



Once again, despite all of the repeated vows—by others to us and by ourselves—of “Never Again,” a Seder celebration was turned into a massacre, Passover freedom *matzot* were soaked in the blood of Jewish martyrdom, whole families were obliterated amidst “blood, fire and pillars of smoke.” And this terrifying atrocity perpetrated by a suicide bomber on Seder night in the Park Hotel, Netanya, can tragically serve as the worst case scenario for the drive-by shootings and terrorist detonations which for the past year and a half have turned home and road into frontlines of battle, have targeted civilian enclaves such as pizza parlors, Bat Mitzvah celebrations and shopping centers as subjects for terror attacks—claiming the lives of 126 civilians during the month of March alone—and have brought nightmares and anxiety convulsions into the daily pattern of Israeli life.

In the wake of this horror, the most important question to consider is how do we Israelis respond? Certainly we have called special fast days and recited Psalms—but that is only a part of the response.

The Talmud records a remarkable incident (*Berachot 3a*):
Tanya Rabbi Yose said, “I once was walking on the road and

entered one of the Jerusalem ruins. Elijah, may he be remembered for good, came and waited for me at the opening...

He said to me, ‘My son, why did you enter this ruin?’

I said to him, ‘To pray.’

He said to me, ‘You should have prayed on the way!’

I said to him, ‘I was afraid lest passersby would stop me.’

He said to me, ‘You should have prayed a shortened prayer.’

At that time I learned three things. I learned that one is not to enter ruins. I learned that one is to pray on the way. I learned that when one prays on the way, one must pray a shortened prayer....”

Rabbi Yose lived during the difficult period following the destruction of the Second Temple, and Elijah is the herald of the Messiah. Elijah is teaching Rabbi Yose the laws of Redemption. First and foremost don’t enter ruins, don’t wallow in misery and despair. You must get on the way, you must begin to travel the road towards Redemption, you must plant and build our homeland physically and spiritually. Are you afraid lest the passerby attempts to stop you, do you fear the Palestinian drive-by assassins and suicide bombers? Then pray a shortened prayer while you are set on the way, charting the path to peace, security and salvation. But you must get on the road, you must act and affirm your fealty by establishing facts on the ground in the State of Israel!

I believe that Elijah’s message has been internalized by

Rabbi Riskin is chief rabbi of Efrat, Israel, and chancellor and dean of Ohr Torah Stone Colleges and Graduate Programs. His thoughts on the parashah can be heard each week on the OU’s Shabbat Shalom weekly e-mail.



HOME

religious Jewry in Israel in general and by our Gush Etzion community in particular. To provide only a few examples close to home in and around Efrat:

- When a junior high school student of mine, Koby Mandell (May God avenge his blood), was brutally murdered in a Tekoa cave, his face mangled beyond recognition, the family responded by establishing a special fund in his name for aiding other families devastated by terror, a cause to which his parents are indefatigably dedicated.

- When Dr. Shmuel Gillis, a renowned hematologist who tended Arab as well as Jewish patients with outstanding expertise and sensitivity, was murdered on the Gush Etzion road, his family and friends erected a Pinnah Chammah (Warm Corner) at the intersection of the Gush, staffed 16 hours a day by volunteers providing coffee, cake and cheerful words for soldiers.

- When Zachi Sasson was murdered on the Tunnel Road between Efrat and Yerushalayim, the family dedicated a look-out point and nature observatory in Rosh Tzurim which serves as a protective educational center for the enhancement of the knowledge and love of Israel.

- When Baruch Cohen was murdered just a few kilometers outside of Efrat, his children issued a call from their house of mourning for the Efrat residents to continue using the road, not to grant a victory to those who would

break the connection between Chevron, Efrat and Yerushalayim—Jewish past, present and future.

Most importantly, in the midst of the blood, fire and pillars of smoke accompanying every terrorist attack, we rise from the ashes and continue on our way to plant and to build, to create new neighborhoods and houses of study, to initiate groundbreaking educational institutions and medical research centers.

And, of course, we can say “Never Again,” because now—at least in Israel—we have the wherewithal to strike back at our enemy and destroy the infrastructure of terror, as we are doing now with great success, thank God. Tragically, the response of most European capitals and media reeks of the anti-Semitism now being perpetrated against defenseless Jews in so many places throughout the world where synagogues are being set ablaze and cemeteries are being vandal-

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ized. The heirs to Goebbel’s “big lie” call us “conquerors,” forgetting that the Treaty of Versailles promised us both banks of the Jordan River, blinding their eyes to the fact that we were always ready to accept a two-state solution which the Arab world consistently refused and still now refuses,

dismissing the sad truth that the refugee problem arose only because of two wars of aggression fought by the Arabs to push us into the sea. Does the world call Poland a conqueror for having taken back lands seized from them by the German aggressor? Is Britain being asked to give up Gibraltar to Spain? The war we are now fighting has nothing to do with “the territories,” which former Prime Minister Barak was ready to give up before Arafat began this *intifada* in his desire to send us back to the ‘47 borders and wipe out the Jewish State! This is a continuation of our War of Independence, our right to live as a nation among nations, our strike at the terror regime of Islamic fundamentalism which threatens the freedom and the future of the entire world. Apparently, the world is only too willing to mourn over us by laying wreaths at Holocaust memorials, but they refuse to allow us to protect ourselves with dignity and to fight for our just cause.

But what of your response, Jewry of the Diaspora? We need you to stand up and be counted because the Moslems worldwide are marching and demonstrating in frightfully large numbers. We need you to petition your governments not to lose their moral compasses, to remind even President Bush that surrendering to the terrorism of Arafat today will bring world surrender to the terrorism of Iran and Osama Bin Laden tomorrow. We need you to come on *aliyah* and to stand with us on the frontline of battle for Jewish and world future; and if you cannot commit to permanent *aliyah*, at least consider periodic *aliyah*; at least visit us to help boost our morale, to improve our economy, to make us feel that we are not alone. If, for you, Israel is “Kosher Disneyland,” it is understandable that you will only come in times of sun and fun; but if Israel is Motherland, it becomes especially important to visit her when she is vulnerable, when she is being attacked.

And we need you to send us your children to study here, so they can discover their birthright here, so they can deepen their commitment to their Jewish roots here. You must allow them to express their dedication, to decide on behalf of their moral consciences to actualize the Torah message they’ve been taught by not “staying on the other side of the Jordan when their brethren are in the midst of battle.” The sages of the Talmud teach that every Jew has four cubits in the land of Israel—because Israel is too precious to leave in the exclusive hands of her legal citizens. Every Jew has a share in Israel—because Israel is our past as well as our future, our roots as well as our ultimate vision, our history as well as our destiny. That is why our sages teach us (*Horayot* 3a) that the only *Kahal Yisrael*, authentic Jewish community, is in Israel—

because Israel is the only place of Jewish historic continuity, from Chevron, where our Matriarchs and Patriarchs began, to Yerushalayim where the Messiah-King will usher in a world of peace. And if every Jew is privileged to have a share in Israel, every Jew must likewise bear responsibility for Israel as well.

In 1948, during our initial War of Independence, the great sage known as the Chazon Ish ruled that no resident

of Bnei Brak (his specific *Chareidi* community) could leave the *yishuv* (Israeli settlement) despite the danger; he reasoned that it is forbidden to weaken the Jewish homeland. I would similarly rule today that anyone who was accustomed to visiting Israel during specific times of the year, or who would ordinarily have sent his children for a year of study in Israel must continue to do so. Anything less would be weakening the Jewish homeland—which is your homeland, too.

And despite the danger, the blood, fire and pillar of smoke on both sides of the divide between Israelis and Palestinians, I remain confident and optimistic about the outcome. On the Friday evening before Yom Kippur a year and one half ago, at the very beginning of the *intifada*, we were twenty-five around our Shabbat table, including my mother-in-law who had just come on *aliyah*. We heard the sounds of gunfire—for the first time. My wife whispered in my ear, “Don’t say anything; maybe my mother will think it’s firecrackers.” As if on cue, my mother-in-law

stood at her seat, looked accusingly at me, and almost shouted: “Beloved son-in-law, is this your idea of the ultimate mother-in-law joke? You bring me here to finish me off in a war?!” She then faced the assemblage: “Our children rescued us by bringing us to Israel. This is where I ought to be. This is where I want to be. I’ve finally come home!”

That Yom Kippur night, immediately after the fast, our *hesder* yeshivah near the Bethlehem border found itself bombarded by enemy fire. All the students, their wives and babies, were on the floor of the *beit midrash* lying on their stomachs. Bullets were whizzing overhead, firebombs were falling—and 40 IDF students stood outside, shooting back. The babies started to cry, a few women began to laugh, laughs which signaled hysteria. One student, Yehoshua Engelman, crawled to his caravan, crawled back with a guitar, and began to play “*Am Yisrael Chai*” (“The Israeli Nation Shall Live”). Bullets were whizzing, firebombs were falling, but a *kumzits* was going on, on the floor of Yeshivat Siach, on Dagan Hill, a few meters from Bethlehem and El Khader. “*Am Yisrael Chai*”—the Jewish people live and will continue to live in our homeland; we must, for we have no other choice, we have no other home. Neither do you. **JA**



Phil Chernofsky, the educational director of the Seymour J. Abrams Orthodox Union Jerusalem World Center, was wounded during a suicide bombing in Machaneh Yehudah earlier this year.