

Shabbat Tkuma Sermon – Rabbi Dubi Haiyun

Torah portions Tazria Metzora (Leviticus 12:1–15:33)

A tale is told of a king who sent his wise men to summarize all human history into one paragraph. Finally, after much effort and many years of research, one of the sages came back to him and said: 'A person was born, lived and died. That's the entire summary of history.' The wonderful poet Yehuda Amichai wrote: "Open closed open. Before we are born, everything is open in the universe without us. For as long as we live, everything is closed within us. And when we die, everything is open again. **Open closed open. That's all we are.**"

These two descriptions succinctly summarize the contents of this week's Torah portion, Tazria-Metzora.

The link between the two passages creates a connection between life, death, and life, and in fact symbolically shows the story of the Jewish people. Parshat Tazria begins with the creation of a new life, at birth: "And the Lord spoke to Moshe, "Tell the people of Israel: 'If a woman conceives and gives birth...' and then continues to discuss leprosy, of which the Jewish sages have said "a leper is considered as if they were a dead person", and then at the conclusion of the parashat metzora once again the discussion returns to the theme of life and discusses the ill who have healed, and of those who have been able to come back from "the dead": "And when the one with a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes. And he shall bathe his body in fresh water and shall be clean." And then further on: "If she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean."

This contrast of life versus death; impurity versus holiness; the sanctity of life in the face of the impurity of death follows the people of Israel throughout history. How symbolic indeed that the Shabbat between Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Memorial Day for Israel's Fallen Soldiers and Independence Day is about life, death, and then life again; in the past and in the future. Just as there is a special sense of soul-searching on the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, so in these days between the Days of Remembrance there is a similar atmosphere. A sadness wafts through the air and this particular Sabbath, which falls between them, must be given a special characteristic. Sabbatot that take place during special periods of the year are given names accordingly, so that the Sabbath before Passover is called "The Great Shabbat" ("Shabbat Gadol") and the Sabbath after Tisha B' Av is called "Shabbat Nachamu."

Just as during the year there are Sabbatot that are given special names due to the haftorah which is read on that day or an event related to that Shabbat, it is appropriate that this Shabbat, which takes place on the days of Remembrance and Independence Day, should be called "Shabbat Tkuma" [Hebrew for rebirth or revival]. This Shabbat symbolizes the tension that is expressed in the Torah portions that are read this week, new life that is accompanied by the constant recollection of death.

Just as we talk about and prepare for Passover on the "Great Sabbath" (Shabbat Hagadol) and there are those that read from the Haggadah, thus on this Shabbat we should relate the connection between the Holocaust and the rebirth of the Jewish State; between the fallen soldiers and Independence. On this Shabbat we should tell of the dead and of the living. Furthermore, we should read passages which should be combined into a type of Haggadah. The Haggadah of Rebirth. A Haggadah that will provide Jewish content to Independence Day.

We should examine the history of the Jewish people through a long-term lens. A lens through which what we see does not begin a few hundred years ago but does not stop there, either. A lens dating back to Abraham and continuing to the current day. Therefore, we should consider our modern days of remembrance as an inseparable part of the heritage of the Jewish people. We should regard Independence Day as an inseparable continuation of the previous Independence Days of the Jewish people. Our first Independence Day was the Passover holiday, when we left slavery for freedom and established an independent kingdom. The second Independence Day was Hanukkah and the third was the day on which the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel - the State of Israel, was declared.

Rabbi Dubi Haiyun has served as rabbi and spiritual supporter at Kehilat Moriah in Haifa since 2008.