

A response to the murders in France

It is our mission to call out to Hashem loud and clear: “We have never forgotten You, Please do not forget us either”

Only a few months have passed since the holy city of Jerusalem was struck with the shocking blow as two disgraceful and murderous descendants of Yishmael entered a Shule and ruthlessly butchered four Jews, Talmidei Chachomim, holy and pure, in the middle of their morning prayers, enshrouded in their tallis and crowned in their tefillin.

And once again we stand speechless, with a shattered heart as we absorb the painful horrors that occurred in France as another enemy of the Jewish People murdered four holy and pure Jews as they made the purchases in preparation for the approaching Shabbos. Instead of returning home with delicacies to honour and enjoy the Shabbos, their holy souls were returned to their Father in Heaven, after being shot for no reason except for the fact that they were Jews, decedents of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

The words from the additional morning prayers recited on Mondays and Thursdays that have poured forth from Jewish hearts for generations, take on a special meaning in this most trying period of time:

“הבט משמים וראה, כי היינו לעג וקלס בגוים, נחשבנו כצאן לטבח יובל, להרוג ולאבד ולמכנה ולחרפה, ובכל זאת שמך לא שכחנו, נא אל תשכחנו.”

“Gaze from the heavens and see that Your people have become disgraced amongst the nations, considered as sheep to the slaughter. To be slaughter, banished, smitten and shamed... However throughout it all and in spite of the trials and tribulations Your people have never forgotten Your Name, please Hashem do not forget Your People.”

Once again, as a People facing yet another tragedy we search for meaning and seeking guidance we yearn for the words that will bring comfort to sooth the intense pain that

manifests in every Jewish heart and strengthen our resolve to pick ourselves up and move forward once more. We wonder how are we to continually deal with such calamity and beg for an answer to the eternal question posed by Dovid HaMelech: “למה יאמרו הגוים איה נא אלקיהם, ואלקינו בשמים כל אשר חפץ עשה” ‘Why should the nations of the world question: “Where is your G-d?” While You remain in the heavens and are able to do as You desire.’ (Tehillim, 115-2)

The “Covenant of Blood” between Hashem and the Jewish People

It is vital that each of us makes a private Cheshbon HaNefesh (spiritual accounting) in the face of the atrocities perpetrated against our People and commit to strengthen our connection to Torah and Mitzvos. However now is not the time for accounting for our spiritual failings that may have led to this great tragedy. Such insight is for the spiritual leaders of the generation who have chosen not to reveal the hidden meaning for why Hashem has allowed these disasters to occur. It may well be that there is no reason that can justify the brutal killing of four precious souls for committing no crime other than being Jews.

What is incumbent upon each of us is to know that we Jews the Chosen people, were being prepared to sacrifice ourselves from the beginning of Jewish history, as Nimrod threw Avaraham Avinu into the fiery furnace, as he was willing to be *moiser nefesh* in a demonstration of ultimate sacrifice to Hashem. His child Yitzchak was also prepared to be sacrificed upon the alter for the sake of Hashem and ever since then our forefathers have charted a path for their descendants that they must be willing and prepared to die in order to make a *Kiddush Hashem*.

The covenant of *mesirus nefesh* was further established as part of the national charter of the Jewish People at *Matan Torah* as *Moshe Rabenu* fortified the “Covenant of Blood” between Hashem and the Jewish People through the division of the blood of the *Olah* and *Shelamim* sacrifices that were equally divided with half being cast upon the altar and the other half being thrown upon *Bnei Yisroel* as is detailed in the following verses (Shemos 24:5):

«וישלח את נערי בני ישראל ויעלו עולות ויזבחו זבחים שלמים לה' פרים. ויקח משה חצי הדם ושם באגנות וחצי הדם זרק על המזבח, ויקח ספר הברית ויקרא באזני העם ויאמרו כל אשר דיבר ה' נעשה ונשמע. ויקח משה את הדם ויזרוק על העם ויאמר, הנה דם הברית אשר כרת ה' עמכם על כל הדברים האלה»

The mysterious “Covenant of Blood” is explained by the Holy Apta Rebbe in his *Sefer Oihev Yisroel* (Parshas Shekalim):

«והנה דרך האנשים הכורתיים ברית יחד, והיו לכשר אחד ודעה אחת, אז דרכם למסור כל אחד ואחד נפשו עבור חבירו, ונמצא דמם מעורב יחד, כי הדם הוא הנפש שהוא עיקר כח הנפשי, וכמו שכתב האברבנאל בספר מצמיח ישועה, דשורש הדבר של כריתות הברית הוא הנוהג שבעולם, כששני מלכים כורתיים ברית לתווך האהבה ביניהם, ולהיות כל אחד בעזר וסיוע של חבירו, אז שותים כל אחד כוס יין, וכל אחד נוקף אצבעו, ומורידים טיפה של דם לתוך הכוס, וכל אחד שותה כוס המעורב בטיפת דם של חבירו, וזה הדבר מורה שמערבים את דמם הוא החיות שלהם, כי הדם הוא הנפש, להיות להם לב אחד ויהיו בהם אחדות, וכל אחד מחויב ליתן דמו ולמסור נפשו עבור חבירו, זהו כריתות הברית.

והנה מלכותא דרקינא כעין מלכותא דארעא, ולרמז זה לקח משה רבינו ע"ה רבן של כל הגביאים חצי הדם ושם באגנות... וחצי הדם זרק על המזבח... ומן הדם שבאגנות זרק על העם, לרמז שכביכול הדמים שהם הכוחות מעורבים זה בזה, ושיהיה הכח ביד ישראל למסירות נפש על קדושת שמו יתברך ויתעלה, והוא הוא כריתות הברית, ויאמר הנה דם הברית אשר כרת ה' עמכם, להיות עמכם ביחוד גמור וברא דאחד».

“It is customary that when people form a partnership they become willing to be *moiser nefesh* one for another in a way that their blood becomes mixed. The reason for this is that the blood contains the *Nefesh* and its essential properties are within. The Abarbanel uses an analogy, that it was once common practice among Kings of the Nations upon forming a treaty and pact together they each drink from a cup of wine. At a certain point each one dips their finger in their cups of wine and sheds a drop of blood into the cup. They then exchange cups and drink from each others cup in a demonstration of love and commitment to each other by uniting their essential souls and becoming one.

The Kingdom of Heaven mirrors the Kingdom on this World and alludes to the reality that when *Moshe Rabenu* threw the blood on the altar and on *Bnei Yisroel* it formed a eternal bond between Hashem and the Jewish People who will be willing to be *moiser nefesh* throughout the ages for the sanctification of His holy name. In that way Hashem and *Bnei Yisroel* are forever united.”

The Covenant of Blood that was sealed at *Matan Torah* as an inseparable component of the Chosen Nation who have been willing and prepared ever since to be *moiser nefesh* rather than surrender their faith in Hashem no matter where or at what point throughout Jewish History. The test of *mesirus nefesh* throughout the Jewish History strengthens our bond to Hashem as it prepares us for the ultimate salvation when the “Covenant of Blood” will be replaced with a “Covenant of Life”, as the prophet Jeremiah (31:30) states:

“הנה ימים באים נאום ה' וכרתי את בית ישראל ואת בית יהודה ברית חדשה... כי זאת הברית אשר אכרת את בית ישראל אחרי הימים ההם נאום ה', נתתי את תורת בקרבם ועל לבם אכתבנה והייתי להם לאלקים והמה יהיו לי לעם”.

“Days are coming, says Hashem, whereby will formulate a new covenant with the House of *Yisroel* and the House of *Yehuda*, for this will be the covenant that I will establish with the House of *Yisroel* after these days...I will place my Torah in their midst and upon their hearts I will engrave it and I will be for them a Master and they will be my nation.”

In this most difficult period in our history we must sharpen our spiritual senses in order to hear the call of Hashem echoing from heaven: ואעבור עליך ואראך מתבוססת בדמיך, ואומר לך: “ואעבור עליך ואראך מתבוססת בדמיך, and I passed over you and saw you lingering in your blood, and I said to you “In Your blood you shall live, in your blood you shall live.” (Yechezkel, 16:6)

Hashem here reveals to us that when Jewish blood is spilt like water He does not conceal Himself from us but rather shares our suffering and bears witness to how throughout the generations we have been willing to linger in the blood of sacrifice. Whether it was the decrees of Ta"ch v"tat, the ruthless pogroms in whichever foreign land we found ourselves in or the loss of six million precious souls, Hashem strengthens us with the words: “in your blood you will live.” It is the blood of *galus* that will precede the eternal “Covenant of Life” of the future redemption.

Furthermore we must remember the rules of war. Each nation is aware and consciously sends their soldiers into battle with the knowledge that there will be casualties and even deaths. As the Jewish People we too are in a perpetual battle for our existence as the people of Hashem committed to Torah and Mitzvos. Our battle though is not waged with bombs and bullets, tanks and warplanes, rather it is in our desire at moments when we suffer the deepest challenge to strengthen our resolve to remain faithful and loyal servants of Hashem under any circumstance and with no compromise whatsoever.

The nations of the world and our enemies remain jealous of the bond and cannot accept the fact that we rejoice in the fulfilment of the Torah and our commitment to the *Mitzvos* and therefore challenge that bond by spilling our blood, hoping that perhaps it will destabilize our resolve, weaken our relationship with Hashem and diminish our Jewish Pride.

It now rests upon our shoulders to continue as did our forefathers throughout the generations to stand strong and declare before those who seek to harm us: "Your evil plans will never be able to sever the eternal "Covenant of Blood" that exists between us and HKB"H".

As a united people we proclaim and pray to our Merciful Father in Heaven: "Gaze from the heavens and see that Your people have become disgraced amongst the nations, considered as sheep to the slaughter. To be slaughtered, banished, smitten and shamed... however throughout it all and in spite of the trials and tribulations Your people have never forgot Your Name, please Hashem do not forget Your People."

We must raise our voices and plead until our prayer shatter the gates of Heaven:

"אם שכחנו שם אלקינו ונפרוש כפינו לאל זר, הלא אלקים יחקור זאת כי הוא יודע תעלומות לב, כי עליך הורגנו כל היום נחשבנו כצאן טבחה, עורה למה תישן אדני הקיצה אל תזנח לנצח, למה פניך תסתיר תשכח ענינו ולחצנו, כי שחה לעפר נפשנו דבקה לארץ בטננו, קומה עזרתה לנו ופדנו למען חסדך".

"If we have forgotten the name of our G-d and turned to foreign Gods, the Hashem you investigate as only You are aware of what is concealed within the heart of man. For we have sacrificed ourselves every day as sheep to the slaughter. Awaken! Why do you sleep my Master? Do not abandon us for eternity. Why have you concealed Yourself from us and forgotten our pain and suffering? Please have mercy upon us and redeem us." (Tehillim 44:21)

We will conclude with the testimony of our Sages who declare that the holy and pure souls of those that were murdered *al Kiddush Hashem* are now in a most exalted place in heaven that none other can stand in their presence (Baba Basra, 10:). It is not coincidental that the four returned the souls on *Erev Shabbos* as *Shabbos* is comparable to *Olam Haba*, as Hashem will tell the nations of the world, "You fools, for whoever prepared on Erev Shabbos will eat on Shabbos." (Avodah Zara, 3.)

May their souls be forever bound with the Giver of life and may we merit to see the fulfilment of the verse: **הקיצו** "Awaken and joyously sing you who dwell in the dust, for your dew is the dew of light." (Yishayahu, 26:19)

