

The Short Vort
Good Morning!

Today is Wednesday, the 9th of Kislev 5784, and November 22, 2023

Loneliness

Part One- To Go or Not To Go

I wanted to go.

I felt it was important.

Numbers count.

We live in a country where we are allowed and expected to express our feelings.

I wanted to go.

Yet, there were many reasons not to go.

A friend who is somewhat older and much wiser and also a Rebbe advised me not to go.

"You are not as young as you once were and are not in the greatest health. It will be a long, tedious day with lots of walking and many unknowns.

The Event is very critical, and you must encourage the Shul to go; however, you should not feel personally obligated. It's a very long trip."

That was on Thursday night, November 16.

I realized the person advising me had my best interests at heart.

I had already booked an airline ticket and a hotel room.

However, after my older friend's advice, I promptly canceled my airline ticket and hotel reservation.

I could drive.

However, driving seemed to me to be out of the question.

I could never imagine driving four-plus hours (each way).

(Full discretion, "even" driving to Lakewood is challenging and strenuous for me, and over the last few years, I rarely attend Chasunahs there. Please forgive me if you are one of those whose Chasuna, Vort, or other Simcha I missed in Lakewood. I have no driver and tend to fall asleep while driving.)

With a heavy heart, I decided not to go to Washington.

Part Two- What Changed?

Sunday was the Levaya (funeral) of Barry Stein, and Monday left me especially tired and emotionally drained.

My trip was canceled, I was emotionally drained, and it was Monday, and it was time to return to learning.

Beforehand, I again sent an email urging everyone to attend the Event- the Event that I would personally not be in attendance at.

I sat down to learn on Monday morning.

I had (sort of) come to grips with the fact that I would (unfortunately) not be able to participate in the crucial Event.

I began to learn and was soon immersed in the beautiful, blissful world of Shas and Pokim.

As the Stein family was sitting Shiva and another congregant was hospitalized, I made the rare exception of allowing notifications of texts.

Suddenly, the slight ping of an incoming text awakened me from heavenly Torah learning.

The text was from a young Protestant minister in Dallas, Texas.

His wife wrote that after hearing my plea for as many people as possible to attend the Event and show support for the Jewish people, her husband and a group of young people decided to trek to Washington. I looked at the text, and one thought entered my mind.

This was not a message from Texas.

Every year on Tisha B'av, when we read the Kinna about the destruction during the Crusader period of the German Jewish communities in the Rhineland, particularly of Worms (Kinnah 25)-I read the following paragraph to the Shul.

It is from the ArtScroll Kinnus:

The Complete Tisha B'av Service:

A New Translation and Anthologized Commentary by Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer and Rabbi Avie Gold; Fourth Impression...June 1997; Mesorah Publications. ISBN 0-89906-878-2; pages 270-271

"The destruction of the Jewish community of Worms in the German Rhineland was the work of the Crusaders.

How ironic!

The Crusaders were willing to leave everything behind- homes, families, occupations- in order to conquer the Holy Land they called Palestine, while the Jews themselves were filled with no such zeal to regain their own homeland!

In heaven, this irony did not go unnoticed but aroused a terrible denunciation against the Jewish people, and especially against the Jews of Worms and her neighboring communities."

As I looked at the text informing me of the self-sacrifice of our non-Jewish friends from Texas (!) to "***leave homes, families, occupations***" – to show their support for Israel and the Jewish people- I knew what I had to do.

Could our non-Jewish supporters be more willing to sacrifice for Israel than me?

I shuddered at the thought that Hashem might look upon me as he did the communities in Worms.

Could it be that non-Jews are willing to be "moser-nefesh" (self-sacrificing) "***while the Jews themselves were filled with no such zeal to regain their own homeland!***"

I knew what I had to do.

I knew without a doubt where I belonged.

There was no reason to call or take counsel; Hashem had texted me.

Part Three- I Am Going

I quickly found a hotel room, called my wife, packed a bag, and by Monday at 3 PM, I was driving south on 95 to join my people.

The driving was difficult, yet so often is life. And after multiple stops on the highway, I arrived in DC.

I arrived at my hotel at 9 PM and quickly walked to the Lincoln Memorial before retiring for the evening.

On the way there and back, I noticed posters I -at first glance- thought were supportive, only to realize they were terribly unsettling.

On every lamppost and public (and not public) pole were red and white posters with pictures of children. I was sure these were pictures of the hostages.

However, on closer inspection, I realized these pictures did not say "kidnapped"; they screamed: "Murdered!"

They were pictures of non-Jewish children allegedly killed by the "Israeli Occupying Forces."

In fact, all of Washington was covered with "Free Palestine" and "Stop the Genocide" posters.

I went to sleep troubled and distressed.

Our enemies were winning the PR war.

I awoke before five, dressed, and caught a cab to the White House.

Part Four- Vasikin at the White House

I was thrilled to be informed that there would be a Tuesday morning Vasikin Minyan, Rosh Chodesh Kislev, at the White House.

This was particularly meaningful to me as the last time I davened at the White House- which was for Mincha on Thursday, May 18, 1978- I was kicked in the head by a Secret Service Officer.

(See Short Vort for Thursday, the 25th of Marchesvan 5784, and November 9, 2023 for details)

This time would be different.

As I was met by the smiling Secret Service Officer, she politely asked me, "Are you here for the Prayer Service? Is so, right this way!"

It was 6:20 in the morning, and dozens were already present.

I entered a spiritual paradise I have never experienced in my over six decades of existence in this perplexing world.

I was met by a crowd that would swell to hundreds of the holiest Jews I have ever had the privilege to bask in their presence.

I felt total Jewish unity.

Achdus in the truest sense of the world.

We were there to daven at sunrise in front of the house of the most powerful person in the world.

There was no agenda other than saving Jews and loving Jews.

This was not arranged by any political organization or agenda-driven group.

Rather, this was a grassroots effort by Jews, some who had risen at 2 in the morning (or never slept) to daven at sunrise and beseech Hashem with our collective hearts.

The Tefilla was something I had never experienced in my life.

Neila, Simchas Torah, and Tisha B'av were woven into one davening.

There were sobs and cries, dancing and singing, and most of all, heartfelt Tefillos from the depths of our souls.

There were Sefardim, who did Birchas Kohanim.

Chassidim in their traditional Jewish garb.

And plenty of regular Jews all united in one purpose- to plead for the Jewish people following the worst pogrom in our history since the Holocaust.

I felt sorry for my fellow Jews who did not experience such a davening that was unmatched in the annals of communal Jewish Tefillah.

No one cared what you wore or what group you were aligned with.

You were welcome if you were there to ask Hashem for the Jewish people to be safe.

There was no need to check your organizational credentials, no need to ask if you were Modern Orthodox, Chareidi, or secular- it was a time when the entire Jewish people were in danger and a time to unite in Tefillah.

The Minyan ended, and I returned for a brief rest at the hotel to gather my strength for the great Event.

Part Five- The Great Event

After a brief rest at the hotel, I called a taxi for the trip to the National Mall.

I took a cab as far as I could go- he left me off about half a mile from the Event.

From there, I began the trek on foot.

It was then that the radiance and beauty of Klal Yisroel began to shine in full.

I saw hundreds and hundreds of Yidden coming from every direction possible.

There were Jews with headcoverings and many (perhaps most) Jews without headcoverings.

They were happy, smiling, joyful, and friendly.

We all greeted each other with love and understanding.

There was no time or reason to show your political identification; it was a time to unite to save the Jewish people.

In searching for the correct terminology to describe the joy and excitement, I must draw upon the only descriptions I have, those from our sages (Chazal).

What immediately came to mind (and I was constantly during my entire sojourn in Washington, reminded of Chazal and how they would have reacted to the Event) was the Mishna at the end of Massechta Succah.

The Mishna states:

"He who has not seen the rejoicing of the water-drawing ceremonies has never in his life seen joy!"

Indeed, someone has never been privileged to see 300,000 Jews, the overwhelming majority of them non-Orthodox, singing, dancing, and celebrating simply being the descendants of Avrohom, Yitzchok, Yakov... has never seen true Jewish unity in their life.

The procession of Jews continued endlessly.

It would eventually prove to be the largest gathering of Jews in a single place in the history of the United States.

As I walked with the throngs of my brothers and sisters, my legs miraculously became lighter and stronger.

Indeed, I was being carried along by fellow Jews in euphoric ecstasy.

I met one Jew- tattooed from elbow to hand.

I asked, "How long did it take you to get here?"

"It took me nine hours!"

"Wow, that's certainly a commitment to your people!"

He added, "The bus we hired refused to take us when they found out where we were going. So, a few of us grabbed an Uber. It cost us \$900."

My face displayed shock and disbelief.

Would I spend \$900 to sit in a car for nine hours?"

Yet, his face displayed disbelief right back at me.

"Is it not worth \$900 to help save the hostages and save additional Jewish lives?"

I asked him, "Can I give you a hug?"

He replied, "Only if you give me a Blessing that I marry a Jewish woman. After the events of these last few weeks, I have realized I have no place in the non-Jewish world. I envy you! Please bless me that I find a Jewish woman. I'll promise to light the Chanuka candles this year if you bless me to marry a Jewish woman."

I told him I was honored to meet him.

He replied, "Where I come from, there are no "real" Jews such as yourself. We need you, I need you, please Bless me!"

This was by no means a one-time occurrence.

Everyone I met, as soon as they saw my rabbinic garb, wanted to come near and connect with me.

These Jews were searching, seeking, wanting, and hoping against hope to be able to reconnect with the Jewish people.

Everywhere I went, people approached me to be photographed with me and shake my hand.

They were happy to see a Jew who reminded them of their great-grandparents.

They had no agenda except to connect with me.

As I entered the National Mall full of hundreds of thousands of Jews, a beautiful smiling Jew came over to me and asked, "Rebbe, can I make the Brocha, ""Baruch...Chacham HaRazim"? (Who knows all secrets)

The Gemara (Berakhos 58b) mentions that upon seeing 600,000 Jews, one says the blessing.

I said I was not sure the requisite amount of Jews was present.

His excitement in making the Brocha was contagious.

As the crowd grew and milled around, there were numerous Minyanim for Mincha.

Plentiful amounts of young men were offering to oblige many men who were pining to fulfill the Mitzvah of Tefillin, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

Young men and women were distributing cards to find a Torah partner.

The atmosphere was a total love for the Jewish people and authentic Jewish tradition.

Should a secular Jew be penalized if the only way he knows to associate with a Jew is to wear an Israeli flag?

After all, if everyone who knows more is ensconced in the Beis Medrash, can you blame them for not knowing more about authentic Judaism?

Part Six- 1-The Program Began

I did not listen to any of the speeches, nor did I plan to attend them or have any interest in listening to them.

Indeed, except for those who watched the "live stream" (Which I must admit, why would you? The point was physically being there, not listening to speeches), I did not meet one person interested in the content of the addresses or the speakers.

It was clear to all that the purpose was numbers.

As Agudah wrote in its letter (which I proudly disseminated), *"In light of the ongoing life-threatening danger confronting Israeli soldiers and all of our dear brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel, and with great concern about the extremely volatile political climate here in the United States, we feel it is important, midarchei ha'shtadlonus, that there be a large turnout at this event."*

Everyone knew that the purpose was not the speeches or who spoke; the intention was **"that there be a large turnout at this event!"**

This was self-evident to anyone and everyone present.

We were not there to listen or be "influenced."

We were there to "influence," and only large numbers would do the influencing.

I am not saying that no one listened to the speeches. However, no one I know felt influenced in any way by the speakers.

Rather, the spiritual impact was achieved by just being present.

2-Questionable Speakers?

Someone told me that a clergyman from a different faith spoke.

I only heard this upon my return; as I already mentioned, no one I saw (secular or observant) paid any attention to who was speaking.

However, even if a non-Jewish clergyperson spoke, it caused me no concern.

Pastor John Hagee never once mentioned (I listened only on my return to his remarks) even the slightest hint that any Jew should join with him.

Indeed, his short nine-minute speech made clear distinctions between Jews whom he supports and the fact that although he is not Jewish, he supports Israel.

He mentioned no Messianic Christian figure, and it is unimaginable that anyone there would have considered changing faiths (Chas V" Shalom) because of his presence.

Yet, even his presence, could it be possibly considered wrong?

Are we never to court or count non-Jews among our friends?

Indeed, did not Agudath Israel of America file an Amicus Brief supporting the Archdiocese of New York's appeal on assisted suicide?

<https://archny.org/a-great-victory-for-life/>

See the website of the Archdiocese of New York, where the Archdiocese writes,

"The New York State Catholic Conference filed amicus curiae briefs in opposition, written by myself and my colleague Alexis Carra. Several other amicus briefs were filed on our side by Catholic and Christian doctors, our allies in Not Dead Yet (a leading disability rights group), and Agudath Israel"

Is it wrong to cooperate with the Archdiocese of New York on issues of mutual need?

Would anyone ask the question because the Agudah filed an Amicus Brief with the Archdiocese, "What's wrong with being a Christian?"

I think not.

Yet, there is much greater precedent to seek the assistance of not only a pastor but, if needed, even The Pope himself!

And I base myself on the great Rav Aharon ZT" L.

As we know, and this was confirmed by a leading Torah scholar, the rally had the status of Pikuach Nefesh.

To quote, "It is pikuach nefesh (an issue of life and death) to fight the Chamas and to stop these attacks." Therefore, in dealing with life and death situations, we must (it's a Chiyuv- obligation) work with everyone, even if need be, the Pope himself.

I am, of course, referring to the man to whom we are subservient and must subjugate our own personal biases and politics.

We are submissive to HaGaon HaTazddik Moreinu HaRav Aharon Kotler Zecher Tzadik L'Brocha.

Here are the saintly and critical words and opinions of the leader of all of Torah Jewry:

"Believing that unity was crucial to rescue, Rav Aharon advised putting aside political and ideological differences and closing ranks among all Orthodox factions to further rescue activities.

Vaad Hatzalah was to be an umbrella organization spanning the gamut of American Orthodoxy and included the Agudath Harabonim, Agudas Yisrael, Young Israel, OU, and many others.

He attempted to work with Reform and secular Jewish leaders and non-Jews as well.

When he was criticized for meeting with the leading Reform Rabbi Stephen Wise, ***Rav Aharon famously declared, "I'd work with the Pope himself, if it would help save the fingernail of one Jewish child."***

<https://mishpacha.com/with-fire-in-his-eyes/>

(Mishpacha Magazine- December 20, 2022)

Let's understand the magnitude and greatness of this man who towered above anyone in our generation.

Rav Aharon was the undisputed Daas Torah for Torah Jewry.

Even the slightest deviation from his teachings can only lead Chas V'Shalom to destruction and calamity.

Rav Aharon said, ***"I'd work with the Pope himself, if it would help save the fingernail of one Jewish child."***

Must I say more?

If Rav Aharon would ***"work with the Pope himself, if it would help save the fingernail of one Jewish child"*** do we dare we absent ourselves from an event that has been already defined as Pikuach Nefesh- whose purpose is to save Jewish lives just because a non-Jewish clergyman is "speaking?"

If Rav Aharon would work with the Pope to save Jews, can the supportive speech of a non-Jewish pastor be the reason for thousands of Jews to absent themselves from a rally defined as Pikuah Nefesh? Can we be more Machmir (strict) than Rav Aharon Kotler Zt"l???

If Rav Aharon would "work" with the Pope to save the "fingernail of one Jewish child," do we dare absent ourselves from an event defined as Pikuach Nefesh because a pro-Israel non-Jewish speaker is speaking about saving Jewish lives?

I was there.

I was an eyewitness.

It's impossible to imagine that "someone will ask, "What's wrong, after all, with being a Christian?"

Yet, even if one entertains this far-fetched possibility that this unlikely (almost unthinkable) possibility exists, does it justify precluding EVERYONE from attending an event that was certainly Pikuach Nefesh? Just as Rav Aharon never considered the remote possibility that if he "worked" with the Pope to save a Jew, someone would say, "What is wrong with being a Catholic?"

So, too, here, if we can potentially save one Jewish life, do we dare not allow a non-Jewish clergy member to show support for the Jewish people?

Part Six- What Question Was Actually Asked?

However, being present at such a momentous event, and I saw it with my own eyes, *there was* a question most Jews were asking.

Yet, it was not the question of "Why not be a Christian?" Rather, it was the question, "What's wrong with being a Frum Jew? After all, these Frum Jews understood the reality better than we did."

This is the question I heard time and time again.

Yet, were we there to answer them?

Or did we stay home and allow others to dominate the narrative?

Part Seven- What's Wrong With Senator Schumer?

Senator Chuck Schumer also spoke at the rally.

Again, it was only later that I heard complaints that he is not our spokesman as he led the crowd with the chant of "Never Again."

As mentioned, I did not listen to Senator Schumer or any of the speakers; however, to state he is disqualified to speak for Jews seems somewhat contradictory based on his normal stops and visits.

For a person who is "not our spokesman," he certainly hobnobs in the "right" circles without too much criticism.

Mr. Schumer is a supporter of abortion and same-sex marriage.

(see <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/24/nyregion/24schumer.html>)

Yet, not only did he speak at the rally, but he is also an honored and invited guest at great Rabbinical courts.

On November 14, 2021, Senator Schumer visited Kiryas Yoel.

"Senator Schumer also paid a visit to the home of the Satmar Rebbe at his home in Kiryas Joel where he was warmly welcomed by the Rebbe and received a bracha for Hatzlacha."

<https://vinnews.com/2021/11/15/schumer-to-satmar-rebbe-this-is-such-a-beautiful-kehilla-video/>

Would one make a case that the Rebbe should not have invited Mr. Schumer?

Could not a Satmar Chassid, who saw the honor, respect, and prestige given to the Senator, now conclude, "What's wrong with same-sex marriage?"

After all, if the Rebbe himself gave such Kavod and honor and a Brocha to a man who supports one of the most serious transgressions in the Torah, why wouldn't a simple Chassid ask, "How wrong can that transgression be?"

It is obvious that most people are intelligent enough to distinguish between people and some of their personal beliefs.

(Indeed, in the video, one sees the over-the-top honor and respect given Mr. Schumer- indeed, the Rebbe himself took time away from his own Talmidim (as is pointed out in the video) to show respect and to honor Mr. Schumer.)

Part Eight- Back to the rally

The more Frum Jews we would have had there, the more people would have asked, "Where have you been all these years? Where is my Yiddiskiet? I need you!"

Friends, the overwhelming majority of the Jews who came were not Torah observant.

No, they did not come to celebrate secular Zionism.

The majority of them were never card-carrying Zionists, nor do they know what secular Zionism means.

They came from Los Angeles, Florida, Texas, and all over North America not to spread secular Zionism.

No, quite the opposite.

They spent thousands of their hard-earned dollars and gave up their time, work, and family time, and many were concerned for their safety for one reason and one reason only.

They came because they wanted to identify with and help the Jewish people.

Most of them are secular Jews who are more opposed to Israeli policies than your average Chareidi Jew.

Most of them have no formal contact with Torah Judaism.

Most of them are not even Zionists.

They are simple Jews!

Yet, they came.

Not to proselytize their secular ideology.

When Hatikva was played, they did not know the words.

Indeed, they were so distant from "celebrating secular Zionism" that many did not even know what Hatikva was.

They came to say, "We are Jewish. Embrace us. We want to learn. We come not to teach, for we have nothing to teach. We come to beg you to embrace us and to console us. Please accept us and teach us."

As mentioned, I spent the entirety of the rally (as did almost everyone I knew) connecting with fellow Jews.

Jews who sacrificed far more than me to attend the rally.

Jews who know not about Chareidim and secularists.

Jews who were begging me and clinging to me for one thing, "Love me. I am your long-lost brother and sister. Please do not forsake me!"

The Jews who were there gave me Chizuk.

After all, I always knew that I am a Jew, and it was not hard for me to publicly state, "I am a Jew."

Yet, for these Jews, their entire world was shaken as they believed they were Americans, yet now they know they are Jews.

Do we dare abandon them?

Part Nine- Concluding Words

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld (December 1, 1848 –February 26, 1932) was the Chief Rabbi and co-founder of the Edah HaChareidis, the Chareidi Jewish community in Jerusalem, during the years of the British Mandate of Palestine.

The Event recorded here occurred in the early 1930s in the Holy City of Yerushalayim.

Besides Rav Zonnenfeld, the only participant is Rav Blau.

BACKGROUND

Rabbi Moshe Blau was an Agudas Yisroel activist and a 6th-generation Old Yishuv.

He was the editor of Agudah's local weekly, Kol Yisroel. He was the brother of Rav Amram Blau of Neturei Karta.

From 1933-1945, Rav Blau headed the Chareidi community in Jerusalem.

This Event is recorded in the autobiography of Rabbi Moshe Blau: "Al Chomosaich Yerushalayim"; Netzach Publishing, Bnei Brak, 1967; Pages 114-115.

The narrator is Rabbi Moshe Blau himself, and this entire chapter deals with Rabbi Blau's relationship with his Rebbe, Rabbi Zonnenfeld.

(All comments in parenthesis have been added by me for background explanation. All words bolded were done by me for emphasis).

Rav Blau begins his narrative:

"One day, I left Shaarei Zedek Hospital in his (Rabbi Zonnenfeld's) company. It was Tu B'Shevat.

I noticed from afar that students from the secular, non-religious schools were approaching us: boys and girls, male and female teenagers, with the Zionist flag at the front of each group.

They were singing the 'worker's' songs."

(Could Rabbi Blau be referring to "The Internationale," a left-wing anthem?

Or perhaps he is referring to their singing of "HaTikva"?

The secular Zionists were closely associated with the Socialist Movement, and we were ideologically anti-religious.)

(Back to our Story and Rav Blau, our narrator):

"They were walking four abreast, and the people on the street were pushed to the sides of the road.

I knew that the sight of a few thousand boys and girls from non-religious schools walking in a parade immodestly dressed and without gender, separation would cause Rabbi Zonnenfeld pain.

Therefore, I told him, "**The parade of children from the (non-religious) schools is coming; perhaps the Rebbe wants to return to the hospital building?**"

"No" was his answer. {He then asked:}

"Are these not Jewish children?"

We were pushed to the side of the road, as was everyone else.

The parade continued as each school marched in its own contingent, with the sound of their songs penetrating the air.

I noticed that Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld was murmuring with his lips. I bent my ear [towards him], and I heard him saying and repeating:

"May Hashem increase you, increase you and your children.

Blessed are you to Hashem."

(Tehillim 115; 14-15)

[He repeated the words] until the entire parade passed us."

These are the exact words recorded by Rabbi Moshe Blau, a man whose anti-Zionist credentials have never been questioned.

Rav Moshe Blau was a man of truth, and he recorded the Event exactly as he witnessed it.

Rabbi Zonnenfeld was not a Zionist.

He did not approve of mixed activities.

He did not approve of modern approaches to Judaism.

Yet, no matter how hard he fought against those whom he felt were promoting an anti-Torah agenda, he never lost sight of the reality that: **"Are these not Jewish children?"**

As I watched child after child parade down the National Mall, I recalled the words of the saintly Torah-true leader of our people.

I recalled the words of Rav Zonnenfeld, a man from whom my own father was privileged to receive a Brocha.

And I, too, asked, **"Are these not Jewish children?"**

Yet, there was a difference.

The children parading before Rav Zonnenfeld were, in truth, not only celebrating but actively promoting and embracing anti-Torah ideology.

Rav Zonnenfeld could have easily escaped and sheltered himself, as Rav Blau suggested inside the Sharei Zedek hospital.

Yet, Rav Zonnenfeld stood his ground.

Rav Zonnenfeld, as he stood watching the parade of scantily clad boys and girls singing HaTikva or some anti-Torah socialist song, could have thought, "If people see me here, maybe they will ask, "What's wrong with being a secular Zionist? After all, Rav Zonnenfeld is here and watching."

Yet, Rav Zonnenfeld did not ask such questions.

Rav Zonnenfeld did not retreat.

Rav Zonnenfeld was not afraid.

Where others undoubtedly saw anti-Torah ideals, Rav Zonnenfeld saw promise and potential.

Yet, most of all, when Rav Zonnenfeld saw Jewish children- (whoever they were), he wanted to be a part of them; he wanted to be present at this show of Jewish identity, even if they were misguided.

He knew Jewish children are the future of our people, and politics and aesthetics and what others might think can never and did never cloud his holy mind.

Yet, it did not stop there.

Rav Zonnenfeld saw an opportunity to bless where others saw immodesty.

Rav Zonnenfeld saw beautiful Jewish children, whereas others saw impropriety.

Rav Zonnenfeld saw an opportunity to bless where others would have opted to balk.

Rav Zonnenfeld asked the question which needs to be constantly asked:

"Are these not Jewish children?"

Were these not 300,000 Jewish children on the National Mall last Tuesday?

Epilogue

When I was driving back to Passaic, the words that entered my mind were the concluding phrase of the Avodah on Yom Kippur.

"Ashrei Ayin Ra'asa Kol Eleh"- "Fortunate is the eye that witnessed this largest gathering of Jews in the history of the United States.

However, by Wednesday, people started (most were not even present at the Event) to quote to me that so and so said not to go, and the "WhatsApp" recordings were alive and viral with claims and

counterclaims condemning and condoning the Event- and suddenly, the end of that sentence crept into my mind.

"Halo L'Mishma Ozen Da'Ava Nafsheinu"- "The words my ears now hear cause my soul to be distressed and pained."

The "hok", the tumult, the accusations, and counter-accusations had begun in earnest.

With all the post-event tumult, I felt that nothing was gained and much was lost.

I took ill on Wednesday and crept alone with my thoughts into my bed.

Yet, respite from the "fallout" was not to be.

The Frum world seemed more consumed with the latest developments on the tumult on Yeshiva World News than with the hostages' plight.

What was a day of connecting with fellow Jews had become a tumult of "my Rebbe said this, and your Rebbe said that."

Suddenly, the hostages no longer mattered.

The murdered Jews no longer mattered.

All that mattered was the "hok," the tumult, the gossip.

And that made me sick, lonely, and frightened.

Postscript

It was a day where I spent over an hour speaking to a non-Torah observant woman and being inspired by her sense of obligation and responsibility to the Jewish people.

This woman was my age.

She was warned by her alienated from Judaism sons not to attend the rally.

She had to make arrangements for her dog to be walked.

She, too, had no interest in listening to speeches.

She did not celebrate secular Zionism, and she certainly did not know (as I didn't) when and if HaTikva was sung and if a non-Jewish clergyman addressed the audience.

She came for one reason.

Against objections from her family and friends, she came as she said to me, "To identify as a Jew and to help protect Jews."

No more, no less.

I left the rally feeling more inspired and uplifted than I had from any other Jewish event I had ever attended.

However, I arrived home on Wednesday to find myself alone, empty, and longing for a Rav Aharon Kotler who would **"work with the Pope himself, if it would help save the fingernail of one Jewish child"**.

I took ill (from which I have not recovered), feeling alone, bereft, and bereaved from the torrent of messages, questions, and counterclaims, all from people whom the overwhelming majority were not even there.

Jews whom I respected seemed more interested in the "hok" (the tumult surrounding the Event) than the lives of Jews.

And that has left me broken, scared and lonely.

I write these words at 4:01 AM as sleep is denied me.

After almost six and a half decades in this difficult and often painfilled world, the question that haunts me and allows me no existential tranquillity is the question of Rav Sonnenfeld, **"Are these not Jewish children?"**

Why is this question so difficult to answer?

With feelings of love, loneliness, and great emotional pain,

Ron Yitzchok Eisenman

Editor's note-

I have tried my best to answer the many queries and questions sent to me over the last week.

I have done my best to be respectful, civil, and fair.

I have always quoted sources for my words when appropriate.

I have tried to follow Chazal's words. – as the Gemara tells us in Bava Metzia 84a- Rav Yochanan preferred Reish Lakish over Rav Elazar bar Pdas, who just gave confirmation bias to Rav Yochanan.

However, Reish Lakish would ask twenty-four questions on every premise of Rav Yochanan, and by doing so, "the truth of the learning" came forth.

Such has been my humble endeavor.

I add to my postscript one section from a letter from The Imrei Emes where he expounds upon the importance of outside critique:

(Not that I consider myself a worthy critic- rather, I quote the source for its own merit)

1924, the Gerrer Rebbe, HaRav Avraham Mordechai Alter TZ" L (known as the Imrei Emes), visited Eretz Yisroel.

He met with HaRav Kook ZT" L, who he refers to as an "Ish HaEshkolos"- a rare and high praise.

See Talmud Bavli Sotah 47b, where Rav Yehuda says such a person "Contains everything."

Rashi explains that such a person has "Kol HaTorah Kula" (all of the knowledge of Torah), among other desirous traits.

The Imrei Emes further says that Rav Kook has "lofty character traits" (Midos Teromios).

The Imrei Emes began writing this letter on his trip back from Eretz Yisroel to Poland.

Toward the end of the letter, he writes that he first thought to travel via Munkatch to meet with the Belzer Rebbe as he heard that the Belzer Rebbe opposed Agudas Yisroel, which the Imrei Emes strongly supported.

However, The Imrei Emes writes that when he stopped in Vienna, he was informed of the Belzer Rebbe's true reason for not joining the Agudah.

After hearing the reason, he decided not to travel to meet the Belzer Rebbe, as his reason for not joining was cogent and justified.

What was the reason for the Belzer Rebbe not joining?

And why did the Imrei Emes accept and even justify the Belzer Rebbe's position?

The Imrei Emes writes that the Belzer Rebbe was not against the Agudah per se.

Rather, the Belzer Rebbe felt there always has to be someone "on the outside" to be able to see things as an outsider and not as an "insider."

The Imrei Emes then writes something so profound, so insightful that each time I read it, I get a chill down my spine from his insightfulness and wisdom.

The Imrei Emes explains that an organization may do something "She'Eino Tov"- which is "not good."

And, continues the Imrei Emes, the way of those who are in the organization is to "cover-up" the "not-good."

Therefore, explains the Imrei Emes, the Belzer Rebbe's non-conformity should not be perceived as being "anti" the Agudah; rather, he will serve the critical role of the man "outside" the organization to provide a justified and necessary critique of the organization and policies.

What is quite refreshing and inspirational in the comments of The Imrei Emes is his profound recognition of the necessity of outside critique and oversight over "his" own organization.

His humility and his recognition of the reality of the danger of "confirmation bias" (before the term was even coined) among even the greatest of people leaves me in genuine awe of this great and foresightful man.

Outsider's viewpoints are critical and needed.

It is and has always been the hallmark of True Torah learning.

Insiders' viewpoints, no matter how great they are, will always slant toward protecting the establishment and its policies.

The recognition of this human fault by the Imrei Emes leaves me (and many others) in reverence and esteem for this great man's insight into the human condition.

(See "Osaf Michtavim", Jerusalem 5727; page 82)