



Next Year We Will Sit on the Balcony¹

I only discovered the story of Chaim Russo last year, as I was delving into the archives at Yad Vashem. Chaim was born and raised in the Kastoria region of Greece, son of a wealthy family of furriers. The Nazis invaded Kastoria and little Chaim was taken to work shoveling excrement in cattle cars. He managed to survive although he didn't know what had happened to his family. However, when he got to Auschwitz, the other prisoners from Europe heard him pray in a way they had never heard before, and told him, "You're not a Jew."

Chaim Russo did not survive Auschwitz. He couldn't bear this new pain, as a stranger among his Jewish brothers.

Chaim's brother, Benzion, survived the war and his first grandson was named Chaim, Chaim Mizrachi, the man I married.

Nevertheless, as I said, I only discovered this aspect of the story last year. On that very day, I lit a candle in Chaim Russo's memory and I promised him the following: "Chaim, we have no control over those who hate us from the outside, but I promise you, for your sake, that I will do all I can so that we don't have enemies on the inside. That no version of prayer should divide us, that no thick walls should prevent us from praying together on the balconies."

When G-d takes Yechezkel to the Dura Valley, he shows him a vast amount of bones, which "behold, were very dry," and He asks him, "Can these bones come to life?" And Yechezkel answers with an answer that breaks our Sages' hearts: "You know."

"Said Rabbi Pinchas, because Yechezkel did not answer 'They will live!' and only replied 'You know;' because he didn't believe, his own bones were not buried in a pure land, as it says 'And you will die on impure ground.'"²

What was wrong with Yechezkel? Did he not believe in the vision of the dry bones? He was the master of putting things together, he saw the wondrous "Divine Chariot" in Heaven, but he could not believe that here, in this Land wrought with conflict, "there was a noise, and the bones drew near, each bone to its [matching] bone."

How could it be that at a time of great plague, of a valley full of death, precisely then all the individuals would come together?

Yechezkel already knew that in Heaven, there was a Divine Chariot and "a voice of great noise" of angels, but what is that noise he hears coming from the balconies? "And I looked, and behold, there are sinews and flesh on them, and the skin covers them... and the spirit entered them and they lived and they stood on their feet, a very great force... And He said to me, 'Son of Man, these bones are the whole House of Israel... and I have put My spirit into them and revived them and placed you on your Land...'"

This year marks Israel's 72nd year of independence. According to the Kabbalists, 72 is a very sacred number, representing the 72 names of G-d. The "Name" of G-d is His expression in the world, or in other words... us. "And each of us has a name,"³ hence G-d has a name in Hebrew, in Yiddish, in Ladino, English, French, Russian, Amharic... The Kabbalists say G-d has 72 names because

the gematria of 72 is ספד – *chessed*, kindness.

For it is only this trait that can bind individuals, with individual names, into one together, which is the name of His Majesty.

Chessed will be the only expression for the independence of Truth. When a bone draws near to its matching bone, it shows that it is capable of the "Divine Chariot;" capable of growing sinews and flesh, because all of us – yes, all of us – are one big human tissue.

Even in a place which seems to you so far away, "in exile... Tel Aviv,"⁴ the people are full of *chessed* and love. Just go out onto your balcony in 2020 and see "a very great force."

"You will yet see, you will yet see, how good it will be..."⁵ Why? "Because I am G-d, I spoke and I acted."⁶

1 Line from an Israeli folk song: "Next year we will sit on the balcony / And count the migrating birds / Children on vacation will play tag / Between the house and the fields / You will yet see, you will yet see / How good it will be / Next year."

2 Yalkut Shimoni, Yechezkel 37.

3 Famous poem by Israeli poetess, Zelda, often recited at Holocaust Day ceremonies.

4 Yechezkel 3:15.

5 See footnote 1.

6 Yechezkel 37:14.

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