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When I was in Israel during the week of Passover, the book stores were filled with people buying a new book -- almost everyone was buying it .. It was the book listing the thousands of dead in the Yom Kippur war.

Kol maasecha besefer nichtavim .. what a terribly new interpretation to this rabbinic word .. the awesome book of suffering and martyrdom compiled by our people during these tragic times -- has become enlarged. The pages titled Kishinev, Auschwitz, Jerusalem, Sinai, have now been supplemented by new ones -- Suez, Golan, Kiryat Shemoneh. Pages and pages of new names have been added -- young and vibrant, beautiful and life-loving young men and women, cut down in the flower of their youth defending the whole Jewish people against its ruthless enemies. Who reads the books of Jewish martyrdom? The world at large of course does not. It knows only of Israeli "intransigence." The statesmen in the capitols of the world and in the world capitol in this city on the East River would not read the book, and the righteous battlers for all the oppressed of the world, except the Jewish oppressed, apparently cannot read the book of Jewish suffering.

One wonders, as you circulate among them, at the strength of the young who have seen so much and of the parents and the loved ones who have suffered so much. There are families who have lost loved ones in each of the wars that have challenged the Jewish state. One woman I knew said: "I have always wondered how it was possible for Abraham to take his son, Isaac, to the Akeda. How could a father willingly give up his son. Now I know ... I sent my son willingly to the battlefield. Abraham was more fortunate. His son came back. Mine did not."

The names in a book, the statistics in a newspaper are cold and impersonal. The tragedy and the pain is much more vividly felt when it is personalized. Recently there appeared an article in the Hebrew press entitled: kocha shel emuna .. an interview with a young man named Eli Sagih, a commander in one of the elite units of tsahal. He said:

אנחנו פה בחזית איננו מודאגים. אולי חוששים קצת מפגיעות שלנו אישיות, אבל היה כדאי אולי שנתפנה לכמה שעות ונרד לעורף ונראה להם: אנחנו איתנים ברוחנו ומן הראוי שיהיו כמונו, ואולי חשוב שיחפלו למעננו, אבל חשוב יותר לנו שיסמכו עלינו ובכל. במלחמת ששת הימים היתה לנו הצלחה פנטסטית, ואנו כאנשים דתיים חשבנו שהאומה התעורר ויתחיל גל התעוררות דתית, ובשלבים מסויימים אכן כך היה. הכול היה בידינו, אך לפתע החל העם לשקוע שוב. הכל החל שוב להיעלם. נושא השחיתויות והופעות דומות הדאיגו אותי מאוד מבהינת המוסר היהודי. כל יודע, אולי המכות האלה נועדו שוב לעורר אותנו כעם ולהזכיר לנו מחדש את ההיסטוריה שלנו. אולי יתחילו האנשים להרהר מחדש בכל מה ששובב אותנו: כל אנו, מה אנו, בשביל מה אנו חיים.

זו בעיה שידעתי אותה לפני שהתגייסתי והחלטתי להילחם בה. כשהתגייסתי, הייתי כתפלל תפילת שחרית במשך חצי שעה, ושמתי לב שלאט לאט החל הזמן להתקצר. תמיד יש תירוצים: הזמן לוחץ, הזמן דוחק, יש מה לעשות. הגעתי למצב שבו בדקתי עצמי בשעון, אם אני מתפלל חצי שעה מדי בוקר, ואם אני רץ מהר מדי, אני מפסיק את עצמי וחוזר לתפילה מחדש. בטירונות, למשל, שהיא תקופה של מאמץ בלתי רגיל ודוחק זמן בלתי רגיל, בעיקר בבוקר, הייתי מוותר על ארוחת בוקר או על כל פעילות אישית אחרת, והייתי מקדיש חצי שעה מינימום לתפילת שחרית.

בקיצור, ידעתי שאם אינני תופש עצמי מלכתחילה, הריני מאבד את כל מה שהיה לי - ומאבד מהר. היה ברור לי שכאשר אני מגיע לחופשה רגילה - ורגילה זה בערך שבוע - אני חייב לבלות חלק מהזמן בישיבה, מפני שאם לא אעשה זאת, אני נמצא מפסיד. שהרי תמיד אמצא לעצמי תירוץ: למה, למשל, בסוכות לא אישן בסוכה, ולמה בשבועות לא אלמד כל הלילה, כפי שנהוג ביהדות הדתית, ולמה בכל חג לא אשמור על המסורות הקטנות שבלעדיהן מתחילים לאבד את המסורות היותר גדולות.

A few days after the interview was given, Eli Sagih died in battle. In reading this, how vivid is the statement of the midrash in tanhuma ...

כל העצים כשרים למערכה חוץ מגפן ומזית למה שהם עושין פירות משובחין הא למדת שבזכות הבנים אבותיהם מתכבדין

(תנחומא ויקרא ה)

The creators of Israel called the army tsahal, related to the Hebrew root tsahal. Tsahali varonee yoshevet tsiyon ke'gadol bekirbech kedosh yisrael.

Are we worthy of such young people? Have we shown our devotion to our people, our fellow men, to a degree that they have done? The quotation from Siach Lochamim: I won't claim that we were all ready to get killed, and yet in our half-truck we all had the same feeling. If the boy on your left was killed, you felt you had to be somehow specially worthy of this terrible sacrifice. We've got to carry on doing what the others didn't manage to do. Carrying on -- that's our debt to them.

These were martyrs in the long tradition of Jewish kiddush hashem. However, theirs was a death not only for the glory of God and His people, but also to protect others. Theirs was a death for the sake of others. For the sake of us, who live here. It was they who preserved the Jewish body and enriched the Jewish soul -- Though their names are now written in the book of death, it was they that gave us the book of life. Where would we have been, what kind of Jewish life and spirit would have been left if we had only remained with the crushed and the burnt, the slaughtered

and the butchered? If we would have been left only with ruins?

If we have light in our lives as Jews, if we have Jewish pride and Jewish determination it is because of the Yossies and the Moshes and the Eli Sagih's who like Adam of old gave up their years to us. And what will we do with them? Will we waste them on petty criticism and caviling on machloket and kavod, or will we dedicate ourselves each in his own way to the furtherance of Jewish creativity, Jewish spirituality, and Jewish purity, and Jewish independence. We have been given their un-lived days; they bequeathed to us their youth and their dedication, their dreams and their visions. We have been spared the bitter tears of their parents and their loved ones; their wives and their children ... All of this has been given to us as a free will offering. Will we squander it or cherish it. This is the meaning of this hour. Each of us must live two lives. Our own and the un-lived years of those who have not been granted the זכות of living.

It is a great tragedy to die. It is a greater tragedy to die young. It is the greater tragedy to die unremembered. It is the greatest tragedy to die without purpose.

It is said of Rabbi Levi Isaac of Berdichev that he spoke thus: I do not ask, Lord of the world, that you reveal to me the secrets of Thy ways -- I could not comprehend them. I do not ask to know why I suffer, but only this: Do I suffer for your sake.

כי עליך הורגננו כל היום

For us too, it would not be enough to ask ourselves Why they died. It is in our hands to see to it that they died for a purpose -- the purpose is the redemption of Israel and the redemption of ourselves.

May the time not be distant when peace will replace war; when love will replace hatred; when the young will live out their years in tranquility and happiness and when Israel will dwell secure in its own land. That those who sowed in tears will be able to reap in joy.

בלע המות לנצה ומחה ד'  
דמעה מעל כל פנים וחרפת עמו יסיר  
מכל הארץ כי ד' דבר

Isaiah 25:8