

Show No Fear

Moses, the Previous Rebbe, and the Yudkins—how to fear nothing.

May G-d Avenge His Blood

On Pesach Sheni 5784, IDF soldier Yisrael Yudkin from Kfar Chabad fell in Gaza. He was one of four brothers from the family serving in the IDF, all of whom fought in the recent “Operation Iron Swords.”

When the tragic news of Yisrael’s death reached his parents, they faced the difficult decision of where to bury him since Kfar Chabad does not have a cemetery. The family decided to bury him in Jerusalem. Yisrael’s father wanted him to be laid to rest on the Mount of Olives, the most important cemetery in Jewish tradition, but his mother was concerned that she wouldn’t be able to visit due to the security risks. When representatives from the IDF suggested the military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, the family agreed.

In Israel, it is customary to erect a headstone on the thirtieth day after burial (in Chabad the custom is to do this immediately after the seven-day shiva period, on the eighth day). When the Ministry of Defense, which oversees military cemeteries, contacted the family about the inscription for the headstone, the family requested to include the abbreviation “hy”d” (“Hashem yikom damo” - “May G-d avenge his blood”) immediately after their son’s name. This is an ancient tradition

used to honor those who were killed because they were Jewish; the request is for G-d to avenge the blood of the Jew who was murdered solely because they were a member of the chosen people.

The expression's origin is based on a verse from the Torah in Parshas Ha'azinu: "*Harninu goyim amo* — Rejoice, O nations, with His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants" (Deuteronomy 32:43). This idea is repeated in the Prophets and Writings, and we recite it every Shabbat before Mussaf in the prayer "Av HaRachamim." The terminology is very specific; we say that it is G-d who will avenge his death, not us.

To the family's shock, the Ministry of Defense informed them that according to regulations, they could not include those words on the headstone. There is a standardized inscription for all military headstones to maintain uniformity, and the Ministry of Defense prohibited the use of the phrase "hy"d" — which has been inscribed on the headstones of Jews murdered for their faith for hundreds of years.

To the Yudkin family, this was unacceptable. Because no agreement was reached, the family arrived to the unveiling on the Shloshim only to discover that the headstone was empty. The Ministry of Defense placed a blank headstone on Yisrael's grave. Why didn't the army allow the inscription? Nobody had a good reason; perhaps the name of G-d was objectionable, or the concept of "avenging" seemed to clash with their "humanitarian" ideals.

The Yudkin family decided not to back down. They launched a

public campaign through the media, stating they would take the issue to the Supreme Court if necessary. They even threatened to exhume Yisrael and transfer him to a civilian cemetery where they could honor him according to Jewish tradition.

This sparked a huge public outcry. Knesset members and ministers got involved, and the issue was discussed in the Knesset. This was at a time when the army was trying to recruit Haredim and promising to meet their spiritual needs, which made this all the more sensitive; here was an issue deeply painful to the religious community, and yet the army was unwilling to show goodwill.

After a well-publicized and intense campaign with the intervention of the Minister of Defense, the Ministry of Defense decided to amend the regulations and allow the inscription “hy”d” after the names of fallen soldiers.

In recent days, it has become clear that this is not a new debate. Since the establishment of Israel, many families have requested to include this abbreviation, but the Ministry of Defense consistently refused, and the families acquiesced to the regulations. However, the Yudkin family did not back down, paving the way for hundreds of other families to honor their loved ones with this inscription.

Why is this terminology so important? According to the Kabbalistic book “Ma’avar Yabok,” saying “Hashem yikom damo” (“May G-d avenge his blood”) is beneficial for the soul of the deceased; it brings comfort to the murdered when this phrase is mentioned in their memory (341:10).

When Moses Was Secretly Afraid

Our Parsha this week skips ahead 38 years. Last week, we were still discussing the Exodus from Egypt and the story of Korach, which took place in the second year after leaving Egypt. In Parshas Chukas, we read about events that occurred 38 years later, in the final year before entering the Land of Israel.

As the Israelites approached the borders of the Promised Land, they encountered two nations responsible for protecting all the inhabitants of Canaan from hostile forces: the nation of Sichon, king of the Amorites, and Og, of the land of Bashan. Sichon and his brother Og were giants, and everyone feared them.

First, the Israelites approached Sichon, whose nation resided outside the Promised Land but collected taxes from all the Canaanite kings to prevent attacks against them. When the Israelites requested passage through his land, Sichon could not agree: "He said to them, 'I am here solely to guard against you, and you ask this of me?'" (Rashi, Chukas 21:23). He came out to fight them, and, as the Torah recounts, the Israelites defeated him and conquered his land.

Then, towards the end of the Parsha, the Israelites approach the land of Bashan, closer to the Land of Israel, and Og came out to fight them. Here, there is an interesting verse: G-d said to Moses, "Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand... and you shall do to him as you did to Sichon" (Chukat 21:34).

Well, if G-d told Moses, "Do not fear him," it seems to imply that Moses was indeed afraid. But why, the Talmud asks, was Moses not afraid of the earlier war with Sichon? What changed that

caused him to fear Og?

Clearly, Moses was not worried about Og's physical strength. Rashi explains: "Moses feared that Og's merit from the time of Abraham would stand by him" (21:34). Hundreds of years earlier, Abraham's nephew Lot was living in Sodom. During a great war between Sodom and other nations, Lot was taken captive, and it was Og who came to inform Abraham that his nephew was captured, giving Abraham the opportunity to rescue him. Now, Moses was concerned that this merit might protect Og. Therefore, G-d reassured him.

The Rebbe once pointed out an interesting point in this interaction. Moses feared Og, but he didn't breathe a word of it to anyone. The Talmud says, "From the response of that righteous person (Moses), you can understand *what was in his heart*" (Niddah 61a). He kept his fear hidden in his heart.

But why? If he feared Og's merit, why didn't he share his fears with Israelites?

The Rebbe answered that Moses was the leader of Israel. He knew that if he showed any sign of fear, it could weaken his people and give strength to the opposing side. Therefore, he was careful to keep his fear hidden. Only G-d saw what was in his heart—and then told him, "Do not fear."

The Previous Rebbe's Fearlessness

This Thursday, Yud Beis Tammuz, we will celebrate the release of the Previous Rebbe from Soviet imprisonment nearly a century ago. In 1927, the Communists banned all Jewish

activities, closed synagogues, shut down mikvahs, and arrested rabbis. It was a terrible time; the entire country was enveloped in dread, and no one knew what the next day would bring.

The Previous Rebbe then rose up with a small group of Chassidim and established a “Chassidic underground,” whose mission was to ensure that Judaism would not be forgotten. They secretly set up mikvahs, gathered Jewish children to teach them Torah in hidden cellars, ensured that every city had a clandestine shochet, and that circumcisions were performed.

Of course, the KGB gradually became aware of these activities. After numerous warnings, they finally appeared on the night of 15 Sivan and informed the Rebbe that he was under arrest.

As he was being led into the fearsome building known as “Shpalerka,” a name which struck terror into the hearts of Russians throughout the country, he resolved that he would not be afraid at all. He would treat his interrogators as if they were insignificant; he would even speak to them only in Yiddish!

In the Rebbe’s own words: “The arrest took place on that night... when the Russian ambassador in Poland was killed, and they decided that they had to kill a number of people in his country. Despite this, his initial entry into imprisonment was with the determination that his conduct would be with expansiveness.” The Rebbe knew that all the Jews of the Soviet Union were looking to him to see if he would survive the imprisonment. If he would show fear, others would completely succumb to the Soviet regime.

So, he knew that he needed to show no sign of fear at all, not in

action, not in speech, and not even in his facial expression. And, the Rebbe concluded, this approach succeeded and led to his release.

The Rebbe derived a lesson from the Previous Rebbe's behavior:

When you go to fulfill G-d's mission to spread Judaism, you should never entertain doubts about your success, and even more crucially, don't let such thoughts affect you. Speak with strength and certainty, knowing that you are on G-d's mission—and you will surely succeed.

Good Shabbos.

(Based on the talk of 12 Tammuz 5725, Torat Menachem vol. 44, p. 80).