

Invocation for Westchester *Yom Hashoah* Ceremony at Memorial Garden Gates,
White Plains

Rabbi Lester Bronstein, May 6, 2024 (revised from May 5, 2016)

Hafoch bah v'hafoch bah d'chuley bah. Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it.

If these scrolls could speak, what would they tell us?

They would tell us of loving old hands turning their rollers from column to column to find the portion of the week. Of loving young hands squeezing them tightly through a frenetic Simchat Torah dance. They would tell of trembling hands trying desperately to transport these scrolls to places of safe hiding. They would tell of cruel rough hands throwing them into dark, cold warehouses. They would tell of *no hands at all* as they wait for months and years in silence without the regular human contact a Torah scroll needs and craves.

But these scrolls can and do speak! They speak of the wonder of Creation, *ma'asey b'reysheet*. They speak of Abraham and Sarah and their brave trek into the unknown. They speak of Isaac's bravery. They speak of our people's ascent from slavery, across the impossible passage of the open sea. They speak of standing still at Sinai. Of manna in the wilderness. They speak of finally reaching the journey's end as Moses departs and Joshua takes the reins of leadership.

Along the way, they speak of Amalek attacking the old, the infirm, the indefensible, and of the Israelites vowing to remember and never to forget, even as they vow to press on toward a fulfilling future as a sacred people, a people shaped by the precepts of this very Torah.

Even as the vow to remember six million of their faithful rising as smoke through the chimneys of death.

Now these scrolls *have* reached their goal. Once again they feel loving arms. Once again they hear children's voices - *our* children's voices - chanting their words and learning their story anew. These scrolls were hostages to cruel history and hatred. They are hostages no more, though our *human* hostages remain in darkness like these scrolls during their years of degradation.

These scrolls have kept their promise and have come home. Now we must keep *our* promise to them and to those who once cared lovingly for them; our promise to give these scrolls a loving home in perpetuity, and to make that home a place of strength, of safety, of peace, of refuge, of principled conviction, of *tikva*, of hope in all the ways that hope can thrive.

Hafoch bah v'hafoch bah, d'chuley bah. Turn them and turn them, for everything still is in them.

Blessed are You, Holy One of Blessing, who gives eternal hope to your eternal people and to all your precious beings.