

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

Acharei 5779

The opening verse in Acharei (16:1) makes reference to the death of Aharon's two eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu. Rav Menachem Mendel Taub, the Kaliver Rebbe zt"l, who passed away last week, offers a deeply meaningful and poignant interpretation of this heart-rending event. I present it in light of the commemoration of Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah).

The Kaliver Rebbe, for those who have seen pictures or videos of him, was the only rebbe of a major Chassidic sect not to have a beard. This was so because when in Auschwitz, he was diabolically experimented upon by Mengele himself resulting in his inability to grow a beard and have children. The Kaliver Rebbe was a leader in pushing for more Holocaust commemorations in the Chassidic/Charedi world. He lamented the fact that people only really remember the Holocaust on Yom HaShoah but otherwise block it from their mind. He said, "If you were there - if you saw how they took a baby from his mother and threw him into a fire - you would never forget." Hours before his liberation, the Nazis were trying to kill as many Jews as they could. The Rebbe screamed SH'MA YISRAEL and said, "Ribbono Shel Olam. This might be the last time I recite Sh'ma Yisrael. If you let

me live, I will make it my mission that the living continue to say Sh'ma Yisrael." The Rebbe survived and indeed made it his life's mission to inspire people to recite the Sh'ma at every event he held.

The Kaliver Rebbe turned tragedy and terror into an opportunity to spread Torah and sanctify HaShem's Name. How he found the strength to do so may be understood in a remarkable insight from his writings. (Kol Menachem (Vol II), Acharei Mot) The Rebbe noted the Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 21:1) that connects ACHAREI MOT SH'NEI B'NEI AHARON to L'DAVID, HASHEM ORI. The connection is found the word B'ZOT. We find B'ZOT in B'ZOT YAVO AHARON EL HAKODESH - With this, Aharon will come to the Kodesh (16:3) and we find it in IM TAKUM ALAI MILCHAMA, B'ZOT ANI VOTEI'ACH - If a war will come upon me, in this I trust (T'hilim 27:3).

The Kaliver Rebbe suggests that after the tragic passing of Nadav and Avihu, it must have felt like a churban, an incomprehensible tragedy. These were the two young stars destined to become the leaders of the next generation. How could Aharon possibly continue without being mired in despair?

The answer is that B'ZOT YAVO AHARON is inherently linked to B'ZOT ANI VOTEI'ACH, and both to MEI-EIT HASHEM HAYTA ZOT. "With this, Aharon will approach the Sanctuary" connects with, "in this, I will trust." And what is this "this?" "This is the Lord's

doing..." (T'hilim 118:23).

We may never understand why unspeakable calamities occur, but the fact that HaShem, is forever our Light and Savior - ORI V'YISH'I, is a source of eternal comfort and undying strength. In this, we trust! No doubt, this idea gives us a glimpse into how the Kaliver Rebbe was able to move on after suffering through the hell of the Holocaust.

Rav Soloveitchik articulated a similar theology in his distinction between GORAL (fate) and YI'UD (destiny). (Kol Dodi Dofek, ch. 11) Fate is when circumstances are forced upon us. We have, over the millennia, suffered the fate of unjust and obscene virulent hatreds. We have been oppressed with torture and death, all foisted upon us simply because we were Jews - GORAL. Yet, that terrible, imponderable fate notwithstanding, we never allowed ourselves to surrender to despair and hopelessness. What drew us up and above the persecution and agony was our unflagging commitment to a great destiny, one which was ours to shape - YI'UD.

After ACHAREI MOT, when death strikes, the Jew remembers K'DOSHIM TIHYU (19:1). The kaddish is tearfully recited and then he defiantly pushes forward. As a people, we refuse to allow the holocausts of our history to define us. Rather, we drive on with the indomitable faith that HaShem has empowered us to become a GOI

KADOSH, a Holy Nation, one that possesses the great spiritual resources to transform tragic events into moments of infinite meaning and worth.

Indeed, B'ZOT YAVO AHARON is a demonstration of the fact that after horrendous misfortune, we can declare MEI-EIT HASHEM HAYTA ZOT and B'ZOT ANI VOTEI'ACH, and then instead of asking the "why" question, challenge ourselves with the "what" question, and resolve how we can become better people in the wake of the tragedy.

This was the courageous declaration of Rabbi Yisroel Goldstein, the rabbi of the Chabad synogogue in Poway California, who in the aftermath of the terror and murder in his Shul (2019), was resolute in his powerful commitment to build only goodness upon the ruins that evil wrought.

May this be our collective resolve as well. 🙌