

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

## Emor

Yom Yerushalyim is some weeks away, but a particular Midrash quoted by Rashi in Parshat Emor brought to mind a powerful message, one that I illustrate by a true story below.

First, though, the Rashi (22:32). The Torah declares that one must not defile Gd's Name and then adds, "... and I shall be sanctified among the Children of Israel." If one is exhorted not to profane Gd's Name, can one not infer the opposite, that Gd's sanctification will necessarily follow? The answer of the Midrash is quite intense. The latter phrase comes to command, "surrender yourself and sanctify my Name." In other words, it is not sufficient to remain passive and simply refrain from doing anything wrong. Rather, one must proactively pursue that virtuous behavior and perform that worthy deed whose act will proclaim that a Kiddush HaShem has taken place.

It is for this reason that Rav Soloveitchik maintains that Rambam (Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 5) conflates sanctifying Gd's Name not only with martyrdom but with the more mundane, commonplace ethical challenges that when met remind us that one may sanctify Gd's Name through noble and dignified living as well as when called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice of one's life.

Hopefully, most of us have the necessary moral spine to refrain from committing a crime. We are careful not to desecrate Gd's Name with delinquency. However, to volunteer to inconvenience ourselves, to put ourselves out for another's welfare, such acts of chesed and charity may not come so naturally. To sacrifice our time and effort, to willingly share our financial resources to help someone else requires an exercise of will to do the right thing no matter the cost.

Could this be what the Psalmist had in mind when he said (T'hilim 34:15), "Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it." Indeed, spurn and shun all evil, but that's just not enough. We are enjoined to marshal our abilities to do good. And when we feel reluctant to exert ourselves or encounter obstacles along the way, remember, we must not waver but instead, doggedly "seek" and "pursue" that goodness.

And when we do, we will become a walking "Kiddush HaShem!"

Our behavior will bear witness to Gd's presence in the world. We will elevate ourselves to "a bit lower than the angels and we will be crowned with glory and splendor" (T'hilim 8:6). We will have acquitted well our reason for being and will have earned the reward of the righteous.

Here then is the true story of one such individual.

Nissim Gini was born in Jerusalem in 1938. When Nissim was in the 4th grade, and 9 years old, hostilities culminating in Israel's War of Independence began. The Old City was blocked and the Jews who lived there were totally isolated, with only 200 young soldiers left, with very little ammunition, to defend the population. The soldiers resisted as much as they could, but many died or were captured. The siege intensified and there were fewer and fewer Jewish fighters left. The civilians, then, joined the efforts to defend the city. The situation of the Gini family was not easy. The father, who had a bakery in Machane Yehuda, had been caught outside the Old City before the blockade began, and was not able to enter the Jewish quarter. Nissim's mother, blind in both eyes by a terrible illness, was in charge of her four children. Chaya, the older sister, who was 14 years old, volunteered in Batei Machaseh, an improvised infirmary where a few nurses and volunteers treated the wounded. Many children, such as Nathan, Nissim's older brother, who was 12 years old, also volunteered. The children brought coffee or food to the soldiers and helped as much as they could.

Nissim, 9, also volunteered. Probably due to his skills in the game of "hide and seek", Nissim knew perfectly well all the corners, the shortcuts and the secret passages of the Old City. Nissim, was very mature, awake and especially

brave. Nissim helped the soldiers carrying weapons and ammunition from one to the other. But the most important thing that Nissim was doing was to slip away at night, avoiding the enemy sight, to identify and inform the Jewish soldiers of the movements of the Jordanian troops. Eyewitnesses tell that Nissim often ran under a rain of Jordanian bullets to fulfill his mission, risking his life to find the Jordanian snipers. The intelligence brought by little Nissim was absolutely critical to the brave Jewish soldiers, and his actions saved lives.

On May 27, 1948, Nissim went home to eat a hot meal, but before he could taste his mom's food, a young man came looking for him: "Your replacement did not arrive", he told him, "we need you at the observation post." When Nissim was about to leave, his mother, frightened by the sounds of the bullets that were increasingly closer, said: "Leave him here, outside is getting very dangerous." Several witnesses remember what Nissim said to his mother at the time: "What do you want, mom, that I stay at home while the others die?" And Nissim left. Nissim arrived at the observation post, near where Yeshivat Porat Yosef stands today, next to the Kotel. In a tragic moment, Nissim raised his head and a Jordanian sniper shot him and mortally wounded him. Nissim was taken to the infirmary of Batei Machaseh. There, he was treated by his own sister, Chaya, who desperately

tried to stop the blood. But she did not have the appropriate medical equipment to help Nissim, and the next day Nissim Gini died of his wounds.

That day, after having resisted heroically for 14 days, the Rabbi of the Old City of Yerushalayim, Rabbi Benzion Chazan, raised the white flag and the city surrendered. The Jordanians took about 500 Jews prisoners, and the rest of the Jews were taken out of the city. The body of Nissim, along with the other seven deceased soldiers, remained in the infirmary of Batei Machaseh.

In June 1967, with the help of HaShem and His multiple and incredible miracles, the Israeli Army conquered Yerushalayim. An elderly Arab citizen asked to speak with the highest-ranking officer. The elder took the officer to a corner of the city and said, "The bodies of a few Jews are buried here. I buried them myself in 1948. The Jordanians wanted to burn the bodies, but I did not allow them." The army unearthed the bodies, but the fighters could not be identified. Except for one: Nissim Gini, because he still had his baby teeth ... The remains of Nissim were taken by order of Rabbi Shlomo Goren to the cemetery on Har HaZeitim. After a few years, the Israeli Army recognized Nissim Gini as the youngest fallen soldier to have served in the Israel Defense Forces, and a plaque was erected in his memory in the Har Hertzl military cemetery.

We may not be called upon to display the heroism of a Nissim Gini, but we can and must be no less heroic in pursuing a life of proactive goodness and righteousness as human beings created in Gd's image.