

I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember. (26:42)

Rashi observes that *zechirah*, remembering, is mentioned concerning Avraham *Avinu* and Yaakov *Avinu* – but not in connection with Yitzchak *Avinu*. He explains that Yitzchak's "ashes" (His ashes are considered to be as they would have been if the *Akeidah* had occurred, and Avraham had offered his son, Yitzchak, on the altar as a *korban*, sacrifice, to Hashem) are piled up on the *Mizbayach*. Remembering applies to something which is no longer extant. Yitzchak's ashes are present. Thus, the term "remembering" does not apply concerning him. Anyone reading this should immediately wonder how the concept of forgetting applies to Hashem. Hashem certainly does not require external triggers to remind Him of anything. The question should be the other way around: Why does *Rashi* mention remembering in connection with Avraham and Yaakov?

Horav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer, zl, offers a novel explanation. Nothing catalyzes *z'chus Avos*, the merits of the Patriarchs, like the children who follow in their ways. When children continue along the path which their forebears forged for them, they connect with the past, and Hashem responds in kind. When children reject the way of life their forbears lived, they can hardly call upon the *z'chusim*, merits, of their predecessors. After all, rejection means severing a relationship, breaking a bond. They cannot have it both ways.

The *middos*, attributes, of Avraham and Yaakov (the areas of their *avodas HaKodesh*, service to the Almighty, in which they exemplified) were *chesed* (Avraham), and Torah (Yaakov). As we have seen throughout our tempestuous history, an elite group of young men, who regardless of the challenges, both positive and negative, has always continued to commit to Torah and acts of *chesed* – even when many of their brethren have turned a deaf ear to any form of religious observance. The blandishments of being accepted by society were too much for some; while, for others, it was the need to escape poverty and overall lack of national esteem that influenced their decision to reject the life for which their parents and ancestors had died.

The attribute of Yitzchak *Avinu* which he manifest on *Har HaMoriah*, as he lay prepared to sacrifice his life for Hashem, has been one that has been accepted with pride by legions of Jewish men and women of all stripes and persuasions. One has only to peruse history to note the scores of unaffiliated, alienated and even self-loathing Jews who were prepared to sacrifice their lives for what they thought were Jewish ideals. This concept is alluded to by *afro shel Yitzchak tzavur u'munach tamid Lefanav*; the ashes of Yitzchak are piled up and laying before Him at all times. The attribute of *mesiras nefesh* has been intrinsic to the Jewish people at all times, throughout the generations. Indeed, it is a reality that Jews of whose relationships with ritual observance was, at best, tenuous, still remained connected via their willingness to die for *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*.

The British mandate in Palestine was a difficult period for the Jews. We have suffered through

various exiles throughout the millennia, but it is increasingly painful when we are in our own Land and subject to foreign rulers who refuse to recognize us as the inheritors and heirs apparent of *Eretz Yisrael*. As a result of the oppression, gangs of young Jews arose. For the most part, their members were not religious in practical observance, but they considered themselves to be Jewish with regard to protecting their brethren and the Land. This paper will not address the *halachic* appropriateness of their activities, but let it suffice to say that they did what they felt had to be done without asking *daas Torah* for guidance. A number of these young men were caught, imprisoned and executed – all because they fought for their G-d-given Land.

The *mesiras nefesh* of these *kedoshim*, martyrs, connected them to Hashem, as their *Rebbe*, the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, *Horav Aryeh Levin, zl*, ministered to their spiritual and emotional needs. Nary a *Shabbos* passed that he did not trudge his way down to the prison. Never did an execution occur that he did not spend time *davening*, encouraging and giving solace to the martyrs during their last moments. These men died as proud Jews. To paraphrase *Rav Aryeh*, “The souls of the holy martyrs will find no repose until Hashem avenges their blood and His Land will atone for His people. In all my visits, every time, I felt that my dear brothers and sisters sensed that I shared in their suffering and pain. They always wished to hearten me, to show me a cheerful face. Every time we broke out in tears, overwhelmed by emotion, they would ask what holy words they could recite from our *Chumash* or *Siddur*, if time was available after they recited *Shema Yisrael*. We do not have the writer who can fully describe the greatness and exaltedness of these brethren of ours... who dedicated body and soul for our People and our Land. They became inspired and intoxicated by the aura of holy martyrs burned at the stake... whose spiritual level no ordinary mortal can reach.”

Their connection to Hashem was consistent with *Yitzchak Avinu's* willingness to give up his life to serve Him. Veritably, *mesiras nefesh* must be the prime ingredient in Torah study and acts of lovingkindness if they are to achieve greatness and validity.