

“Tensions in Bet Shemesh”

By

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(This poem may only be circulated in full, and with author attribution. It is based on a report, “Internal tensions mar commemoration in Beit Shemesh,” published in The Jerusalem Post, Friday, 24th April 2015, and descriptive of a violent Charedi demonstration against the public Remembrance Day, commemorating those who fell in the defence of Israel)

Each Yom Ha-Zikkaron commemoration,

Of the fallen flower of Israel’s nation,

He’d wait by his window,

For the siren-sound;

His back,

Once straight,

Now bowed

To the ground.

As each year passed,

He lamented more

All those he’d lost -

Family that he never knew –

In the Holocaust.

His own survival

Was a miracle for sure,

Having been evacuated

Just before the war;

By tortuous routes,

Brought to Israel's shore -

His Polish passport,

Still kept in a draw.

From the day they arrived,

His parents had vowed

That anything Polish

Would be disallowed:

Its language and culture,

They would eschew –

A gesture at what

Poles did to the Jew.

As a proud Israeli,

Their child was reared;

Though as a survivor,

His psyche was seared

By parental tales

Of how Poles took pleasure

In attacking Jews,

As a sport

For leisure.

'Remember Amalek,

And do not forget,'

Was his parents' mantra

And mind-set;
'They took our lives,
So we must ever prepare
To defend our country
And the vision
We share.'

He's eighty now,
And he's kept that vow
That anything Polish
He'd disallow:
That its language and culture
He'd eschew –
A gesture at what
Poles did to the Jew.

In Sheinfeld Beit Shemesh,
Alone he now lives,
With memories
That his mind sieves:
Flashes that,
May now seem quite clear,
But, soon, just fail
To cohere.

Yet, today is a good day –

Lucidity's friend –
Though some early memories
Also blend
With this commemoration
Of Israel's dead –
Successive survivors
Pumped with lead.

As he recalls
Those parental tales,
Of massacred Jews,
His face still pales;
A sweat breaks out
On his furrowed brow –
Could civilized men,
Such things,
Allow?

How different, he mused,
Is the Jewish race;
Recipients of
The good Lord's grace;
A brotherhood,
A unity;
A model of fraternity!

Just then, he heard
The march of feet,
Seemingly coming
From down his street.

His ear picked up
The sound of a crowd;
Voices chanting,
Excessively loud.

Loud-speakers
Had clearly been erected
Beneath his window,
Undetected,
While he'd been musing
On the Jewish State,
As our only haven
Against hate.

Eulogies,
Memorializing;
Hazkarot,
Voices rising;
Kaddish,
In unison,
Recited;
Rabbis speaking;

Sources cited.

Interrupting

Those solemn proceedings,

And drowning out

Some Torah readings,

Hasidic youth,

In demonstration,

Screaming taunts

And vituperation,

From Ramat Beit Shemesh,

The next enclave,

Were mocking the memory

Of the brave

Who, selflessly,

Gave up their lives

For such Hasidim

And their wives,

So they might live

Safe and secure –

To denounce the State

As vile, impure.

The old man couldn't

Believe his ears;

It aroused his very

Deepest fears.
'Zionists' being screamed
As a term of hate
For fellow citizens
Of the State;
'Nazis' applied to religious Jews,
Just for their variant
Nationalist views.

'Am I going mad?'
He cried.
Was it for this that
Six million died?
How can Jews who claim
To follow God's plan
Be filled with venom
For fellow man?
How can they deny
To God His role
In the achievement of
Our millennial goal
Of a return to Zion,
Our nation's soul?'

'That Hasid's raised
A Palestinian flag!' -

He heard one youth shout.

‘Come on chevra,

Follow me;

Let’s knock ‘im about!’

The old man leaned back

In his chair,

And closed his heavy lids.

He heard his dad recalling

How the Poles pursued the *Zhyds*

With taunts, violence

And detestation –

Of the kind now rife

In our re-born nation.

‘I cannot understand,’

He mused,

‘Why they live

In a Zionist State,

Boldly unfurling our enemy’s flag

And purveying hate,

When their heart is in the Poland

Of an age long-since past,

Host to Jewish millions

That were shot and burnt,

And gassed!’

As he took his final breath,
He reflected on the fact
That he had had no offspring
And required, therefore, no tact
To explain to them the paradox
Of Jew hating Jew,
When we ourselves were hated,
By all, but a few;
And how those who prayed daily
For a return to our land,
Could, in the very next breath,
Reject it out of hand!

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