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### THE BONES ARE NEVER DRY

**L**IFE MEANS GROWTH, MOVEMENT, HOPE. THE READING FOR THE HAFTORAH this Shabbat presents the idea that, in spiritual terms, life is never extinct. This can be seen as continuing the theme of the Exodus, with which Pesach began, and reaching towards the ultimate liberation.

The well-known prophetic parable by Ezekiel<sup>1</sup> which is chanted after the reading from the Torah Scroll describes a valley of dry bones. Parched and lifeless, they represent the state of inert hopelessness of the Jewish people in exile in Babylon (Iraq). The prophet gazes at the sight of the bones in the hot shimmering valley. They suggest total spiritual extinction.

Then G-d tells the prophet to speak to the bones, to transmit a prophecy to them. He tells them that G-d Himself will bring them back to life, breathing spirit into them, and making sinews, flesh and skin grow upon them. The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that the prophet is told to speak to them despite their apparently lifeless state<sup>2</sup>. From the point of view of the Jewish prophet and his Divine vision, life is always there. The bones are never so dry that life cannot be rejuvenated.

Then indeed, suddenly, the bones began to come to life. They joined together, were transformed into healthy human figures and then

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stood up as a vast army. This image became a message that Ezekiel transmitted to the Jewish people: they will come back to life and will be redeemed from exile. They will return to the Land of Israel.

This image concerns both the way we see ourselves, and the way we see others. “Hopeless!” can express the way a teacher sees a pupil, a person sees a human situation, or even the way we view ourselves.

During Pesach, the festival of national, spiritual and personal liberation, we hear a different message. The bones are never so dry that they cannot come back to life, the individual and also the Jewish people as a whole can always be rejuvenated in practical and spiritual terms. With this perspective our approach to history and to life is itself transformed.

Yes, there are processes of secularization and assimilation. Yes, there are trauma in the personal lives of many individual men and women. Yes, people can make tragic mistakes. But that does not mean that they or we have reached the end, sunk in a forgotten valley as parched white bones. We might look like that. But the breath of life is there, waiting to be revealed.

The prophet in this case means not only Ezekiel in a white robe but each one of us. When we look at the person (who might be our own self) with hope and confidence, expressing our ‘prophecy’, the teaching of transformation and rejuvenation, there is a response. The bones are indeed waiting to stir, regroup and to come back to full life.

This Shabbat reading leads on to the final days of Pesach, with the miraculous splitting of the Sea in the Torah reading<sup>3</sup> on the seventh day (Monday), and, in the Haftarah<sup>4</sup> of the last day of Pesach, the beautiful promise of the Messiah. With that step into the future the teaching of the always living bones will ultimately be fulfilled.

1. Ezekiel ch.37. 2. See *Hitva'aduyot*, Parshat Acharei, 5746, sec.30. 3. Exodus 13:17-22, 14:1-15:26. 4. Isaiah 10:32-12:6 (said only outside the Land of Israel).

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### *SHABBAT IN PESACH*

#### **OVERCOMING THE INNER PHARAOH**

“NO MORE PEOPLE!” Grabbing the bat, Rachel shouted so that the whole park could hear. When there were too many people playing it was always a pain, and this Pesach Intermediate Days outing was no exception.

As she was moving to get into position ready to play, Leah noticed two girls who were looking very dejected. Only moments ago they had been eager to join the game, but now they had been turned away, and they seemed unhappy and alone. Knowing how it felt to be excluded, Leah felt bad for these two and knew that she should say something. But it was almost as if there were some sort of invisible force causing a blockage between knowing what she should do and actually doing it. So, shoving the thought out of her mind, Leah ran to take up her position as bowler.

Suddenly, as she faced Rachel who was ready to bat, Leah remembered what her father had said at the Seder table only two nights ago.

“In Hebrew the word for ‘neck’ – ‘oref’ is made up of the same letters as ‘Pharaoh.’ The neck is the part of the person which separates the head from the rest of the body.

When someone knows in their head what they should do, but can't bring themselves to actually do it – that's the inner 'Pharaoh' blocking them. Pesach was the time when the Jews fought against Pharaoh and won. So, there is an extra power in the days of Pesach to break the hold that our Pharaoh has over us – making it easier for us to rise to the challenge of doing what we know is right."

"LEAH!!! THROW THE BALL!!" The shouts from her team brought Leah back to earth. But now she knew what she had to do, and she knew she had the strength to do it.

"One second everyone!" Mustering all her courage, Leah faced the crowd, "I really don't think that it is right that not everyone is allowed to play. We've all come to the park to have fun, but two girls are stuck sitting on the side because of some stupid rule that we don't like having too many people play." There, she'd said it. She'd taken a step and done the action. Hopefully it won't backfire, she thought, but at least I've tried fighting my Pharaoh and not letting it rule me.

Amidst the crowd, slowly heads nodded in agreement. Turning towards the side where the two girls were huddled together, Leah called "Hey! You wanna join? Would be way better with more people on the teams."

Within seconds everyone was playing together, enjoying the fresh spring air. And as she threw the ball to the next girl in line, Leah rubbed her neck discretely, happy that she had managed to beat her inner Pharaoh this time.

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