

CONGREGATION AGUDATH JACOB

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*From the Desk of
Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner*



'May G-d Avenge Their Blood'

How do we remember Jews who were murdered?

זְכוֹר - Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you were leaving Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way, and struck those of you who were hindmost, all of the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d. (Deut. 25:17-19).

And the LORD said unto Moses: "Write this as a Remembrance in the Book, and recite it in the ears of Joshua: that I shall surely erase the memory of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar, and he called its name "Hashem is my Miracle [Ado-nai Nissi]". And he said: 'The hand is on the throne of the LORD: Hashem maintains a war with Amalek from generation to generation (Ex. 17:14-16).

As the names of the hostages tortured, raped & murdered by Hamas were released, many of their co-religionists, responding online to this unthinkable atrocity, looked

to Jewish tradition and parlance. "**Zichronam Livracha**," some of them typed. "May their memories be for a blessing." That is indeed the phrase usually utilized to mark the passing of a Jew, and it was heartfelt.

But I have to admit that it (z"l) was also, in this context, insufficient and therefore inappropriate. When Jews are murdered because they are Jews—by a Nazi in Auschwitz, by a terrorist in Nir Oz, or by an anti-Semite in the U.S.—then the traditional phrase we use is different, and sharper, it is almost a "cry" to G-d Almighty similar to Moses's cry to Hashem seeing his people's suffering in the dungeons of Egyptians slavery – it's a cry imploring Hashem's intervention –

וַיִּצְעַק אֶל ה'

Hashem Yikom Damam, we say.

May G-d avenge their blood. This phrase draws on several biblical verses, paralleling the 13th-century prayer known as *Av HaRachamim*, which, commemorating those murdered in the time of the Crusades, cites the Psalms:

**לִמָּה יֹאמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם
אִיהֶם אֱלֹהִים**

Why should the nations say, "Where is their G-d?"

Let it be known among the nations in our sight that You avenge the spilled blood

And it says: "For He who exacts retribution for spilled blood remembers them. He does not forget the cry of the humble".

Prayers such as these illustrate something fundamental about Judaism. Memory is central to Jewish life; that is why we pray after any death that the individual z"l who has passed should be remembered. Yet when it comes to murdered Jews, our recollection of how they died must be joined forever with a prayer for divine vengeance and divine retribution.

You would be totally correct in asking, why is there such a difference in the way we remember our dead....

Contrary to what Christianity would suggest from their practitioners, Judaism will not "Forgive" nor "forget" the atrocities committed on its people. Enough is Enough.

The saying reflects the fact that when it comes to mass murderers, Jews do *not* believe that we must love the sinner while hating the sin; in the face of egregious evil, we will NOT say the words ascribed to Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

We Jews, we believe without any doubt whatsoever, that a murderer, a terrorist who rapes his victims and tortures them, who decapitates babies or burn them alive in ovens, who kills innocents civilians just because they are Jews, who sheds the blood of helpless elderly men and women knows exactly what he does; that one who brings death to those engaged in celebrating new life knows precisely what he does, that a man who shoots up a synagogue knows well what he does.

To forgive in this context is to absolve; and it is, for Jews, morally unacceptable and unthinkable. Halachically, I would even say that is part of the group of commandments of "Lo Ta'asseh" (You shall Not transgress).

But the mantra for murdered Jews that is **Hashem Yikom damam** bears a deeper message. It is a reminder to us to see the slaughter of 1200 Jews in Kibbutzim near the Gaza border not only as one terrible, tragic moment in time, but as part of the story of our people, who from the very beginning have had enemies that sought our destruction.

There exists an eerie parallel between Amalek, the tribe of desert marauders that assaulted Israel immediately after the Exodus, and the Hamas murderers. The Amalekites are singled out by the Bible from among the enemies of ancient Israel because in their hatred for the Chosen people, they attacked the weaklings in the rear, the helpless, those who posed no threat to them in any way. Similarly, many among the dead in those Kibbutzim were elderly or disabled, Holocaust survivors and their children and grandchildren; the murderer smote "all that were enfeebled," and he "feared not G-d".

Amalek, in Jewish tradition, embodies evil incarnate in the world; we are commanded to remember Amalek, and the Almighty's enmity for it, because, as Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik explained, the biblical appellation refers not only to one

tribe, "Amalek", but also to our enemies throughout the ages who will follow the original Amalek's example.

To say **Hashem Yikom Damam** is to remind all who hear us that there is a war against Amalek from generation to generation—and we believe that, in this war, G-d is not neutral.

It is therefore inappropriate to merely say "May their Memories be for a Blessing." We must treat these kinds of murders differently from most deaths; to do otherwise is to ignore Jewish life, Jewish tradition, and the Jewish historical experience.

When Jews bury their dead, there is a certain process called "**the ritual of Taharah**", the ritual of washing dead bodies before burial, as well as the society known as the **Chevra Kadisha**, the "sacred colleagues," members of the Jewish community who answer the call to bury our brethren, as emotionally searing as it may be. When one person dies, members of the Jewish community often step in to care for the body and the family. When 11 (more than 10 people, a Minyan) people die, the whole community become part of the mourning process.

The logistics are complicated. Eleven bodies have to be accompanied, washed, and buried. Eleven funerals have to be planned. Families move into an intensive period of mourning, called **Shiva**, that lasts for up to seven days and **Shloshim**, that lasts for up to thirty days after the burial. In order to be completely accurate about the law requiring "**the Ritual of Taharah**", I need to add this important addendum.

"If an Israelite is found slain," we are informed by the **Shulchan Aruch**, the Jewish code of law, "they bury him as they found him, without shrouds, and they do not even remove his shoes". If the bodies are being buried in their original condition, then there is no "**ritual of Taharah**", rather, they are buried in the clothes in which they died. If we are able, if autopsies do not intervene, we bury murdered Jews in the clothes soaked in their blood that was shed. *(If you had the opportunity to watch the Israeli Chevra Kaddisha called "Zaka" at the site of October 7th massacre, you would have seen how these "amazing Holy people" were looking all over around the slain or burn bodies for traces of blood which they were required by Law (Halachah) to collect in order to bury it with the deceased bodies).*

The intent, in part, is to highlight the fact that they died **for the one and only reason that they were Jews**, and to inspire constant recollection of their murder, to

inspire eternal outrage, on the part of the Jewish people—and on the part of G-d himself.

So, to mark the memory of the murdered as a blessing, without speaking of just and righteous vengeance, is to treat them as anyone else who may have died.

It is to forget the fact that they died before their time and that their lives were cruelly cut short solely because of the people and faith to which they belonged.

It is with this in mind that we must mourn the murdered Jews of October 7th and after—by treating their murder as an act of evil that is an Amalekite example in our age. We thereby connect recent deaths of Jews to Amalek's assaults throughout history—from the desert after the Exodus, to the Crusades, to the Inquisition, to the many pogroms, to the Holocaust, to today.

For Jews in America, thank G-d, except in some instances, Pittsburg, Colleyville, Chabad in Poway, Los Angeles shooting, New Jersey arson attacks, Jews have been safer in their history than most other places in the world.

But don't misunderstand me, Amalek has not been yet defeated. Antisemitism has been on the rise in the United States in the 21st century, including hate crimes, vandalism, and harassment. We have to be vigilant as most of our Jewish institutions have now official Security in front of their doors...

I still remember vividly when the news from Pittsburgh broke, Jewish and Gentile Americans alike invoked George Washington's words to the Jews of Newport: *"May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants—while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid"*.

Washington loved the phrase "under his own vine and fig tree." It is taken from our Hebrew Bible, and he used it often. The fact that this country's first President applied imagery from a Jewish text to the people whose ancestors wrote those words, tells us a great deal about the blessed home that Jews found, and continue to find, here in America. Yet the context of the quote, from the prophet Micah, reminds us that we do not *yet* live in an age where nothing can make us afraid:

But in the end of days, it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the LORD'S House shall be established as the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say: "Come ye,

and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the House of the G-d of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths”

כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה' מירושלים

“for out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken.

The world that our Prophet Micah (He was one of the 12 Minor Prophets) describes is not yet upon us. Peace does not reign on earth, and the nations of the world have not all celebrated the Jewish connection to G-d, to the Torah, to Jerusalem. Nothing could illustrate this better than the fact that Micah’s words, paralleled in Isaiah, predicting an age when swords are beaten into plowshares, grace the wall outside the United Nations—while inside the building, dictators and modern Amalekites are welcomed to denounce and condemn the State of Israel from the podium.

Unfortunately, Hamas - Evil still exists, and as long as it does, the Lord is still at war **לדור ודור** from generation to generation.

We pray, that the memory of those 1200 Israelis and others at the Nova Peace Concerts murdered, too many of the tortured and killed hostages, along with over 900 Holy soldiers of the IDF, will be for a blessing.

In all cases, the eulogies described remarkable human beings who were dedicated to their people, and (ironically) to their neighbors (as so many of the “Kibbutnikim” were Peace Activists).

While we will Never Forgive or Never Forget, we must remember their deaths in an indescribable, barbaric and monstrous fashion, never forgetting that they were murdered because—**and only because**—they were Jews.

This fact will be forever on our minds, and on our lips, whenever we make mention of all the martyrs murdered, rapped, tortured, decapitated and burned alive in the horrors, the carnage and atrocities of October 7th and after...

Hashem Yikom Damam. May G-d avenge their Blood!

Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Back in the late 1950s, a young Harvard psychology professor named Richard Alpert (no, not our CAJ member Richard Alpert!) was living the high life. A prestigious job, big research grants, a nice apartment, a fancy car, lots of women to date. The dream life, I suppose, for a secular Jewish academic bachelor. He connected with a senior member of his department, the infamous Dr. Tim Leary, and began doing research on hallucinogenic drugs—and taking them. Harvard was not particularly excited about this development, and in the early 1960s fired them both.

Alpert quickly became miserable, descending into drug and alcohol abuse and chronic fear and anxiety. He continued experimenting with hallucinogens. In the late 1960s, he took a trip to India and, through a chance encounter, stumbled upon a *sadhu* (Hindu renunciate) who became his *guru*. He then began a new life. Taking the name Ram Dass, he was reborn and for the rest of his life was a celebrated author, lecturer, and spiritual teacher.

Why am I telling this story? Not for any reason related to Alpert's life trajectory, although as a former young Jewish (but not secular) academic scientist back in the day there are some elements in his story that at one time resonated within me. No, the reason that I am mentioning this is because a few years into his rebirth, as Ram Dass, he wrote one of the great classic books of the human potential movement. Published in 1971, his book *Be Here Now* has been described by some as the "bible" of the hippie era and counterculture.

Now, as religious Jews, there is much in his book that would not be relevant to our lives, of course. Ram Dass was a *yogi* and practiced Hinduism—and indeed is one of the main apostles of what came to be known as the JuBu movement, a name given to those Jews who become practicing Buddhists or Hindus. That piece of the story is not relevant here. Rather, it is the underlying theme of *Be Here Now*, its thesis statement, if you will, to borrow an academic phrase, which is most intriguing.

As Jews, so many of us spend so much of our waking life with our consciousness focused so overwhelmingly on grieving over our past, or, alternatively, on worrying about our future. For good reason, of course, as we can all recite chapter and verse on the demonic evil committed by those who have hated and continue to hate us. This includes the barbarism of Hamas over the past year and a half that I need not elaborate on. As a result, little if any time—and for some of us, no time at all, literally zero—is spent mentally being in the present moment, reflecting on and savoring Hashem's many blessings to us. In other words, we do not seem to get around to "being here now." While this may be understandable especially in light of what has been going on in

the world, in my opinion this is to our detriment, individually in our psyches and souls, as well as collectively as part of the Jewish people. Let me make clear, though, what I *do not* mean to imply by what I am saying here.

I am not suggesting at all that we should never recall nor reflect on our past, as individuals and as a people, including the wickedness and travails that we have experienced. G-d forbid. Of course we should; this a *mitzvah*. Consider how many times variations of the word *zachor* (remember) appear in *Tanakh*. We are commanded to remember, and it is a good thing, too, as we benefit from spending part of our waking life preserving our history—good and bad—steeling our resolve to face our enemies, and telling our story through the narratives contained in the liturgies of our various *chagim*. It is one way in which our future generations learn about who we are and what we are called to do in this world as Jews.

I am also not suggesting that we should not plan for our future, as individuals or as a people. Again, heaven forbid. As a congregation, for example, we are called to be responsible stewards of our property and we must maintain it and ensure that our financial resources are sufficient for us to continue. As Jews, writ large, we must constantly be alert to ever-present threats to us and to our homeland, and we must labor to prepare ourselves for every danger which may come. Recent events remind us that this is compulsory for every Jew. Only a sociopath would give no care to the future, nor fail to pay any attention to the past. That is no way to live, nor is it what is expected of us as Jews. “Don’t worry, be happy,” may make a catchy song, but in the present context of what has been happening in Israel, for example, it is not a serious way to respond.

Rather, what I am suggesting is actually quite simple and straightforward and, I believe, reasonable. It is just this: we ought not focus *all* of our consciousness *solely* on the past or *solely* on the future, or some combination of the two, and *never* take even one single moment to be in present time, to “be here now.” There are among the Jewish people those for whom 100% of their waking consciousness is taken up by mentally being in the past and/or being in the future, and 0% enjoying the blessings that Hashem has provided to us. Again, to be clear, I would never suggest that we flip those numbers. Living *only* in the present moment, 100% of the time, is, in my opinion, not a meaningful way to live and, collectively speaking, it is foolish and even selfish. It is just that each of us needs to settle on some number larger than 0%. That number might differ among us, for sure, but, whatever it is, and for however much of each day we are in the present moment, it is emotionally and spiritually healthy to take at least some time to release ourselves from the fear and anxiety, even if briefly, that comes with being Jewish in the present-day world. If nothing else, this can help us to restore our psyches to equilibrium and better equip us to go forth and face the challenges that confront us, individually and collectively.

We ought to be defined more by *tikvah* (hope), a state of mind that should come naturally to us in light of the promises made to us as part of our eternal *brit*, or covenant, with G-d. This word is so important that it is preserved in the title of our national anthem which we sing at the conclusion of our *Shabbat* services. Hope in turn helps us to feel *ashrei* (joyous, happy, fortunate), a word also familiar to us from our liturgy. Experiencing joy or happiness, even for a few moments, can free us from becoming emotionally consumed over our past and our future. According to Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, despair is a disgrace and is forbidden to us, and it could also be considered blasphemy, as we are told that Hashem wants us to be hopeful and happy. He wants us to experience moments of great joyousness, although, admittedly, this may sometimes be difficult given our history and given present threats, especially related to what is happening in Israel and the explosion of anti-Semitism in North America.

“Being here now” is perhaps harder for some of us than for others, which is understandable. We are all wired differently. But certainly while we *davven* in *shul* and during the times each week or each day when we learn

Torah or read Jewish writings and when we pray privately or say a *b'rachah*, or perhaps during other special times—for example, while spending time in nature or meditating or reading or exercising or serving others or being with loved ones—we can step out of our perpetually worrisome mental existence situated in the past/future and take up residence in the joyous presence, even if just for a while. This may be a challenge for some of us, more than for others—and I know, as I am as guilty as anyone!—but we all stand to benefit from recognizing and savoring G-d's many blessings to us as Jews.

L'shalom,
Jeff Levin

March Service Schedule

		<u>Friday, March 14</u>	
	<u>Saturday, March 1</u>	Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm
Shacharit	10:00 am	Candle Lighting	7:18 pm
Shabbat Ends	7:03 pm		
		<u>Friday, March 7</u>	
Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm		
Candle Lighting	6:14 pm		
		<u>Saturday, March 8</u>	
Shacharit	10:00 am	Shacharit	10:00 am
Shabbat Ends	7:08 pm	Shabbat Ends	8:13 pm
		<u>Friday, March 21</u>	
	<u>Thursday, March 13</u>	Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm
Purim	6:00 pm	Candle Lighting	7:23 pm

Saturday, March 22
 Shacharit 10:00 am
 Shabbat Ends 8:18 pm
Friday, March 28
 Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm

Candle Lighting 7:28 pm
Saturday, March 29
 Shacharit 10:00 am
 Shabbat Ends 8:23 pm



March 15
 Gerald Bonneville
 Anna Papernov

March 16
 Richard Alpert

March 27
 Susan Silver

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

March 22
Susan & Abbye
Silver



ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ❖ There will be no office hours for the week of March 10.
- ❖ Our annual CAJ Purim celebration will take place at shul on Thursday evening March 13th beginning at 6:00 pm. We'll read from the Megillah Esther, eat dinner, and have a celebration. Please come wearing a costume, Jewish-themed or otherwise. We'll have a prize for the best costume(s). We look forward to seeing everyone!

THANK YOU for your donations in February!

Shabbat

Javis Howeth
Joseph Settle
Susan Raphael
Jeff Levin
Henry Hacker

Barabara
Dankenbring
Michael Pesses
Inez Bonneville

Susan Lanxner
Steve & Carrie Draher
George & Kathleen
Keller

In Memory Of

Sheila Schnur

Barbara Dankenbring
Cal Goldberg
Debbie Hersh

Esther Anna Gulman

Jeff Levin
Sam Harelík
Harry Harelík

Paul Leka

Paul & Paula Farmer
Max Harelík
Harry Harelík
Larry Harelík
Harry Harelík

YAHREZEITS

The following names of dearly departed will be read aloud by the Rabbi preceding the Mourner's Kaddish on Shabbat morning. It is fitting and customary that the nearest of kin be present in the synagogue for the recitation of this special prayer in their memory. Attendance not only honors the departed but also enhances and guarantees that a Minyan is present to recite the Kaddish.

Kaddish will be read on March 7

Adar 6 Morrie Alperin
I Aronson*
Harry Siegel*
Joseph L Wise*
Adar 7 Lois Helfer
Mrs A (Ray) Lowich*
Esther Sigel*
Adar 8 Mike Perry
Marie Doris Rosenberg*
Adolph Rubel*
Chaym D Silevitch
Adar 9 Leon Berman*
Jacob Farbstein*
Adar 10 Lauren Hoffman*
Rachel Stein
Adar 11 Schmuel Tzvi Lanxner
Bessie Offman
Rose Patlis
Harriett Polinsky
L Weisberg*
Adar 12 Louis Belove*

Kaddish will be read on March 14

Adar 14 Mrs Daniel (Annie) Adams*
Max Levy*
Adar 15 Larry (Leibel) B Harelik*
Isidor Sacks*
Richard Sifuentes
Adar 16 Gerald Abels
Fannie H Englander*
Max Jortner
Dora Peasachovitz
Adar 17 Mrs B Genecov*
Bessie Zoblotsky*
Adar 18 Blanche R Ellis*
Louis Esserman*
Rebecca Hayman*
William Lender
Seymour Neuwirth*
Deana Stupak
Robert Todd
Adar 19 Jack Blutman
Mrs I Chodorow*
Esther Harris
Anna Jacobson*
Ben Keen*
Max Wise*

Kaddish will be read on March 21

Adar 20 I J Gollob*
Eli Hoffman*
Norma Norat
Adar 21 Harry Brodkey*

Pearl Greenfield*
Frank Israel
Thelma Lipinsky*
Bessie Novy*
Adar 22 Carlos Sifuentes
Adar 23 Anna Goldman Hersh*
Adar 24 Mrs Harry Brodkey*
Robert Gurkoff
Dave Wizig*
Adar 25 Emanuel Kestner*
Ana Nieves
Audre Rapoport*
Adar 26 Mrs Morris (Esther) Rubinsky*

Kaddish will be read on March 28

Adar 27 Gerardo Romero
Goldie Stern
Adar 28 Zahira Meiling Camacho
Adar 29 Secil Chazanov*
Sherwin Fischman
Ethel Cecile Israel*
Bessie Katz
Pamela Powell
Sophia Rubenstein
Dorothy Marie Taub*
Nisan 1 Esther Jornitzky*
Morris Wise*
Nisan 3 Leon T Aronson*
Israel Goodman*
Molly R Schwartz*
Phillip Harold Schwartz*
Nisan 4 Beatrice Dorman Drainman
Florence Hendler Feldt*
Shirley Helfer
Mrs Meyer (Freda) Hoffman*