

APRIL 10, 2017

## Shabbat Chol Hamoed and Second Days

### From Despair to Hope – Shabbat Chol Hamoed

**Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost (Ezekiel 37:10) יבשו עצמותנו ואבדה תקותנו (מלאכי ג:כג)**

During his address to the recent AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington, Vice President Mike Pence described a visit he and his family made to the Dachau concentration camp. They were joined by Abdi Noor, a 93-year-old Holocaust survivor who had been imprisoned in Dachau as a 17-year-old boy. Pence said, “Abdi described to me the hellish life he endured toiling away as a slave. All those around him were taken away one-by-one never to return and then he stopped, looked up at me with tears in his eyes, and said words that I’ll never forget. He said, ‘Then the Americans came.’ I was so proud. Those words underscored the imperative of American strength and they powerfully remind us of the immutable bond between our people and the people of Israel.”

On Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pesach, the Haftarah recalls one of the most famous sections in the Book of Ezekiel—the vision of the dry bones. In this passage, the prophet is instructed to descend to a valley of dry bones and foretell of a resurrection of those who had perished. Ezekiel does as instructed, “And the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet” (37:10). While many allegorical stories appear in the books of the prophets, rarely is the allegory interpreted explicitly. The text continues, “Then He said unto me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say: Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off. Therefore prophesy, and say to them: Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.’”

Writing about this famous Haftarah, Tamar Granot (See *Maftirin B’Navi*, p. 324), who served for many years as National Head of Psychological Services in the Department of Rehabilitation at Israel’s Ministry of Defense remembers, “My grandfather, Rabbi Zvi Greenstein (of blessed memory) would often say, ‘I am from the dry bones that Ezekiel resurrected.’ To whom do the words of the prophet refer? Perhaps they address someone who emerged from Auschwitz-Birkenau where s/he lost a spouse, child or entire family? Or maybe they speak to someone who survived other unthinkable atrocities and then ‘resurrected’ their spirit and arrived to the land of Israel.” Today, for many those individuals—and for some Israel itself—represents the greatest possible response to the words of Ezekiel, and represents the fact that all hope is not lost. Jews around the world affirm this by singing Israel’s national anthem “Hatikvah”—“the hope.” As a testament to the connection between this chilling passage and the modern state of Israel, artist Benno Elkin [carved an image of the resurrection of the dry bones](#) as the base of the famous menorah that stands at the entrance to the Knesset in Jerusalem. In addition, the prophecy reminds us that the birth of the state of Israel is no less than a miracle, which symbolizes a nation and a people that appeared to have been “left for dead” by the world, but now thrives as a leader for the world in military expertise, science, technology and security.

In a few weeks, Bronia Brandman, 86, who was born in Jaworzno, Poland, and who watched two of her sisters being sent to the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau, will return for the first time since her liberation to the death camp, [JNI Media reports](#). This time, she and forty other visitors will be accompanied by officers and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces. The entire delegation will then fly on an Israeli Air Force transport jet from Poland to Israel, where they will visit IDF bases, commemorate Yom HaZikaron (Israel’s Memorial Day), and celebrate Israel’s 69th Day of Independence. “I never wished to return to that place of our degradation and annihilation, but to return in the company of our noblest, bravest of the brave—our IDF soldiers—makes my spirit soar with pride and hope.” This is the

message of Ezekiel, which we continue to witness today, and which continues to inspire us to do our part to ensure Israel's continued growth, success and security. ■

## Bent on Hatred and Destruction – Last Days of Pesach

**I will draw my sword (Exodus 15:9)**

**אריק חרבי (שמות טו:ט)**

Three years ago, Ayla Shapira, suffered burns all over her face and arms when a Palestinian teen threw a Molotov cocktail at the car she was in. Last month, Ayla, now fourteen years old, [journeyed to Brussels to speak before the European Parliament](#) about how European aid is being used by the Palestinian Authority. “The most worthwhile profession in the PA is to murder a Jew,” she told the members of Parliament. “The [terrorist] who threw the Molotov cocktail (that hit my car) was a 16-year-old boy who wanted to ensure his family's livelihood.” Ayla is shockingly correct: A teacher in the Palestinian Authority makes NIS 900 (\$250) a month; a laborer makes NIS 1,500 (\$415) a month and a Palestinian who murdered a Jew and served 30 or more years in prison receives a monthly salary of NIS 12,000 (\$3,300) from the PA—a pension similar to that of a major general in the military for the rest of his life.

As we read the story of the splitting of the Red Sea and the miraculous salvation of the Israelites, let's consider Pharaoh's state of mind. As the ruler of Egypt led the Egyptian cavalry towards the Jewish nation camped at the banks of the sea, what was his intent? Had he been allowed to reach the Jews, what would he have done? That question is the subject of a debate between the commentators Rashi and Abraham Ibn Ezra about how to translate a challenging word in the text. During the Song of the Sea, we read, “The enemy said: ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword...*torishemu yadi*.’” Rashi explains that the word *torishemu* is “an expression of poverty and need.” Thus, in the song the Egyptians say, “I will draw my sword, my hand shall impoverish them.” In other words, according to Rashi, Pharaoh intended to use the power of his military to recover the wealth and riches that the Jews had taken from Egypt on the night of Passover. Ibn Ezra disagrees with Rashi, explaining that the word *torishemu* means “to destroy”. Pharaoh didn't care about the money. He intended to use his military to exterminate the Jewish nation. This seemingly abstract linguistic dispute raises a much larger ideological question: What motivation drove the Egyptians to attack? Were they motivated by logic? By a reasonable and understandable desire to recover lost wealth? Or, were the Egyptians motivated by rage, hatred and a desire for revenge, bent on senselessly and viciously murdering millions of people? It's actually not just an old question; it's a very modern one as well, one that Israel must deal with each and every day.

In its ongoing dispute with the Palestinians, Israel has repeatedly made overtures, and significant concessions in order to reach a peaceful resolution. In fact, The Times of Israel [reported](#) that that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is preparing “a raft of goodwill gestures for the Palestinians following a request from U.S. President Donald Trump” in order to bring the PA back to the negotiating table. While Jordan and Egypt have reached peace agreement with Israel, the Palestinians have not only refused to enter in serious negotiations, but instead glorify the values of terrorism and the murder of Jews. While Hamas is now in the process of [amending its charter](#) and is, “seeking to improve its international standing by removing the most blatant anti-Semitic material from its 1988 charter,” it openly admits that it will never accept Israel's right to exist and its ultimate goal of destroying the Jewish State. What about the Palestinian Authority? Is it driven by a desire to reach a fair and amenable agreement with Israel, or is it motivated by something more sinister? It is often hard to tell. The United States should continue to clearly communicate to the Palestinians that if they want to show the world that they truly are interested in lasting peace with the state of Israel, they must halt their campaign of violence and financial support for terror. ■

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