, and Rav Mordechai Gross, fought hard to maintain Jewish access to these sites. Rav Berland continued to encourage his students to visit these holy sites and to visit them himself at every opportunity, eventually forcing the Israeli government into a partial compromise about allowing Jewish access to these graves.

These visits were roundly condemned in the secular press and also angered many of the leading figures in the army, intelligence agencies and Israeli government, who didn't want this Rabbi and his followers forcing their hand on security matters and dictating policy to *them*. For as long as Rav Berland had been out of action, the defense establishment didn't care so much. But now he was back, and he was encouraging hundreds of people to visit the holy graves of *Tzaddikim* like Yosef Hatzaddik, Rachel Imeinu, the Prophet Natan and many other holy sites that were officially in 'Area A', the area placed under Palestinian control.

On July 31, 2011, shortly after another fatal shooting during an unauthorized visit to Kever Yosef, Rav Berland was visited by the Head of IDF Central Command, who asked the Rav to stop his students from making any more unauthorized visits to Kever Yosef and the other Jewish holy tombs in the West Bank. Rav Berland agreed on condition that the army chief would start arranging more authorized entries to these sites.

Also in 2011, the IDF Commander of Yehuda and Shomron met with the late Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv to try to convince him to issue a statement forbidding any more unauthorized visits to Kever Yosef and other Jewish holy sites. The IDF was clearly very serious about trying to stop the unauthorized visits.

Two years' later, following a rock attack on the Rav and his followers' cars in Chalchul in 2013, the Head of the IDF in Samaria made another visit to Rav Berland, to try to persuade him to stop visiting Chalchul.

The Rav showed the army chief many of the passages in the holy books that describe how all the protection of Israel is only due to the *kivrei Tzaddikim*. He told him that all the miracles that Israel experienced in the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War were in the merit of the holy *Tzaddikim* buried in Israel.

“You are saying it's a danger to go into Chalchul, and I'm saying it's a danger not to go into Chalchul!” the Rav remonstrated. But the army chief was not impressed by the Rav's words and left.



Shortly after Rav Berland's encounter with the IDF chief — and many months still before the first slanders surfaced in the Israeli press — the Rav mentioned in one of his *shiurim* that he suspected that there were people in Israel who wanted to create a libel against him so he'd end up dying in jail.

Soon afterwards, Rav Berland left the country.

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On June 28, 2012 Rav Berland appeared at a huge rally that was held at Tel Aviv's Winter Stadium. A sell-out crowd of eight thousand people showed up at the venue, with many more thousands of people tuning in from their homes. Back then, the disastrous civil war in Syria that would go on to claim more than 560,000 lives, and destroy two million homes was only just beginning.

As well as speaking about peace and *teshuvah* the whole night, the Rav also demanded that the world should intervene to stop the bloodshed happening in Syria, where women and children

were being slaughtered daily. But Rav Berland's plea to end the violence in the Middle East was a message that did not go down so well with the defense establishment.

EXCERPT OF THE RAV'S SPEECH AT THE WINTER STADIUM, JUNE 28, 2012:

"The Talmud teaches us that we need to do acts of kindness to Arabs; it does not matter what kind of Arab! Other than a terrorist, we need to help and assist every single Arab in every way possible; with money, with encouragement, in every way possible, even to split the sea for him!

All the more so when we see the horrible massacre that is happening two hours from here [in Syria], right under our noses! And the entire world is silent! Kofi Annan says we'll take Ahmadinejad to make peace! He will stop the terrible massacre!

This past Thursday 170 children were killed, two days ago 107 children, every day they are slaughtering right under our noses, and Kofi Annan says, "We'll take Ahmadinejad!" He will make peace! He who creates all the weapons of mass destruction? He will make peace?! What have we come to?! What kind of merciless world have we come to?!

The nations of the world are silent. And we, the Israelite Nation, the Nation of Justice, the Nation of Conscience, the Nation of Fairness, the Israelite Nation is the conscience of the entire world! The entire world lifts up their eyes to the Israelite Nation, the entire world believes in the Israelite Nation, the entire world knows that the Israelite Nation will bring the redemption, only the Israelite Nation will bring the Moshiach!...

Beloved is man for he was created in God's image.¹¹ Every person is in the image of God!... Every person is composed of sparks of Godliness! God created them all! All of mankind! Seven billion people! For "Beloved is man who was created in God's image."

"When we go pray at the kever of Yosef Hatzaddik and I see Israeli soldiers standing there with M-16s, I say to them, "Are you not ashamed?! Here lies Yosef Hatzaddik! What are you afraid of?! Why are you standing here with M-16s?! I used to walk here alone when I lived in Bnei Brak, I walked here by foot! Who needs these M-16s?!..."

When we went to war with Ammon and Moav, the Navi got up and said, "Just play music! Just sing! Throw away all your instruments of war! Throw away all your weapons! Begin singing! Just sing!"

So Yehoshaphat said to them, "If you believe in the words of the Navi then you can win over all your enemies just through song and music." Because all our victories and all the wars that we won with weapons are not considered "victories!" Any war that is won with weapons is not eternal; they also have weapons, they have the atom bomb, and one day everything can turn around.

"Victory" is only what we win through the power of song and music which awakens the Jewish spark in every nation, in every gentile, in every single Arab, for there does not exist an Arab or

¹¹ Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) Chapter 3, Mishnah 14.

gentile that does not have within him a Jewish spark. We just need to arouse that spark, and then automatically there will be peace in the entire world!"

The Rav's peace and *teshuvah* rally was widely covered by the media, both in Israel and abroad, and garnered a great deal of attention in both the secular and religious press.

For many of the months that the Rav had been living in Beitar, certain individuals had been demanding large sums of money from him, and threatening to spread outrageous slanders against him if he didn't comply. The highly publicized event at the Winter Stadium gave the Rav's opponents new impetus to act. Just two and a half weeks later, the first slanderous lies began to be reported in the Israeli media.

The next stage of Rav Berland's deal to atone for the Jewish people had come due.

THE TZADDIK IS LIKE A MIRROR

The Baal Shem Tovⁱⁱ once taught that the Tzaddik is like a mirror: Whatever a person sees when he looks at the Tzaddik is simply a reflection of himself. The Tzaddik shows the person who he really is. If he comes with a negative attitude and outlook, that's what he'll see reflected back at him. And if he comes with a positive attitude and outlook, then that's what he'll see when he looks at the Tzaddik. This is one of the tests involved in coming close to the Tzaddik.

This is the reason that the people literally suspected Moshe Rabbenu of committing adultery¹².

In his writings on *parashas Korach*, the Baal Shem Tov explained why there were those amongst the Jewish people who accused Moshe of every sin committed by Bilaam the *rasha*: "Let it not be a wonder to you when you see people accusing a complete Tzaddik of the most horrible things, that he never even imagined doing. Those people are the *Erev Rav*, and are completely evil people. Many times, they accuse [the tzaddik] of things they themselves have done. But they are blinded, and can't see fault in themselves. And if they didn't do such a thing in this lifetime they certainly did it in a previous lifetime".

ⁱ *Isaiah 2:2*.

ⁱⁱ Baal Shem Tov al Hatorah Parshas Korach and Komarno Rebbe in the name of the BESHT brought in Netiv Mitzvotcha Path of Unification, 6th path, 5th passage.

¹² The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin 110 states that Moshe Rabbenu's entire generation suspected him of adultery.