

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara
by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler
Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

OD LO AVDA TIKVATEINU!

Shabbat Chol HaMo'ed Pesach
- 14 p'sukim • Yechezkel 37:1-14

Our haftara tells of the well-known vision of the dry bones that Hashem revealed to the navi Yechezkel. After gazing upon this frightening sight, the prophet was asked by G-d: HATICHYENA HA'ATZAMOT HA'ELA? "Can these dry bones [ever] come to life?" It is a question that, undoubtedly, was repeated for generations by many Jews in numerous lands.

Our ancient scholars established that this prophetic vision be read on Chol HaMoed Pesach - yet, strangely, it does not mention Pesach at all. It is, indeed, a curious choice. After all, the selection from Sefer Yehoshua that we read on the first day of the Chag, tells of the very first Korban Pesach that was offered in Eretz Yisrael, and, is, therefore a fitting selection for the first day. Likewise, David's song of praise from Sefer Shmuel Bet which is read on the seventh day, is also an understandable choice, as it echoes Israel's song of praise at Kriyat Yam

Suf, that was sung on the seventh day. But why do we read Yechezkel's vision of dry bones on Shabbat Chol Hamo'ed Pesach?

A logical question... With a logical answer.

Z'MAN CHEIRUTEINU, our "Festival of Freedom" was never meant to be a simple "reminiscence" of the Exodus from Egypt alone. It was not to be limited to our past redemption. Z'MAN CHEIRUTEINU is better understood as the "Season of Freedom" and as such, our dream for a future redemption is part of the theme and the observances of Pesach. It is with this understanding that we turn to the haftara for Shabbat Chol HaMo'ed Pesach.

The well-known prophecy found in the 37th perek of Sefer Yechezkel, captured the imagination of the early Zionists who saw the prophetic words as a message of renewal and rebirth; it reflected their view of the return of the Jewish nation to its homeland, as they labored to reawaken its lifeless agriculture and revive its ancient practices.

Indeed, they believed that the dry bones would yet come back to life!

A wonderful Israeli congregant of mine who was brought up in a secular home and educated in a secular school, told me that, in the early years following Independence, all the

students in their public schools were expected to memorize this vision of Yechezkel (which he repeated to me!). And why not? It was the dream of the future redemption, a dream they hoped to realize through their efforts. And, seeing the once-arid land give forth her fruit and the once-barren country repopulated with her children, why should they not recognize Yechezkel's vision as coming true?

HaRav Amnon Bazak points out that Hashem's revival of the dry bones followed a specific progression: First, the bones will be brought together and connect to one another. Second, sinew and flesh would come up. Third, skin would be drawn over them and, finally, RU'ACH - breath and spirit would be blown into them and bring them to life. There would be separate phases to bringing life to the bones. The first three phases would focus on the physical structure of the dry bones and only after that, would Hashem grant them life by providing them with "breath", i.e., spirit.

Rav Bazak contends that those who grieved over the Churban, and suffered in the GOLUS had little hope of ever seeing the rebirth of a devastated community. Hashem expresses their feelings in our haftara: ...HINEI OMRIM... 'AVDA TIKVATEINU' -"they [the exiled] proclaim 'our hope is lost.'" Clearly the purpose of the vision to

Yechezkel was to encourage this lost community that there would yet be a rebirth, that there would be another redemption; and that the dry bones would come back to life.

And this is, therefore, part of the message of Pesach. It is not enough to celebrate the PAST redemption from Egypt, for one must also celebrate - and affirm - their belief in the FUTURE redemption. It is essential for our generation to see Pesach as the time to recognize the current - miraculous - GE'ULA - one that we experience daily.

It is not surprising that today millions of voices declare with assurance what past generations could not:

OD LO AVDA TIKVATEINU! ★