



What is the Spiritual Healing Significance of the Dead Sea?

Where is the World's First Health Resort?

How I long to travel in Israel, especially to my two favorite spots, the Kineret (Sea of Galilee) and the Dead Sea – Actually, the Torah never calls this healing lake ‘Dead.’ Its name in the Torah is יַם הַמֶּלַח/Yam HaMelach – the ‘Salt Sea.’ It has supplied a wide variety of health products from balms for Egyptian mummification to minerals for various cosmetics. I know many people who soak in the mineral baths of the Dead Sea at the onset of every winter to strengthen their immune system. Salt has antiseptic properties, and the Dead Sea is eight times as salty as the ocean. The mineral baths of the Dead Sea are known from ancient times to be exceptionally healing. Yam HaMelech has attracted interest and visitors from around the Mediterranean for thousands of years. King Herod created one of the world's first health resorts (for himself) at the Dead Sea. The Egyptian Queen Cleopatra built cosmetic and pharmaceutical factories in the area. Later, the Nabateans extracted asphalt from the Dead Sea and sold it to the Egyptians, which they used to embalm their dead. (The word ‘mummy’ actually derives from the Egyptian word for asphalt). Today, the Salt Sea has become a top destination for those seeking healing and peace of mind. It is a restorative therapeutic place for people from all over the planet. Besides the fun swimming, the same minerals that make this lake deadly for fish, make it a doctor-recommended treatment for people. The salt draws toxins from the body. The bromine relaxes the nervous system, and the magnesium is good for the skin. At the Dead Sea, I often chance upon groups of Danes suffering from psoriasis and various other skin disorders. The Danish health insurance subsidizes healing treatments for them at the Dead Sea! Swimming in the Dead Sea or covering oneself with its mud may heal psoriasis, arthritis, rheumatism, eczema, and fungal infections. The air also contributes to a feeling of well-being. The extremely low altitude creates a high concentration of oxygen (the opposite of thin mountain air). The high atmospheric pressure of the Salt Sea area blocks ultraviolet rays, making playtime there even more carefree. It is almost impossible to get sunburned at the Dead Sea. I wonder about the deep secrets of this mysterious lake – the lowest land elevation on Earth – 417.5 m (1369 ft) below sea level. How did the so-called ‘Dead Sea,’ become transformed into one of the greatest life-giving health resort areas in the world?

From Fertile Plain to a Barren, Salt-encrusted Desert

In *Parashat Lech Lecha*, the Dead Sea is called both the ‘Salt Sea’ (*Bereishit* 14:3) and עֶמֶק הַשִּׁדִּים/Emek HaSidim – ‘Vale of the Fields’ (ibid. 3, 8, 10). Before the destruction of Sodom, the parched desert, which now houses the Dead Sea, was once a fertile plain, through which the Jordan River flowed, periodically flooding the entire plain, and creating a lush land. Therefore, Lot chose to move there (*Bereishit* 13:10). He had his eye on this fertile land, which was watered by the natural irrigation of the Jordan River. When Avraham and Lot were standing on the height near Beit-El, they could gaze down onto the fruitful and blooming Jordan valley. It was indeed like the Garden of Eden, or like the rich land of Egypt they had just left.

ספר בראשית פרק יג פסוק י' וַיֵּשֶׁא לוֹט אֶת עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת כָּל כְּנָר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כָלָה מִשְׁקָהּ לִפְנֵי שְׁחַת הַשָּׁם אֶת סֹדֹם וְאֶת עֲמֹרָה כִּגְן הַשָּׁם כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶמְכָּה צֶעֱרָ: יא) וַיִּבְחַר לוֹ לוֹט אֶת כָּל כְּנָר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיֵּסַע לוֹט מִקְדָּם וַיִּפְרְדוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אֶחָיו: יב) אַבְרָם יָשָׁב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְלוֹט יָשָׁב בְּעֵרֵי הַכְּנָר וַיֵּאָהֵל עַד סֹדֹם:

“Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw all the district of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Eternal destroyed Sodom and Gemorrah, even as the Garden of the Eternal, like the land of Egypt, as you come unto Zoar” (*Bereishit* 13:10).

This plain was similar to both Egypt, watered by the Nile and the Garden of Eden, which was also naturally irrigated by four rivers (*Bereishit* 2:10); (Ramban, *Bereishit* 13:10). Yet, the people of Sodom were irredeemably evil. Avraham’s prayers on their behalf were ineffective, and “G-d overturned these cities, and the entire plain.” Thus, the Dead Sea is subsequently described as “full of slime pits,” where the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah got stuck (*Bereishit* 14:10).

Emunah from the Slime

Parashat Lech Lecha describes the very First World War ever, which took place at the Dead Sea, also called עֵמֶק הַשִּׁדִּים / *Emek Hasiddim* (*Bereishit* 14:3). Nimrod, who wanted to get back at Avraham for surviving the burning furnace (Targum Yonatan, *Bereishit* 14:1), mobilized the Four Evil Superpowers against the Five Kings at the Vale of Siddim (*Bereishit* 14:8). Among the Five Kings, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled and fell into the slime pits in the Vale of Siddim (*Bereishit* 14:10). Thereafter, the Four Evil Superpowers took Lot captive in order to drag Avraham into the war (ibid. 12). The evil kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were stuck in the mud of the Dead Sea, because they were engrossed in the muddy material of desires. As a *midah c’neged midah* – measure for measure, they were punished through the muddy material of the slimy pits. These kings also descended from the builders of the Tower of Babylon, who used clay as building material (*Agra d’Kala* 380a,10). There were many pits [at the Dead Sea]. The clay was very sticky, so it was only by a miracle that the king of Sodom alone emerged from the slime pits (*Bereishit* 14:17). Hashem performed this miracle to teach *emunah* to those who did not believe that Avraham had been delivered from Ur-Kashdim – the fiery furnace. As soon as the King of Sodom escaped from the slime in Avraham’s merit, they corrected their past disbelief (Rashi, ibid. 10). So, from the impure slime of the Vale of Siddim, *emunah* in Hashem is confirmed.

The Secret Salt Sea Connection

The first time the Dead Sea is mentioned in the Torah is when describing how the Five Kings became connected together in this place. “All these became allies in the Vale of Siddim – this is the Salt Sea” (*Bereishit* 14:3). They used to be enemies, but they made peace between them at the Vale of Siddim, because from there they made plaster for building. It is only after the destruction of Sodom that it turned into a lake, which today is called the Dead Sea (Malbim). The double nature of the Dead Sea is, furthermore, highlighted by the fact that the very same place where these kingdoms made peace turned into a battlefield (Abarbanel). It is known that מַלְכוּת / *Malchut* – Kingdom is called יָד וָשֵׁם / *Yad VaShem* – a Hand and a Name (*Yesha’yahu* 55:5). עֵמֶק הַשִּׁדִּים / *Emek HaSiddim* – The Vale of the Fields corresponds to the *klipah* (impure husk) of Kingdom. Within this word are the letters of יָד וָשֵׁם / *Yad Shem* (*Agra d’Kalah*). We always eat our bread with salt because Kingdom is called *Yam HaMelach* (the Salt Sea). Salt has rectifying qualities. Without salt, many foods would be inedible. It is interesting to note that both לֶחֶם / *lechem* – bread and מֶלַח / *melach* – salt consist of the same letters, which have the numerical value of 78, exactly three times 26, the numerical value of Hashem’s four-lettered name (Arizal, *Sefer Halikutim*, *Tehillim* 36).

The Redeeming Qualities of the Muddy Slime

Salt is associated with suffering. Just as salt is used to preserve meat, the purpose of suffering is to attain a good final goal – the conquest of evil, by extracting the good sparks. Even within the negative muddy, unholy impurity, there is the redeeming quality of the challenge that slime, and darkness poses to activate the hidden holiness. This is why the *yetzar hara* (evil impulse) is called “very good” (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 9:7). The word ‘*sid*’ (from *Emek HaSiddim*) can also mean

plaster, which is necessary for building and strengthening a home (Rav Tzaddok of Lublin, *Kometz HaMincha* 2:36). After redeeming the sparks and conquering the boundaries of evil, Israel merits the boundaries of the Salt Sea. For the Dead Sea is described in the Bible numerous times as forming a boundary of the land of Israel (see *Bamidbar* 34:3,12, *Yehoshua* 15:2, 5, 18:19). The boundary of the Sea corresponds to the upper world, and salt symbolizes perseverance (*Noam Elimelech*).

Transforming the Mud

Even when we are sunk in the material, we can find Hashem hidden within it. This is the meaning of *חֶמֶר בְּאֵרוֹת בְּאֵרוֹת חֶמֶר* / *v'Emek HaSidim be'erot be'erot chemar* – “the Vale of the Fields were pits and pits of muddy clay” (*Bereishit* 14:10). Avraham, our Father, was able to enlighten even the muddy material. This is why it follows, that the Vale of the Fields became “the Vale of *Shaveh* (Straight/equal) – it is the King’s Vale” (*ibid* 17). This was the special transformative work of our Fathers (*Imrei Emet*). It is also possible that the repetition of the word ‘pit’ comes to teach us that there are pits into which one sinks perpetually. Yet, there are other kinds of pits from which it is possible to rise by using its slime to build (*Siftei Tzedek*). The word used for pits in this context is *בְּאֵרוֹת* / *be'erot*, which also can mean wells. (It is the latter meaning which I intended when naming my Midrasha). Perhaps, the word ‘*be'erot*’ is mentioned twice to allude to the fact that the pits can have two opposing qualities. Once the *be'er* is completely transformed and all the sinking slime becomes purposeful, then the Dead Sea will be healed and once again become one of the most fruitful places in the world. Already in our time, people have begun to make the slime and mud of the Dead Sea purposeful.

Healing and Sweetening the Waters of the Dead Sea Reflects the Final Redemption

The Dead Sea is a meeting place between good and evil – the place of transformation from fertile fields (*Emek HaSiddim*) to a barren deadly place of void. However, the prophet testifies that this most barren land will one day be completely healed and most fertile of all:

ספר יחזקאל פרק מז ... וְנִרְפְּאוּ {וְנִרְפְּאוּ} הַמַּיִם: וְהָיָה כָּל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׂרָץ אֶל כָּל אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא שָׁם נְחָלִים: יַחֲיֶה וְהָיָה הַדָּגָה רַבָּה מְאֹד כִּי בָּאוּ שָׁמָּה הַמַּיִם הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּרְפְּאוּ וְחַי כָּל אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא שָׁמָּה הַנָּחַל: וְהָיָה וְעָמְדוּ {וְעָמְדוּ} עָלָיו דְּוָגִים מֵעֵין גְּדִי וְעַד עֵין עֲגָלִים מִשְׁטוֹחַ לַחֲרָמִים יִהְיוּ לְמִינֵהוּ תַּהֲיֶה דְגָתָם כְּדָגַת הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל רַבָּה מְאֹד: בְּצִאֲתוֹ {בְּצִאֲתוֹ} וַיִּגְבְּאוּ וְלֹא יִרְפְּאוּ לְמִלַּח נִתְּנוּ: וְעַל הַנָּחַל יַעֲלֶה עַל שָׁפְתוֹ מֶזְהָ וּמֶזְהָ כָּל עֵץ מֵאֲכָל לֹא יָבוֹל עָלָיו וְלֹא יִתֵּם פְּרִי לַחֲדָשִׁיו יִבְכֶּר כִּי מִיָּמֹיו מִן הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הֵמָּה יוֹצְאִים וְהָיוּ {וְהָיָה} פְּרִי לְמֵאֲכָל וְעֵלָיו לְתִרְוָה:

...The waters shall be healed. 9. Every living creature that swarms will be able to live wherever this stream goes. The fish will be very abundant once these waters have reached there. Everything will be healed and live wherever this stream goes. 10. Fishermen shall stand beside it all the way from Ein Gedi to Ein Eglayim; it shall be a place for drying nets; and the fish will be of various kinds and most plentiful like the fish of the Great Sea. 11. Yet, its swamps and marshes shall not be healed; they will serve to supply salt. 12. All kinds of trees for food will grow on both banks of the stream. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail; they will yield new fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the Temple. Their fruit will serve for food, and their leaves for healing” (*Yechezkiel* 47:8-12).

Water symbolizes pleasure. There are both physical and spiritual pleasures represented respectively by the ‘Lower Waters’ and the ‘Upper Waters.’ When the ‘Lower Waters’ were separated from the ‘Upper Waters’ during the Second day of Creation, they wept bitterly. These bitter tears became the saltiest of waters – the waters of the Dead Sea. Ultimately, it is our purpose in this world to sweeten and heal the ‘Lower Waters,’ through converting this lowly realm of earthly mundane pleasures into a dwelling place for Hashem. When we complete this mission, we

will reach the final *Geulah* (redemption). Then there will no longer be a dichotomy between the 'Upper' and 'Lower' Waters. Physical and spiritual pleasures will merge. All the evil kingdoms will be overcome, and humanity will rise to a higher level of spiritual sensitivity, which incorporates physical reality. This is the final rectification for eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which caused the original split between Good and Evil. The healing and sweetening of the salty waters of the Dead Sea has recently begun. [Samantha Siegel](#), a Jewish woman living in Jerusalem, discovered freshwater ponds with fish on the shores of the Dead Sea. We are fortunate to live on the cusp of redemption, experiencing how the prophecies are being fulfilled.