

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

POTEACH ET YADECHA - YOM HASHOA

I need to preface this entry with an apology. I ask forgiveness up front from all the relatives and friends of the hostages who live every day as a nightmare, not knowing what is happening with their loved ones. I don't even want to imagine what it must be like because I can't handle it. That said it might be very difficult for these people to hear about the Holocaust and survivors who are telling their stories on TV, while own loved ones are still missing. This is more than understandable - but the following was how I was reacting to Yom HaShoa last year and, therefore, it seems cold and insensitive in its ignoring the current situation. Please accept this as coming from a good place, a time when the circumstances in this country were significantly different.

When I listen to the memories recounted by Holocaust survivors, aside from it being shocking and disturbing beyond words, I am amazed that these people managed to stay alive at all. This is what surrounds us in Israel on Yom HaShoa, and it probably should surround us more often because we should never let these things be forgotten. I look at the faces of the children who are listening to the report of an eyewitness and it is so clear that they cannot imagine what is being

relayed. I can't either. It is beyond them. It is beyond me as well. Before I got married and had children, I read every book I could about the Holocaust. I don't really know why. I hope it wasn't out of morbid curiosity. I like to think that it was an attempt to understand that which is truly beyond comprehension. And what affects me most this time of year when, in Israel you can't escape the fact that there was a nightmare called the Holocaust; and when you are surrounded by eyewitness testimonies, is my awe for these survivors. 'Awe' is an insufficient word. Admiration? More. Shock? Yes. Astonishment? For sure. These are people who did more than fight to live.

There were numerous uprisings against the Nazis by these "Jews who went like sheep to the slaughter". We only hear of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and revolt in the Sobibor concentration camp (where 300 out of 600 prisoners succeeded in escaping). But various ghettos had uprisings which, unfortunately, had little success. But can you imagine even attempting something of the sort? We Jews in Israel (as well as in CHu"L) are so amazed when we read of how the people here in 1948 were able to defeat the overwhelming odds of all the Arabs against them when they had very little to fight with. Guns? Planes? Ammunition? Etc. Now relate that to the Jews who knew it was suicide, but still "fought" against the Nazis. With what? If they were to be killed, then at least they

would take Nazis with them.

Ultimately, I can never get past the simple fact that someone could live through that living hell and survive. Not only survive; these people who are giving their testimonies did more than that. They thrived. They built homes, had families and prided themselves in this revenge against Hitler. Many of them lived quite long lives. And I ask myself: HOW? How was it possible for them to get through all that? What kept them going? Certainly, some of it had to do with "luck" and circumstances that helped them but that is not enough. From where did they get the strength, the hope to keep on?

I don't know, but maybe this is one of the meanings of POTEI'ACH ET YADECHA UMASBI'A L'CHOL CHAI RATZON - Gd opens His hand and fills all living things with RATZON - desire. Will. These people were blessed with the will Gd gave them and were strong enough (and "lucky" enough) to use it to save their lives.

Gd gave all of us RATZON. Will we use it?
How? ❀