

“Ayala’s plight and collective responsibility”

by

Jeffrey M Cohen

(I acknowledge that many might find elements of this poem gruesome and disturbing. The full details of the firebombing of the car in which Ayala Shapira and her father, Avner, were travelling, were published on-line, on 29th December 2014, in an article by Rochel Sylvetsky, the sister of Ayala’s great grandmother. They are details that one cannot readily get out of one’s mind, and which continue invade the poetic imagination. It is a situation that Israelis live with on a daily basis, though, as Ayala’s father, Avner, commented, “It is time to ‘change the disc’, as they say in Hebrew; time to change our way of looking at what is going on.” This poem, in addition to being a tribute to, and a token of profound sympathy with, a brave and highly talented young heroine of our people, is also a gesture of support for the sentiments Avner expressed. Those who set out to maim our people should be made to truly fear the consequences, and those who lead Arab communities, while encouraging and rearing their youngsters to resort to such indiscriminate terror and murder, must also be made to fear the most dire retribution.)

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Ayala bat Rut,

You’ve joined the ranks

Of those called on

To offer thanks

To God for the harm

As well as the good –

The miracle

That you withstood:

The terrifying conflagration,

The horror

And burning sensation;

The piercing pain,

Fear, convulsion;

Mental anguish

And revulsion;

Reality

In suspension;

For survival,

Apprehension:

“Am I, truly,

Still alive,

And did dearest Abba

Survive?”

A thought, then,

Entered her head;

Something that he,

Once, had said:

If someone’s clothes

Are set ablaze,

Before, any alarm,

You raise,

Get them to lie

On the ground,

And to roll themselves

All around.

She released the belt,

And fled the car,

Throwing herself

On the road;

Rolling, rolling,

Desperately,
As the adrenalin
Flowed.

It was Ayala's
Presence of mind
In a situation,
Dire,
That saved her life
And delivered her
From a pyrrhic,
Palestinian pyre.

*

Sympathy for the terrorist,
Is too frequently
Expressed,
By many countries
In the West,
Even if,
With suicide vest,
And high explosives
Strapped to chest,
He has innocents
In his sights -
Their priority:

His human rights!

That the bomber had come

From an Arab village,

Where kids were groomed

To maim and pillage -

To shoot to kill

And fire-bomb cars;

With murderers,

Their exemplars –

Surely meant

He couldn't be blamed,

Though *Allahu akbar*,

He'd exclaimed;

For he'd been programmed,

From his birth,

To invest violence

With infinite worth;

To hurl stones,

And to assault -

With terror employed

As his default.

“We're all victims of

A situation,

Imposed on us

By the Jewish nation” -

Is the village elders'
Justification
For the cruelest acts
Of evisceration.

Well, let me tell you
Of a biblical law,
Which loony lefties
May well abhor:
That if a body
Is discovered slain,
Between two towns,
In rough terrain,
And, after a thorough
Investigation,
There was still no
Identification
Of the slayer's
Provenance,
Or the background
Circumstance,
The two towns' leaders
Were arraigned;
It mattered not
That they were pained
And shocked by what
Had just occurred,

And that their grape-vine

Hadn't been stirred

By a nod or wink

Or whispered word.

They still had to offer

A formal defence

Of the implied charge

That, in a sense,

They were liable

For the consequence

Of a sole traveller

Left exposed,

And, to danger,

Predisposed.

Those leaders

Were called on

To explain

How it was

That the victim came

To have left their town

Without the provision

Of a skilled guide

And supervision;

And, why, such dangers

They didn't envision.

The Bible records
The declaration
That the leaders must make
At that accusation:
"Our hands did not
Shed his blood;
We saw
No danger
In the bud;
Forgive our towns
For this tragedy,
And accept this,
Our solemn plea;
For human life
Is a gift,
Divine;
Ours to protect
As a sacred shrine."

With this in mind,
It can be seen
Why Jews regard it
As obscene,
And a tragedy,
Beyond compare,
That no contrition

Can repair,
When innocent lives
Are terrorized,
And violence is
Most highly prized,
And justified
By a sacred writ,
That, with God's kindness,
Does not fit.

And this, also,
Will explain
How odd to them
Is our reprised refrain
That the responsibility
Of every Jew,
Is to protect
And to rescue
Any fellow in distress,
Or if subjected
To duress;
And any leader
We elect,
A tabernacle of peace,
Must erect;
And a charitable spirit,
Inculcate,

And humane principles,
Mandate.

Hence my confusion
And my pain,
My incomprehension
At the insane
Attack upon
A little girl;
What devil,
Could bring himself
To hurl
A grenade
At an 11 year-old child -
Her innocence and trust,
Cruelly defiled?

Palestinian parents
Must pay the price;
Imams who promise
Paradise;
Elders who idealize
Sacrifice,
And sprinkle hate
Around,
Like spice.

Collectively,
They bear the guilt,
For all such crimes,
And for blood
Spilt;
No longer can they
Shift the blame,
Or knowledge
Of violence planned,
Disclaim;
If a culture of hate
They promulgate,
They join the ranks of
Terrorist's
Mate.

*

Ayala bat Rut,
You're in our heart;
Your progress,
We will, daily,
Chart.
If your well-wishers
Could share your pain,
There'd be none
That would remain;

But the road ahead,
We know,
Is long,
And you'll need your faith
To remain strong,
To emerge from
Your vile ordeal,
To ensure that all your wounds
Will heal.

Chizki v'imtzi,
May your recovery
Be achieved
Most speedily;
May *Hashem* grant you,
And your family,
His soothing blessing
Of tranquility.

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