

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

Noticeably, the Torah mentions the word “remembering” (*v’zacharti, ezkor*) only in connection with Avraham *Avinu* and Yaakov *Avinu*. *Rashi* explains that “remembering” is not necessary with regard to Yitzchak, because *afro*, the ashes, of Yitzchak appear before Hashem as they rest upon the *Mizbayach*. [This, of course, refers to ashes of the *ayil*, ram, which was offered in place of Yitzchak.] Veritably, the concept of “remembering” with regard to Hashem is unimaginable. He does not require a symbol to remind Him of anything. Hashem does not forget. If so, the issue is not why remembering is not mentioned by Yitzchak, but rather, why, in fact, is it mentioned with regard to the other two *Avos*?

Horav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer, zl, explains that nothing inspires the merit of the *Avos* on our behalf more than when their children/descendants act appropriately, performing *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim*, good deeds. When Hashem sees the children carrying on the legacy of the *Avos*, it brings forth an abundance of Heavenly blessing, for there is the source of all blessing. Let us now analyze the *middos*, attributes, which the *Avos* exemplify, and ask ourselves: Are we following in their footsteps? Are we worthy of receiving Heavenly blessing in their merit? Avraham *Avinu*'s attribute was *chesed*. He was the pillar of kindness in a world steeped in pagan beliefs. Yaakov *Avinu* represents devotion to the study of Torah at its apex. While it is possible that, throughout the millennia, our people's commitment to Torah and *chesed* was, at times, failing, and certainly not on the level expected of us, they still demonstrated ample allegiance to the attributes which Avraham and Yaakov personified.

Yitzchak *Avinu* represents *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, at its pinnacle. He lay down prepared to relinquish his life, because his father said that Hashem had instructed him to offer up Yitzchak as a *korban*. This set the tone and standard for the millions of Jews who, throughout our history, have sacrificed themselves for Hashem. The *zechus*, merit, of Yitzchak is to be found always, across the board, throughout the entire Jewish people – regardless of religious observance. To be a Jew means a willingness to sacrifice for Hashem and the Jewish nation. Even Jews who have turned their backs on the Torah proudly proclaim that they are Jews. In today's reality of anti-Semitism, this is a form of *mesiras nefesh*. The world is finally showing their true colors; the hatred that possessed them for centuries has come to the fore. Politically correct in today's political climate means to shed the façade and come out with their true feelings. As descendants of Yitzchak *Avinu*, we – all Jews – stand proud, ready to sacrifice ourselves for Hashem. [Veritably, Hashem would rather it be *kiddush ha'chaim*, sanctifying our lives with a deeper commitment to Him.] This is what is meant by Yitzchak's ashes being in front of Hashem.

The Jewish People are not unfamiliar with martyrdom for their faith. Throughout the millennia, Jewish communities have confronted adversity, persecution and even brutal murder as a result of

their convictions, or simply just because they were Jewish. As such, instances of martyrdom have, unfortunately, become part of our historical narrative. The concepts of self-sacrifice and martyrdom have become part of the fabric of the Jewish People, deeply intertwined with their resilience and endurance in the face of historical challenges. Religious commitment is the barometer which determines at which point one's *mesiras nefesh* will emerge.

Gidi Katz was born to be a fighter pilot. This was the feeling of his squadron commander. A fighter pilot's role demands exceptional skills in flying, quick decision-making and adaptability. He faces intense physical and mental challenges which require quick-thinking precision and the ability to address high pressure situations in the air. Silence and focus are critical for a fighter pilot, so that he can concentrate on complex tasks and render split-second decisions with heightened focus. Gidi was silent, apparently always deep in thought and concentration.

When the squadron commander informed his squadron about a trip to the concentration camps in Poland, Gidi perked up. Yes, he would like to go. It was almost as if a hidden spark within him had been ignited. His grandmother was a survivor, having emigrated to the Holy Land after her liberation. Gidi immediately signed up for the trip. He went to the library and devoured every book on the subject of the Holocaust.

They arrived in Warsaw on a Friday morning. *Shabbos* services were held in the large *shul*. Gidi held a *siddur* in his hand and stared at the words, which sadly were foreign to him. He continued with his signature silence throughout the *Shabbos*. The first camp the group visited was Stutthof, near Danzig, Germany. It was the first concentration camp set up outside German borders and the last camp to be liberated by the Allies. Twenty-eight thousand Jews were brutally murdered there. When Gidi came to Stutthof, something within him changed. It was almost as if a dam had burst and released a torrent of water. As he stood before the crematorium, staring at the imposing edifice, he felt a sudden desire to dance. In his pocket, he had a small *sefer Tehillim*, a gift from his family's *Rav*. He took the *Tehillim* in his hands, waved it up and down, and began to dance in earnest. He sang the only Jewish song in his limited repertoire: *Sisu v'simchu b'simchas Torah*. He thought to himself that he was losing his mind. He was a young man whose nature was characterized by silence and self-control, and now he was singing and dancing in an unabashed and uncontrolled manner.

Gidi took out his cellphone and called the one person in whom he would confide: his mother. He related to her what had just transpired as he stood before the crematorium. His mother replied, "Call *Savta* (your grandmother) now." He asked, "*Savta* Bruriah? She has never, ever spoken about her experiences during the Holocaust." His mother insisted, "Call now."

Gidi called his grandmother, informed her where he was now standing, and described what he had just experienced. She began to weep uncontrollably. After a few minutes, she caught her breath and began to speak. "Gidon, you wonder why you are dancing in front of the crematorium in Stutthof. Let me give you some of my family's history. I was an eight-year old child when my family

was taken to Stuttgart concentration camp. My father, together with nine other compatriots, were given the ghastly task of removing the bodies from the gas chamber and placing them in the crematorium. These broken Jews went about silently performing their gruesome work. They were broken shards of humanity, far beyond any expression of tearful emotion. One night, after a particularly depressing day, the team of ten men stopped to catch their breath, as the accursed Nazis went for a cigarette break. All of a sudden, my father called out, "My friends, today is *Simchas Torah!* Let us dance, sing and give praise to Hashem!" My father removed his small *Tehillim* from his pocket, lifted it up and began to sing *Sisu v'simchu b'simchas Torah*. All the men joined in the effusive singing and dancing. Hearing the commotion, the Nazis came running, their rifles drawn and shot them all *al kiddush Hashem*. The place where you were suddenly inspired to sing that song and dance along, holding your *Tehillim* aloft, was the place where my father died – because he sang and danced to Hashem. You, Gidi, are named for my father." Gidi now knew the rest of the story.