

"Everyone Has a Name"
BeMidbar 2016

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This morning's Torah reading contains the census and includes names of the leaders and members of tribes in the wilderness. Hearing the recitation of names reminds me of the poem by one of Israel's most popular and beloved poets, Zelda Schneurson Mishkovksy, known simply as Zelda. She wrote a poem widely recited on Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron called, "*L'chol Ish Yesh Shem*, Everyone Has a Name."

Having grown up in a traditional Jewish home, her poem was inspired by a famous midrash in Kohelet Rabbah which says that "A person is known by three names. One that he is called by his father and mother. One that people know him by, and one that he acquires for himself." She wrote:

לכל איש יש שם
שנתן לו אלהים
ונתנו לו אביו ואמו

Everyone has a name
given to him by God
and given to him by his father and his mother.

לכל איש יש שם
שנתנו לו קומתו ואופן חיוכו
ונתן לו האריג

Everyone has a name
given to him by his stature
and the way he smiles.
and given to him by the fabric he wears.

לכל איש יש שם
שנתנו לו ההרים
ונתנו לו כתליו

Everyone has a name
given to him by the mountains
and given to him by his walls.

לכל איש יש שם
שנתנו לו המזלות
ונתנו לו שכניו

Everyone has a name
given to him by the constellations of stars
and given to him by his neighbors.

לכל איש יש שם
שנתנו לו חטאיו
ונתנה לו כמיתהו

Everyone has a name
given to him by his sins
and given to him by his longings.

לכל איש יש שם
שנתנו לו שונאיו
ונתנה לו אהבתו

Everyone has a name
given to him by his enemies
and given to him by his love.

לכל איש יש שם
שנתנו לו חגיו
ונתנה לו מלאכתו

Everyone has a name
given to him by his celebrations
and given to him by his work.

לכל איש יש שם
שנתנו לו תקופות השנה
ונתן לו עיורונו

Everyone has a name
given to him by the seasons of the year
and given to him by his blindness.

לכל איש יש שם
שנתן לו הים
ונתן לו מותו.

Everyone has a name
given to him by the sea and
given to him
by his death.

And so on this week, when we read the names of our ancestors who wandered in the wilderness, and are reminded by the poet that each name represents a life, and that each life is precious, I want you to hear four names: Ilana Naveh, Ido Ben Ari, Michael Feige, and Mila Mishaev.

Know that each of them had a name, and more than that, each had a life. In the words of the Talmud, each life was a world to their loved ones. Each had hopes and dreams, aspirations and accomplishments, and loved ones. As the poet Zelda reminds us each name had a life.

Ilana Naveh, age 39 was a mother of four, was celebrating a friend's birthday in Tel Aviv.

Ido Ben Ari, age 42, an executive at Coca Cola in Israel and recipient of a prestigious award for his military service in Sayaret Matkal, an elite army unit, was enjoying a meal with his wife Tal and their two children in Sarona in Tel Aviv when he was shot.

Mila Mishaev 32 years old, was about to be married in a few months was waiting to meet her fiancé when she was shot and killed.

Michael Feige, 59 years old and father of three was a sociologist and anthropologist who lectured about war and terrorism and was the head of the Israel Studies at Ben Gurion University was the recipient of a prestigious award for his book, "Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories" . Described by a colleague as a "gentle and peaceful man" he was gunned down by terrorists in the killing spree in the heart of a popular outdoor mall area, similar to Bethesda.

How to respond to such evil, and what to make of it?

One response, the Israeli response is not to give in to terror. The very next day the outdoor market area, where I dined just a month ago was once again packed with people. Last night a Kabbalat Shabbat service was held there.

We often are told that Palestinian terrorists who commit these terrible acts of violence have a grievance. They had a brother or cousin who was killed, or an uncle who was locked up for throwing rocks at Israeli police. What no one seems to mention is that the Israeli victims of terror also have brothers and cousins and relatives. Yet they do not become terrorist bombers. They do not go out and seek revenge. In fact, many of them, become even more determined in their quest for peace.

I wish the world should stop coddling terrorists and finding excuses for those who kill people whose only sin is that they are Jews. They should stop rationalizing and blaming despicable unacceptable acts of murder on political factors. Instead the focus of attention should be on what to do about a culture which celebrates violence, a society which encourages, nurtures and celebrates acts of terror. This is what must be condemned and ostracized. This is what must be boycotted and sanctioned.

Just the other day, in a surprisingly honest revelation Ban Ki Moon, the Secretary General of the UN admitted that due to pressure by the Saudis he was forced to remove them from the list of governments whose military actions threaten the lives of children. And they talk about the power of Jews to control the media?! Israel does not have the financial resources to compel its detractors to have investigators turn away. Not that it wants to, or seeks to do so. It would be happy if critics looked at the whole picture and understood the greater context rather than to view Israel in isolation.

So what is the response? Just the other day, a young man from Itamar, where there was a terrorist attack 14 years ago, which killed his mother, father and siblings, and where he lost a leg just got engaged at a soccer stadium in Israel in the presence of tens of thousands of people. The response to vicious hatred is love.

And the response is to remember, not to forget. Honor their memories. Remember that each has a name, and the names are Ilana Naveh, Ido Ben Ari, Michael Feige, and Mila Mishaev. May their names be for a blessing.

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