

Shabbat Hol Hamoed Pesach 2020, 5790

By Brenda Simmonds

On the Shabbat that falls during Pesach it is customary to read the Haftorah containing the prophesy of the dry bones. Here the prophet Ezekiel experiences an unusual vision and declares an even more extraordinary prophesy. God walks with him to a valley filled with dry bones and instructs him to proclaim to the bones "I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live again ". While initially the bones came together and flesh grew and skin formed, the reconstructed bodies did not have breath. God then further instructs Ezekiel to call to the ruach saying "Come o ruach from the four winds and breathe into these slain that they may live again". The wind complies, the ruach enters the bodies, they come to life, stand on their feet and become a living, vast multitude.

God goes on to explain this vision saying that the dry bones are the whole house of Israel who while currently in a state of confusion and despair shall be revived in the future.

Why read this at Pesach? Could it be that Passover speaks to us of God's deliverance, his mighty outstretched hand while this prophetic reading speaks of God's spirit. Perhaps for us to be a free people we require more than liberation, what we need is heroism of the spirit.

Six months of the year we declare in G'vurot in the second blessing of the Amidah that God causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall. Here the wind appears in the blessing as the manifestation of the power of God. But we stop saying this prayer at Passover and instead replace it by saying that God causes the dew to fall.

Is this a parable or metaphor for our day. What really reanimates dry bones? Is it only ruach Elohim? Are we simply bystanders, or is there a role for each one of us in this divine forecast?

During the High Holidays we are required to make atonement, to take stock, to change ourselves and mediate our relationship with God and others. Having completed in part this monumental task we go into hibernation, illuminated by Chanukah and reminded of our place in the world through Tu-Bishvat. Now we have reached spring, the time for sowing for the future harvest. We water, protect and watch our vulnerable plants grow for we will need them in the months ahead. But if the dry bones are us, do we too not need the same care and attention. We too can dry up, our hopes and desires lying dormant and stagnant. We may have muscle but have lost the connective tissue, the connectivity between who we are and who we might be if we were fully alive. Are we more truly present when at work than at home, with our friends rather than our family, and are we a better parent or grandparent than a partner? The passage contains the word ruach ten times. Surely this is no coincidence. Our lives too need to be fused with the winds from all the earth, from different people and cultures, for what unites us as individuals is our need for love and a living spirit.

I wrote this piece originally before the current "unprecedented times " took hold, so some mention of where we find ourselves today feels compulsory .While it may be true that the world begins to feel more and more in the grip of something so small and indiscriminate in its power , we are left in our own diminishing spheres as the prophesy suggests in confusion and despair. Despite this reality the Haftorah suggests to me that for the next six months or beyond each one of us could be that reviving wind for ourselves and others. Above all Ezekiel's vision offers a message of hope, it uses the imagery of revival and a second chance at life, perhaps even in today's calamitous world filled

with unspeakable losses. The challenge for all of us is whether we can relate in whatever small way to the vision and in our ability to look and see what life truly has to offer.