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Chol HaMoed Pesach
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The Poetry of Resurrection

By Rabbi Eliezer Lachman, Rosh HaKollel

On the Shabbos of the intermediate days of Pesach we read the haftarah of the dry bones, wherein the prophet Yechezkel sees dry bones miraculously grow flesh, sinews and skin and come back to life as people. Tur (Orach Chaim 490), citing Rav Hai Gaon and others, explains that this reading alludes to the fact that the future Resurrection of the Dead will take place during this time of the year. But why is this so - why is the time around Pesach designated for the Resurrection?

On this Shabbos we also read the book of Shir HaShirim, the song of all songs. The commentaries (see Darchei Moshe ibid.) explain that Shir HaShirim discusses, in allegorical form, the Exodus from Egypt and the everlasting relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people that it started. However, it would seem that the format of Shir HaShirim as a song is also significant, and is connected not only to the Exodus, but to the theme of the resurrection as well. For resurrection and song go together, as the Gemara (Sanhedrin 92b) teaches that when the dry bones were brought back to life as people, they immediately broke out in song to Hashem.

The themes of the Exodus, song and the Resurrection of the Dead converge further on the seventh day of Pesach. On that day, the redemption from Egypt was completed with the miracles of the Splitting of the Sea, and the Jews responded to these events with song. The Torah introduces this song with the phrase az yashir Moshe uvnei Yisrael, which literally means "then Moshe and the Children of Israel will sing." Why the future tense? The Gemara (Sanhedrin 91b) explains that this is an allusion to the Resurrection of the Dead, and the verse is hinting that Moshe and the Jewish people will sing this song in the future upon being resurrected from the dead. Thus, the culmination of the Exodus resulted in song, and that

very song will be sung at the Resurrection.

Why is this so?

First we must understand the concept of song. The "songs" we are referring to are actually elaborate poetic compositions that are expressed in their fullness only when sung. Poetry conveys its thoughts and feelings not only through the unitary meanings of its words; it also uses devices, such as parallelism, alliteration and metaphor to form connections and create greater depth and a multiplicity of meanings. For this reason, Targum Unkelos, the traditional Aramaic translation of the Torah, will often assign more than one meaning to words used in poetic sections of the Torah (see, for example, Bereishis 49:11). When this form is used in the Torah, it indicates a deeper understanding of reality, according to which Hashem has endowed everything with meaning, and in fact with multiple layers of meaning.

The significance of the Exodus is not only that the Jews were redeemed by Hashem, but that they also achieved this deeper awareness. All events large and small were no longer random, but rather reflected Hashem's will and His relationship with the Jewish people in myriad ways. The proper medium to express this is poetic song; hence it is depicted in the poetry of Shir HaShirim and the Song of the Sea (Az Yashir).

The Resurrection of the Dead follows directly from this understanding. Hashem has endowed everything with ultimate meaning; how is it, then, that a person dies after a short life, inevitably leaving Hashem's plans for him unfulfilled? The answer is that Hashem's plans for him, and for all existence, will be realized with the Resurrection. The concept of the Resurrection of the Dead is that all that is dead, devoid of existence and meaning, will ultimately be brought back to life and attain its true meaning (see Leshem Doa"h 2:2:3:2-4). This concept entered human understanding with the Exodus as a consequence of the unlimited meaningfulness of all existence that Shir HaShirim and Az Yashir teach.

About the Friedman Kollel

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel, located in Olney, Maryland, offers learning opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds. These include one-on-one chavrusas, public lectures and classes for men and women, as well as after-school structured learning for public school teens. The Kollel operates under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Lachman and Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky. For more information or to sponsor an upcoming Capital Torah, please contact Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky at FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org.

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