

MARCH 29, 2010

Pesach

Out of the Ashes (Shabbat Chol Hamoed)

Bik'ah...mlei'ah atzamot – “A valley...full of bones” (Ezekiel 37:1)

On Shabbat Chol Hamoed we read of Ezekiel's strange tale of a prophecy in which he seems to return a pile of bones to life. While rabbis in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 92b) understood the story figuratively, they debated whether the tale was literal as well. Rabbi Eliezer and others believed that Ezekiel literally revived the bones, however, Rabbi Yehudah argued that, “in truth (*emet*), it was a parable (*meshal*).” The very next opinion in the Talmud questions Rabbi Yehudah's choice of words: “If it was a parable why is it truth and if it is truth why call it a parable?” Our own experience watching the birth of the state of Israel provides a powerful answer. Rabbi Yehudah did not believe that Ezekiel actually revived the bones. However, his refusal to accept the details of the parable at face value did not diminish his faith that the allegory conveyed an eternal truth—that the nation of Israel would one day rise “from the dead” and return to its homeland.

In modern times we have witnessed the actualization of Rabbi Yehudah's interpretation of Ezekiel's vision. Following the destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust, the Jewish nation has risen from the ashes and built a miraculous country in our ancient homeland. Now, it is our responsibility to safeguard the Jewish state.

Today, more than 60 years after the birth of Israel, it has become easy to take the existence of the State for granted. However, even with Israel's strong economy and capable defense forces, the survival of the Jewish state is not a given. As American Jews there is much we can do to help ensure that Israel will continue to be a vibrant Jewish state for our children and our grandchildren. This means that we must all do what we can to support Israel. It is imperative that we develop relationships with our elected officials and become the people that our members of Congress depend on for information about the Jewish state. We must actively get involved in political campaigns, donate to the candidates of our choice, lobby our elected officials, invite them to speak in our synagogue and make sure they understand the necessity of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship. For more on how you can help support the U.S.-Israel relationship, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

Israel's birth and continued growth attest to the truth of Ezekiel's fantastic prophecy. Now, the parable has been transformed into reality as the ashes of Israel rose up from the Holocaust to build a miraculous country—one which we bear the burden of keeping safe. ■

Jerusalem—Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (Shabbat Chol Hamoed)

Na'avah k'Yerushalayim – “Beautiful like Jerusalem” (Song of Songs 6:4)

The anonymous male lover, describing the powerful beauty of his beloved in the Song of Songs, declares that she is “Comely as Jerusalem” (6:4). Why does he compare her to Jerusalem? Amos Chacham, in the Da'at Mikra commentary (p 53), explains that Jerusalem served as the capital of Judea and was therefore known throughout the region. How was the city comely? The commentary Metzudat David (on 6:4) notes that Jerusalem was known for its

orderly manner and leadership (despite its great size). Thus, the lover derives the praise for his beloved's beauty from his appreciation for the significance and importance of Jerusalem.

Our traditional reading of Song of Songs on Chol Hamoed Pesach reinforces our historic connection to Jerusalem and reminds us of the significant role the city played in Jewish life. Today, Jerusalem continues to play a vital role in Jewish life, serving as the undivided capital of the state of Israel.

For more than three millennia Jerusalem has played a central role in the lives of Jews throughout the world, first being named by King David as Israel's capital in 1,000 B.C.E. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu summed-up the relationship between Jerusalem and the Jewish people in a recent speech. Speaking about a signet ring that was loaned to him by Israel's Department of Antiquities, Netanyahu said: "This ring was found next to the Western wall, but it dates back 2,800 years ago, 200 years after King David declared Jerusalem as our people's capital. This ring is a seal of a Jewish official, and his name is inscribed on it in Hebrew. The name is: Netanyahu. Netanyahu Ben-Yoash. That's my last name...The connection between the Jewish people and Jerusalem cannot be denied... Jerusalem is not a settlement. It's our capital." Indeed, throughout the ages, and throughout the world, our people recognize Jerusalem as first in our thoughts. With more than 800 mentions of Jerusalem in the bible, and literally thousands of references to the city throughout more than 2,000 years of rabbinic literature, the city has played, and continues to play, a critical role in our people's heritage and future. For more on Jerusalem, click [here](#).

From ancient times, when Jerusalem was mentioned in the Song of Songs, to today, the city has been a special home to the Jewish people. Put simply, Jerusalem is Israel's capital—yesterday, today and tomorrow. ■

Fearing the End (Seventh Day of Pesach)

Hamibli ein kevarim b'Mitzrayim – "Because there were no graves in Egypt..." (Exodus 14:11)

As the panic-stricken Israelites watched the Egyptian army bear down on them, they complained to Moses: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness?" Taken at face value their complaint defies logic. By their own statement they considered remaining in Egypt a death sentence. Why then did they complain about dying in the desert? S'forno's remarks on the verse provide a deep insight into human nature. Commenting on their fear of dying in the desert (14:11), S'forno explains that the Israelites real concern was dying "of starvation, in nakedness, completely destitute." Thus, the Israelites did not worry about death, because death was a given. Rather, they quite naturally worried about the end of life, and the suffering they would endure.

This natural fear of death continues to trouble people today. Recognizing this universal human frailty, a doctor in Israel has been working to bring calming end-of-life care to Bedouins living in the Negev desert.

Late last year Dr. Yoram Singer—Medical Director of the Home Palliative Care Unit of the Clalit Health Services health fund, and chairman of the Israeli Association of Palliative Care—received an award from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in recognition for his twice-weekly house calls to Bedouin villages. Described at the award ceremony as "an angel of mercy," Singer oversees homecare hospices in Kiryat Gat and in Rahat, the largest Bedouin city in Israel. "I think an important part of being an adult is helping the helpless, trying to do something in places where there is nothing," Singer told the website Israel21c.com. "The sadness of departing, the fear—not really of death, but of what's going to happen on the way—and an urge to close circles, to say goodbye and to forgive. All these are quite universal. And if we could concentrate on our commonalities more than our differences, we would be much better off."

The Israelites' complaints to Moses highlighted their humanity and the universal anxiety that people feel when contemplating the end of life. Thanks to doctors like Yoram Singer, Jews and Arabs living in the Negev can feel just a little bit better in the face of the unknown. ■