

Yom Hashoa, Yom Ha'Zikaron, & Yom Ha'atzmaut: Israel's "High Holiday Season"

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I want to tell you the story of Yehiel and Tzipporah Rosenfeld. Yehiel was born in the town of Opatow, in southern Poland; and Tzipporah was from Lodz, Poland's third largest city. When Yehiel was 18 and Tzipporah was 14 they met in the Nazi forced labor camp Skarzysko, where they were both interred during the Holocaust. According to legend, Tzipporah was initially more interested in Yehiel, and he sort of rebuffed the advances of this much younger camp in-mate. But she was persistent, and eventually the two fell in love, despite the inhuman, barbaric conditions of the labor camp. By the time the Russians liberated the camp the two had gotten engaged and three weeks later, theirs was the very first Jewish wedding to be celebrated in Lodz after the war.

But Yehiel and Tzipporah knew that their future did not lie in Poland or Europe for that matter. Tzipporah, already pregnant, obtained a permit to enter British Mandate Palestine in 1946, accompanying a group of children. Yehiel on the other hand was denied entry and attempted to sneak into Palestine, as did many other Holocaust survivors who wanted nothing more than to flee European continent. Yehiel was arrested by the British authorities and held at an internment camp in Cyprus for 15 months, missing the birth of their baby boy, and not knowing the fate of his beloved wife. When Yehiel was finally released, he joined Tzipporah and their now 7 month old son Yosi in Kfar Etzion, a kibbutz situated in the Judean Hills between Jerusalem and Hebron. This kibbutz was a destination for many Holocaust survivors and refugees. It is in the heartland of biblical Israel, on Derekh Ha'Avot, the road between Hebron and Mt. Moriah, the Temple Mount; it is the very same place where Ruth gathered grain, where King David shepherded his flocks, where the Maccabbis and Bar Kochba soldiers fought battles and hid out in caves. On November 29, 1947 the United Nations approved Resolution 181, better known as the partition plan for Palestine. It was perhaps the original "Two State Solution." The land was to be roughly divided between sovereign Jewish and Arab states. The City of Jerusalem was to be under international administration. The Jewish reaction was euphoric...people poured into the streets, dancing arm-in-arm, celebrating the dawning of a new Jewish nation. The Arab response

was unanimous refusal. Not long after the UN voted to support partition, the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, helped by Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Libya, launched a full blown attack on the Jewish state.

It was decided that the mothers and children of Kfar Etzion would be evacuated to Jerusalem. But Tzipporah Rosenfeld refused to leave her husband's side. They sent their son Yossi along with the other children to safety in Jerusalem, while they stayed and fought to defend the southern approach to Jerusalem. But surrounding, hostile Arab villagers overwhelmed the kibbutzniks. When they realized they were outnumbered and outgunned, the Jews surrendered. Many had fallen in the fighting. Although the survivors laid down their weapons, the Arab legions massacred every Jew in Kfar Etzion, with the exception of just 4 survivors who managed to hide. 240 were killed on that day, including Yehiel who was 24, and Tzipporah who was 20...just a few years after being liberated from a concentration camp. They survived the Shoah; survived Hitler; survived the Nazis; only to be killed in defense of the Jewish people in the land of Israel. The Knesset declared that the day of that battle in Kfar Etzion would be forever memorialized as Yom Ha'Zikaron, Israel's national Memorial Day.

Yosi, who became an orphan at just a year old, was adopted, grew up in a loving family, graduated from the Technion as an electrical engineer, and served in the Israeli Air Force for 21 years, retiring as a colonel. He went on to a successful second career in Israel's high tech industry. He and his wife have 6 children, 3 boys and 3 girls. Their eldest son is named Yehiel for his father, and their eldest daughter is Tzipporah in memory of his mother.

This Shabbat, we straddle Yom Hashoa, Holocaust Memorial Day, which was just this past Thursday, and Yom Ha'Zikaron Israel's memorial day followed immediately by Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, on Wednesday and Thursday. In this country these days often come and go without much pause. Last week I attended not one but two Yom Hashoa memorial services, one sponsored by the greater Jewish community, the other here at Har Shalom, organized by our own members, religious school and survivors. Both were meaningful; both displayed respect and honor for the catastrophic loss of life that was the Holocaust. And at both ceremonies I thought to myself, 'Where is everybody?' The community-wide ceremony,

this year at B'nai Israel was well attended enough, but they didn't have to add any extra chairs, and I'd say the average age in the room was between 75-80. Here at Har Shalom, there were many more empty seats than occupied ones. I'm not saying this to make anyone feel guilty or to sit in judgment. We are a community that is separated by time, by geography, and by experience from the Holocaust. Moreover, we have museums, memorials, films, books, testimonials; kids in public schools all over America read Eli Weisel and Anne Frank as required texts; even the U.S. Congress convened a memorial service on Thursday where our very own Hazzan Ozur Bass sang in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. But it's a holiday without fixed ritual...there is no official book that we read, no Torah portion or Haftarah, no statutory prayers, no fast, no ceremonial meal. We receive the yellow yahrzeit candle from the Men's Club to light, but besides that, most of us still aren't quite sure what we're supposed to do. I drove my kids to school on Thursday morning. My 15 year old usually plugs her phone into my car's radio so she can play her own music on those drives. Just as we were turning into the parking lot of their school it occurred to me that jamming to her tunes for the last 20 minutes was probably not in the spirit of Yom Hashoa...and I'm a rabbi!

But in Israel, Yom Hashoa has a totally different meaning. Cars on highly trafficked highways and thoroughfares come to a halt, as drivers stand in the road beside them at the sound of the memorial siren (this happens on Yom Ha'Zikaron as well). Israeli philosopher and Rabbi Donniel Harman writes that Yom Hashoa, Yom Ha'Zikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut are “the High Holiday season in Israeli life.” Historically, Yom Hashoa was observed almost as a contrast to Israel's Memorial and Independence Days. Yom Hashoa represented the helpless Jew; the Jew who went like sheep to the slaughter; the defenseless Jew...while Yom Ha'atzmaut and even Yom Ha'Zikaron stood for Jews who defended themselves; Jews who are self-determining, independent, strong, and the masters of their own destinies. It was this contrast between the Jewish life of the past and the new Jewish life of the present that reinvigorated the purpose of Zionism for so many.

Today, however, Israelis have a more nuanced view of Yom Hashoa, just as many of us do. We know that plenty of Jews resisted; that many Jews went to heroic lengths to save themselves as well as others; we know about remarkable revolts and underground armies that fought their

oppressors on many fronts. Yom Hashoa today is not as much about the powerless Jews of the past, but the new, rising specter of anti-Semitism has given new meaning to this holiday. Europe is once again hostile ground for many Jews, to say nothing of the Arab world. I saw it with my own eyes when I went to France after the killings at the kosher grocery store in Paris. There is hysteria, disillusionment, and fear all over again about whether Jews have a future in Europe; about whether Jews can trust their governments, their societies, and their neighbors to stand up for them and protect them from a rising tide of Anti-Semitism.

Anti-Zionism is the new form of Anti-Semitism in many of the very same places where Nazis rounded up Jews and sent them to their deaths less than a century ago, and that scourge of Anti-Zionism has crossed the sea and begun to nest in America's college campuses. Who can say the words "Never Again" without noticing that again seems more and more like *now*.

Professor Hartman says that "all modern Jews are survivors." On Yom Hashoa "we are like a family that mourns our collective losses together." Next week, after we pay homage to the modern heroes of the Jewish people...men and women like Yehiel and Tziporah Rosenfeld who fought valiantly and made the ultimate sacrifice to defend the modern Jewish state, we will joyfully celebrate the 68th year of the modern miracle that is the State of Israel. And as we do, we continue to hope for to yearn for to work for an Israel that is worthy of the many sacrifices that have been made for its existence. May the blood of the martyrs of the Shoah and the soldiers who wore the uniform of the first Jewish army in 2,000 years never be spilled in vain. We pray that Israel continues to live up to the noble legacy of all these holy martyrs, and shines brightly as a light unto the nations. And we Jews who live in the Diaspora...we have a responsibility too, and it's not only to stand up for Israel or to defend the Jewish state wherever it comes under attack, though we must surely do that as well. In the parasha this morning we read: *U'shmartem et chukotai v'et mishpatai asher ya'aseh otam ha'adam, ve'chaim bahem*. You shall keep my laws and my rules, and you shall live by them. I happen to be inspired by the chassidic interpretation of that verse which is that the Torah is telling us that the proper way to fulfill mitzvot is *with life* and passion; That Judaism is not meant to be lived without feeling or enthusiasm...but '*with chay*,' *with life*, with vitality.

Our charge is to live Jewish lives of meaning and significance; Jewish lives that are worthy of those who gave up theirs so that this precious heritage could become yours and mine. Honor our forbearers by being proud of your Judaism; don't take it for granted...celebrate it! Live it every day! Make it compelling and beautiful for your children and grandchildren. Then we will not only honor our past, but we will also secure our future for many generations to come.

Shabbat Shalom