

## *Understanding Techiyat Hameitim*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The *haftarah* for Shabbat Chol HaMoed Pesach consists of the famous passage found in *Sefer Yechezkel* 37:1-14 that focuses upon the *navi's* (prophet's) vision of the “dry bones” and their subsequent *techiyat hameitim* — resurrection. The first three *pasukim* set the stage for this prophetic encounter:

The hand of the L-rd came upon me and carried me out in the spirit of the L-rd and set me down in the midst of the valley, and that was full of bones. And He made me pass by them round about, and lo! They were exceedingly many on the surface of the valley, and lo! They were exceedingly dry. Then He said to me; “Son of man, can these bones become alive?” And I answered, “O L-rd G-d, You [alone] know.” (Verses 1-3, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Our Sages differ regarding the nature of this *nevuah* (prophecy); does it speak of that which Yechezkel directly witnessed, or was it a *mashal* — a parable?

...the view that in truth [the story of the resurrection of the dry bones] was [but] a parable... Rabbi Yehudah said: “It was truth; it was a parable.” Rabbi Nechemiah said to him: “If truth, why a parable; and if a parable, why truth?” — But [say thus]: “In the truth there was but a parable.” Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Jose the Galilean said: “The dead whom Ezekiel revived went up to Palestine, married wives and begat sons and daughters.” Rabbi Yehudah b. Bathyra rose up and said: “I am one of their descendants, and these are the tefillin which my grandfather left me [as an heirloom] from them.” (*Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin* 92b, translation, *The Soncino Talmud*)

Clearly, these sages maintain different views as to what took place during Yechezkel's prophetic encounter. One must note that this *machloket* (dispute) continued long after the

close of the Talmud. By way of illustration, in his *Moreh HaNevuchim*, the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204), in opposition to other Tanach interpreters, maintains that Yechezkel's vision of the dry bones and their ensuing resurrection was, indeed, a *mashal* (II:46). Nevertheless, the general concept of *techiyat hameitim* is universally embraced by all classic Jewish thinkers. Little wonder, then, that the Rambam unequivocally states: “*Techiyat hameitim* is a fundamental principle of the Torah of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. There is no religion of, or connection to, the Jewish people if one does not believe in this...” (*Perush HaMishnaiyot, Sanhedrin, Hakdamah l'Perek Chalek*, Rabbi Yosef David Kapach edition, page 139, translation my own) In addition, he categorizes this theological precept among his celebrated 13 *Ikkarei Emunah* — Principles of Faith (page 142), and codifies its singular import in the *Mishneh Torah* in his list of 24 types of individuals *she'ain lahem chalek l'olam habah* — that are denied a portion in the world to come: “The following individuals do not have a portion in the world to come. Rather, their [souls] are cut off and they are judged for their great wickedness and sins, forever...those who deny the resurrection of the dead and the coming of the [Messianic] redeemer.” (*Hilchot Teshuvah*, III:6, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger)

Due to a number of specious criticisms levelled against his formulation of *techiyat hameitim*, the Rambam wrote a monograph entitled, “*Ma'amar Techiyat Hameitim*,” to clarify his position. Therein he states: “I have explained to them that *techiyat hameitim* is a fundamental Torah principle that consists of *chazarat hanefesh l'guf* — the return of the soul to the body — and that one should not alter this concept in any manner from its direct and basic meaning.” (Rabbi Yosef David Kapach edition, page 79, this and the following

translation my own) As such, basing himself on the earlier-cited passage from *Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin*, the Rambam maintains:

And it appears to us from these statements, that those people whose souls will return to their bodies [will live life as we know it to be]. They will eat and drink, engage in marital relations and give birth, and ultimately die after a very long time — similar in kind to the days that will be in the times of the *Mashiach*. (Page 82, brackets my own)

In sum, the Rambam asserts *techiyat hameitim*, one of his 13 *Ikkarei Emunah*, to be an essential pillar of Torah thought. Moreover, it is to be understood at face value, namely, it literally means *chazarat hanefesh l'guf*, wherein those that merit this gift from Hashem will live again *ba'olam hazeh* — in this world.

May the time come soon and, in our days, when we will witness the fulfillment of the *bracha* recited three times daily in the weekday *Shemoneh Esrai*:

You are mighty forever, my L-rd; You resurrect the dead; You are powerful to save. He causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall. He sustains the living with loving kindness, resurrects the dead with great mercy, supports the falling, heals the sick, releases the bound, and fulfills His trust to those who sleep in the dust. Who is like You, mighty One! And who can be compared to You, King, who brings death and restores life, and causes deliverance to spring forth! You are trustworthy to revive the dead. Blessed are You L-rd, who revives the dead. (Translation, Chabad.org)

*V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom, *Chag Sameach* and may Hashem protect us all.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>  
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.