



MARTYROLOGY

“Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey after you left Egypt ... how he surprised you on the March, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, it shall be, when Adonai your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you ... you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

Eyleh Ezkerah: These I Do Remember

These things I do remember;
O I pour my soul out for them.
All the ages long hatred hath pursued us;
Through all martyr years,
Ignorance, like a monster, hath devoured our innocent ones, our
martyrs as in one long day of blood.

Rulers have risen through the endless years, Oppressive,
savage in their witless power, Filled with a futile
thought: to make an end of that which God has
cherished.

Interpretive translation by Nina Soloman

Rabbi Akivah was condemned to death by the romans for teaching Torah to his students. As he was being tortured before being put to death the sun rose – the hour for reciting the morning Shema had come. Rabbi Akivah said the words of the Shema and smiled.

Rufus, the Roman officer in charge of the execution and a former friend of Rabbi Akivah called out, "Old man, are you a sorcerer or a fool that you smile while in pain?" "Neither," replied Akivah, "but all my life, when I said the words, 'You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart and soul and might,' I was saddened, for I thought, when shall I be able to fulfill this commandment completely? I have loved God with all my heart and with all my possessions, but how am I to love God with all my soul -- was not assured to me. Now that I am giving my life at the hour for saying the Shema, and my resolution remains firm, why should I not smile, even rejoice?" And as he Spoke, his soul departed.

Talmud Berachot 61b (Adapted)

Al sheloshah devarim
Al sheloshah devarim
Al sheloshah devarim
ha'olam, ha'olam omed.
Al hatorah ve'al ha'avodah
ve'al gemilut chasadim.

On three things the world stands:
On Torah, on worship, and on deeds of loving kindness.

Pirkey Avot 1.2

[[Read silently]]

During the Crusades and the Middle Ages, uncounted thousands of Jews and dozens of Jewish communities in Europe and the Middle East were massacred and destroyed. Many more were terrorized and looted.

The Inquisition's racks and fires and the period's forced conversions were not legends. Thousands of Jews died martyrs' deaths, and thousands more made the bitter choice to become converts, albeit in name only. Still others chose exile.

Because of religious fanaticism, millions of innocent Jews were slaughtered, and a living and vibrant Jewish culture was destroyed. Spanish and Portuguese Jewish culture lay dead or dormant until the dawn of European Enlightenment.

And yet, as has happened throughout our long history, our forced exile and dispersion made it possible for the living tree of Jewish life to take root and flourish in many lands, and thus made possible our survival as a people.

[[Continue to read silently]]

The blood of the innocent who perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Treblinka, and Theresienstadt, cries out to God and humanity. We will never forget the burning of synagogues and houses of study, the destruction of holy books and scrolls of Torah, the sadistic torment and murder of scholars, sages, and teachers. They tortured the flesh of our brothers and sisters; but they could not crush their spirit, their faith, their joy.

We recall our brothers and sisters in the Warsaw Ghetto and in

other hellish places who valiantly rose up and defied the monstrous adversaries.

We recall the heroism of those who, in the face of unprecedented and overwhelming force, maintained Jewish life and culture, and asserted Jewish values in the very midst of enslavement and degradation.

Even as we mourn, we recall with love those precious few compassionate men and women of other faiths and nationalities who, at the risk of their lives, saved some of our people. Truly, "The righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come."

O Adonai, God of Compassion, remember Your martyred children. Remember all who have given their lives for 'kiddush Shemecha' -- the sanctification of Your name and all those who have given their lives to keep Your children from harm.

SHOES

Near the ghetto's dusty road
A little boy stands silently
Watching as a wagon rolls
In front of him towards history

Staring as the wagon passed
His eyes grew wide as they did find
A thousand pairs of empty shoes...
Who left these shoes behind?

Some were tiny like a nut
Some were large and weatherworn
Some still had their laces on
And some had shreds of leather torn

My, God, the little boy did think
I've never seen so many kinds
But where are all the missing feet
That left these shoes behind?

Suddenly he saw a pair
That he knew he had seen before
His Daddy's boots stood proud on top
Then this poor boy could look no more

But every night in trembling dreams
His father stumbles as if blind
On weeping soles of empty shoes
That someone left behind

Music and Lyrics by Brad Sachs

This poem was written by the rabbi of the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh

A Minyan Plus One

was taken from us on the Shabbat,
the most joyous of the holidays,
the only holy day even God Himself celebrates, the emulation of
Eden, the day of completion.

Before they could perform the service,
Before they could take their seats and begin the prayers,
before the ark opened and the Torah revealed,
before they could rise and sway
and chant their portion,
the book opened like wings in their steady hands,
though they know the blessings by heart.

Before that week's Torah portion,
A minyan plus one was taken.
When they would have once again
heard the story of when Abraham,
our first Patriarch of Chutzpah,
approached and argued with the Lord:
"Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

And He was answered:

"For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

And so, as on other days, on that day –
He did. He allowed the wicked
to sweep away the righteous.

*And when the Lord had finished
speaking with Abraham, He left.*

And took a minyan plus one.

And Abraham returned home.

Ani ma'amin; ani ma'amin; ani ma'amin;
be-emuna sh'eymah
b'vi-yat ha-mashiahh, ani ma'amin;
V'af al pi sh'yitma-mey-ha,
im kol ze ani ma-amin.

In memoriam

Let us remember our dearly beloved sons and daughters who gave their lives for the liberation of our homeland and the security of our people. They gave all they had. They poured out their very lifeblood for the freedom of Israel, even as the living waters quench the thirst of the arid soil. Not in monuments of stones or trees shall their memories be preserved, but in the reverence and pride which will, until the end of time, fill the hearts of our people when their memory is recalled

David Ben Gurion

A protest... a prayer

Dear God, so much innocent bloodshed!

We are supposed to be created in Your image, But O how we have distorted it.

When we recall the inhuman acts of humanity, at times we are ashamed to be human.

When we read of the nobility of their victims, we are proud to be Jews.

Teach us, O God, to honor our martyrs,

By being vigilant in defense of our people and of people everywhere,

And by fighting cruelty, persecution, and hatred wherever it may exist.

Help us, O God, to draw strength from our faith, And give us the courage, Compassionate One, to live by our faith.

May we always remember the tragedies and injustice that have been visited upon our people, but may we never become collectors of injustices.

May we always remember that every act of evil is balanced by ten thousand acts of compassionate kindness.

As we remember the suffering and evil that has befallen our people, may we never forget the uncounted acts of kindness that sustain our world.

Where there is hatred, may we bring love.

Where there is pain, may we bring healing.

Where there is darkness, may we bring light.

Where there is despair, may we bring hope.

Where there is discord, may we bring harmony.

Where there is strife, may we bring peace.

May the remembrance of our suffering make us ever mindful and compassionate to the suffering of others. Give us the strength to begin to repair the world, and let tikkun olam begin with us.

Kol ha'olam kulo, gesher tzar me'od
ve'ha'ikar lo lefahed k'lal.

The entire world is a very narrow
bridge.

The essential thing is to have no fear at
all.

[Attributed to Nachman of Bratzlav]

Mourner's Kaddish, p.1216