

KOL MEVASSER

Thanking God: Reflections on a Sephardic Haggadah

Rabbi Daniel Bouskila, SEC Director

A few nights ago, as the Maggid portion of our Seder came to a close, we declared with great faith:

Therefore we are obligated to thank, acclaim, laud, exalt, bless and applaud the One who has performed all these miracles for our ancestors & for us.

We then recited the first two Psalms of *Hallel* (Psalms 113-114), and -- after dinner -- we sang the rest of *Hallel*, as well as the traditional (and fun!) songs that all give praise and thanks to God. The educational goal of the Seder is to teach our children the story, values and lessons of the Exodus from Egypt...but the spiritual goal is for all of us to give thanks to God for taking us out of Egypt.

The above text says that we must give thanks for the miracles that God performed "for our ancestors, **and for us.**" During my family's Seder the other night, we asked what the Haggadah might mean by including the words "and for us." We understand what "for our ancestors" means, but why do we add "and for us"?

In seeking answers to this question, we were enlightened by a commentary read to us by my son Ilan. He read it from a beautiful Haggadah that he received as a Bar Mitzvah gift. Titled "*The Sephardic Heritage Haggadah*" (by Artscroll/Mesorah Publications), the commentary is by Rabbis Eli Mansour and David Sutton (both Sephardic rabbis in New York). In addition to including the explanations of many great Sephardic rabbis and sages - the editors at times insert their own insights.

Their comments on this issue actually appear at the outset of the Seder, when we say "*Had not the Holy*

One, Blessed be He, not taken our ancestors out from Egypt, then we, our children, and our children's children would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." Commenting on the Jewish tendency to decentralize God's role in our successes (often seeking assurances from elsewhere) Rabbis Mansour and Sutton write:

*This false illusion of alternative sources of success has plagued us throughout our history. As a community we believe in God, but we rely on governments and various stratagems to bring Jewish salvation. At the time of the Balfour Declaration, many Jews thought that their problems would be solved by the mighty British Empire. However, they were soon disappointed when the British first tilted away from the Jews, and then - just when the danger to Europe's Jews was becoming undeniable - they drastically limited and then virtually halted Jewish immigration to Eretz Yisrael. Later, Jews fantasized that the international community of nations, embodied in the United Nations, would be the source of Jewish salvation, and their hopes were dashed yet again. Again and again, Jews have relied on the nations of the world to be their savior, only to be disillusioned. **By personally redeeming us from Egypt, God set the tone so that we might realize that only God is our real savior.***

These powerful words ring true as we read the *Haftarah* (prophetic portion) this coming Shabbat, just one week before *Yom Hashoah* (Holocaust Memorial Day) and *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Israel's Independence Day). Known as the "**Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones,**" this *Haftarah* (from the Book of Ezekiel, Chapter 37) is always read on the Shabbat of *Hol Hamoed Pesach*, and its powerful content - especially in light of the comments by Rabbis Mansour and Sutton - take upon a new significance

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KJ Schedule

Erev Shabbat Pesah / Fourth Day Friday, March 29th

Shaharit	6:30 am
Shir Hashirim	6:40 pm
Candle Lighting.....	6:54 pm
Minha & Arbit	6:54 pm
Sefirat Ha'Omer Fourth Night	

Shabbat Pesah /Passover Fifth Day Saturday, March 30th

Shaharit	8:30 am
Class with Rabbi Batzri	5:30 pm
Minha/Arbit, Seuda Shlisheet, Hallel	6:00 pm
Shabbat Havdallah	7:42 pm
Sefirat Ha'Omer Fifth Night	

Erev Yom Tov / Passover, Sixth Day Sunday, March 31st

Shaharit	7:30 am
Candle Lighting.....	6:55 pm
Minha and Arbit	7:00 pm
Sefirat Ha'Omer Sixth Night	

Yom Tov / Passover Seventh Day Monday, April 1st

Shaharit	8:30 am
Class with Rabbi Batzri	5:30 pm
Minha & Arbit	6:30 pm
Candle Lighting.....	on or after 7:59 pm
Sefirat Ha'Omer Seventh Night	

Yom Tov / Passover Eighth Day Tuesday, April 2nd

Shaharit	8:30 am
Class with Rabbi Batzri	6:00 pm
Minha & Arbit	6:30 pm

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and meaning in this historic era that we are privileged to live in.

The *Haftarah* says: *The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones...and He said to me: 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered: 'O Lord God, only You know.' Again He said to me: 'Prophecy over these bones, and say to them -- 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones - Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live, and I will lay sinews upon you, and I will bring flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'*

In our era, this "Valley of Dry Bones" could very well be any concentration camp in 1945. With that in mind, continue reading:

*So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceeding great army. Then He said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say - **Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost, we are clean cut off.**' Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, **and bring you into the Land of Israel.** And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and I have brought you up out of your graves, and I shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live, **and I shall place you in your own land - then you shall know that I the Lord have spoken, and performed it, says the Lord.***

In 1945, after 6 million Jews were murdered, thousands of Jews who survived the Holocaust looked and felt like "dry bones." The images of displaced persons camps were that of a "Valley of Dry Bones," and, indeed, the best words to aptly describe how the survivors felt are "**Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost.**" Bringing these survivors "**into the Land of Israel...in your own land**" was a miracle of Biblical

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SHABBAT READINGS

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proportions, as was their ability to rise up from the ashes of the Holocaust and join "**an exceeding great army**" that would now help to establish and defend a renewed independent homeland for the Jewish people.

I, like many others, am still disturbed by the apparent absence of God during the Shoah. It's a theological mystery, and a perplexing question. Having said that, I know that the Holocaust can be brought about by the evils of human beings, but the birth of modern Israel could never have come about by human hands alone. Wherever God may have been during the Shoah remains a mystery, but He certainly was there for us afterwards, breathing new life into dry bones, giving them hope, and bringing them into their own land, the Land of Israel. In God's own concluding words to this prophecy, I am convinced that all of this happened because "*the Lord has spoken, and performed it.*"

In the spirit of the comments by Rabbis Mansour and Sutton, let us forget about U.N. Declarations and Resolutions, and instead give thanks to "He who has performed all of these miracles for our ancestors --- **and for us.**"

In Memoriam

We remember these *yahrzeit* anniversaries for March 30th to April 6th 2013. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate *tzedaka*, and attend services the preceding Shabbat.

21 Nisan / Monday, April 1st
Ester Avrahamy *Ester bat Batia*
Hanini Horesh Suleiman

22 Nisan / Tuesday, April 2nd
Edward Ezrapour *Eliyahu ben Ezra Avraham Hayim*

25 Nisan / Friday, April 5th
Frederick Tizabi *Yehezkiel ben Avraham*

Refuah Shlemah

Yocheved bat Rachel, Mazal bat Malka, Dan Herdoon, Mazal Tov bat Salha Matana, Moshe ben Ezra, Sasson ben Rahel/Sassoon Moses, Penina bat Henia, Dov Ber ben Sonia, Maurice Ovadia/Moshe ben Noosha, Pnina bat Esther Vera Levi

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Tuesday, April 2nd

Havdallah 8:00 pm
Sefirat Ha'Omer Eighth Night

Weekdays

Wednesday, April 3 to Friday, April 5
Shaharit 6:30 am
Sefirat Ha'Omer after dark (Days 9 to 11)

Erev Shabbat Friday, April 5th

Shaharit 6:30 am
Shir Hashirim 6:45 pm
Candle Lighting 6:58 pm
Minha & Arbit..... 6:58 pm
Sefirat Ha'Omer Eleventh Night