

Pesach and Israel's High Holidays

Living in exile, the prophet Ezekiel found himself in the valley of Dry Bones, speaking words of encouragement to a vast host of the dead who never made it back to Israel. In its most climactic moment, when Ezekiel confronts the host of the dead, the host bemoans its fate: "We have lost our hope." (37:11)

How fitting that the modern State of Israel's national anthem is written as a response to Ezekiel's prophetic vision: "We have, *not yet*, lost our hope." This song stirs the heart; generations upon generations before us have longed for and dreamt this dream - to once again live, prosper and finally come to rest in our home. For so many, this dream was extinguished in oppressive lands, but for some reason, in our time, it has finally come true. The Jewish spirit is incomplete when she is removed from her soil, from her roots. The breath of life has flowed back into our hollowed frames; the sweet elixir of hope has wetted our withered tongues.

With the close of the holiday of Pesach, we commemorate the exodus and redemption from Egypt. Our lives as slaves moved from oppression and despair to freedom and opportunity. But the goal was never simply to be set free. We went straight from Egypt to Sinai. Torah provided structure for a slave tribe to transform into a nation and a society.

Ultimately the goal of the covenant, the Torah, was for us to use it as a guide to shape our community, our homeland. Now we have a land on which to practice our tradition as it relates to the people of the world. In the Diaspora, pockets of commitment and learning are incredible expressions of Jewish continuity, but we are still a cloistered few; divided and weak.

Rather, the Diaspora Jewish community is an emissary of the State of Israel. The actor on the global stage, the one whose children take up arms in defense of their fellow citizens, is the State of Israel. Israel is the hope, the *Tikva*, of the Jewish community. For the religious Jew, the state of Israel is not merely a tool to give Jews a seat amongst the Nations of the world, the state of Israel is the opportunity to live and proclaim the most authentic, historic, self-confident Judaism in over 2000 years.

Friends, I understand that this has been a tiring time for us and our families, but I implore you to steel yourselves and observe these days with as much time and energy as you can discover. These upcoming days are the High Holidays of the state of Israel and the Jewish people – *Yom Hashoah*, Holocaust remembrance, on April 15th– 16th, *Yom Hazikaron*, Israel's Memorial Day, April 21st-22nd, and *Yom Ha'atzmaut*, April 22nd-23rd. These are minor holidays, as proclaimed by Israel's chief Rabbinate, and we must not forget our right hand, our home.

We will be observing *Yom Hashoah* in MFJC on Thursday evening, April 16th, at 7:00PM with readings, singing songs, and listening to stories of our survival.

On Wednesday evening, April 22nd, at 7:00PM, we will remember Israel's fallen soldiers. Following the memorial service, we will celebrate *Yom Haatzmaut*, Israel's 67th year of Independence.

Please, families and friends, come to shul during these important days for our people to mourn our loss, to recall who we live for and to celebrate the miracles and wonders and give thanks to God.

Chag Sameach and Moadim L'simcha L'Geulah Sheleimah May our holidays be joyous and our redemption complete...

Rav Menashe East