



Avinu Malkeinu

No words. No breath. Our hearts are dizzyed with shock and trauma and burning tears stream down our cheeks. Our people and our Land suffered their worst day in the 75-year history of our state. More Jews were killed on this one day than on any single day since the Holocaust. The pain and suffering are indescribable, the fear is palpable, and the mourning is overwhelming.

I feel uncomfortable writing anything. There is absolutely nothing to say while so many are still suffering, while so many are being buried, while so many are fighting for their lives, and while so many are in the line of fire. This is not the time for “ideas”, or the time to draw larger conclusions, or to search for meaning. It is a time to cry and cry. For our people and for our Land. For the name of Hashem which was so horribly desecrated.

I only write to provide basic “guidance”, and to recommend a few responses, not that there is any protocol for a catastrophe like this. Most of these “responses” to this disaster are self-evident, but on the slim chance that they aren’t, it is worth repeating them. Larger conversations about the ramifications of this tragedy will have to wait until a more appropriate time.

TEFILLA

Though tefilla is always central to our

relationship with Hashem there is a specific mitzvah to daven during a time of crisis, or an *eit tzarah*. The Torah describes the prototypical *eit tzarah* as

וְיִתְּבֹאוּ מִלְחָמָה בְּאַרְצְכֶם עַל-הַצָּר הַצָּרֵר אֲתֶכֶם

The most severe form of national crisis occurs not only when we are at war but when the war assaults our country. It has been 50 years since we last experienced war in our own country during the Yom Kippur War. This is far worse. During the Yom Kippur war the battles were waged along empty borders in sparsely populated areas, limiting the amount of civilian casualties. Sadly, we have currently suffered a massive pogrom directed at our own people. There is no other word to describe this vicious premeditated attack designed solely for the purpose to kill and kidnap as many innocent people as possible, including elderly and babies. If there ever were an *eit tzarah*, this is it.

The special mitzvah to daven during an *eit tzarah* can be accomplished by adding tefilot, and some have added *avinu malkeinu*. Though every perek of tehilim is effective, the perakim which most directly petition Hashem for salvation from heartless enemies include: 2, 7, 9, 13, 20, 22, 23, 27, 44, 55, 59, 60, 70, 74, 79, 80, 83, 121, and 130.

Even without adding extra tefilot, the

mandate of *eit tzarah* demands that we invest more deeply in our routine tefilot. This extra commitment can be attained through better minyan attendance or better decorum and discipline while davening. Mere awareness that our tefilot possesses an added dimension can often deepen the experience, even without any inserting additions. There are lives hanging in the balance and a Jew's first response is to daven to the Redeemer of our people to send us redemption.

MOURNING

The scenes are already apocalyptic and will only get worse. Thousands of lives have been shattered by senseless hatred of our people. Hundreds of funerals in the span of a few days is unfathomable. Even for those who haven't been directly impacted by the tragedy, there is a basic human and religious responsibility to sympathize and identify with the suffering of the direct victims. Obviously, with few exceptions, any celebratory events or even enjoyable social events should be canceled. Additionally, until the intensity of our national mourning subsides, recreational media consumption should be curbed. It is unthinkable that while we are burying hundreds of korbanot a Jew is relaxing and watching a sporting event or a movie. Part of living Jewish history is the responsibility to identify with tragedy.

CHESHBON HANEFESH

Whenever a tragedy occurs moral introspection is mandated, and certainly a catastrophe of this magnitude requires self-examination. It is impossible to play G-d and to know what causes such tragedy. It is always easiest to critique others and



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to lay the blame on someone else or something else. Instead, each person should look inward, at themselves and their communities to identify areas for improvement. Hashem is sending us a message. Though we don't exactly know the specifics of the message, it is crucial to personalize the experience and look for individual paths for improvement, and not just harp upon collective issues which are always less manageable. Hashem expects us to respond to a crisis by improving our religious behavior.

EMUNAH

The ways of Hashem elude human comprehension and we certainly can't wrap our minds around this catastrophe. Yet, our *bitachon* assures us that Hashem has some purpose for allowing this to occur. Faith also demands that we have confidence that, in the long run, Hashem has

our best interests in mind and cares for and redeems His people. This is a dark hour in modern Jewish history and is not a time for simple faith. We cannot be afraid to ask genuine questions but also cannot be dispirited when we are thwarted in attempts to uncover answers.

EMUNAH IN REDEMPTION

These horrific events cannot shatter our deep belief that our return to our ancient homeland is part of a larger historical redemption. Our country has seen very dark days before, and though the trauma of this day far surpasses anything we have endured in the past, the wheels of redemption continue to turn.

For some reason over the past few days, witnessing the grotesque and nauseating images, I kept thinking about the pogroms which battered our people about 120 years in 1905. According to some reports we suffered over 600 pogroms in one year. There is one difference though between 1905 and 2023. We have our Land and we have our army and despite whatever shortcomings were exposed, our army, with Hashem's help will punish the murders and continue to protect us.

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war my Rebbe, Harav Yehuda Amital cited a midrash which would become a staple of his as he wrestled with demoralizing national events. Commenting on the fact that in Shir Hashirim Hashem is compared to a gazelle, the midrash elaborates:

מה הצבי הזה נגלה וחוזר ונכסה כך...גואל
האחרון...נגלה להם וחוזר ונכסה מהם

A deer is so swift and furtive that almost immediately after it appears, it disappears from view. Its disappearance doesn't mean that it has entirely left the scene.

Redemption can have lags, and lulls, and even terrible setbacks but once the process begins it unfolds with inevitability.

This tragedy tests us to maintain our resolve and our vision that we are part of a larger historical trajectory. Our faith survived the Holocaust and I"yH we hope and daven that with His help our faith will survive this incalculable tragedy. It takes great faith to participate in the final chapters of history. We pray to Him to give us strength and faith to navigate the sorrow and pain of this process.

There is a fabled song with ancient roots, which was sung by many European Ashkenazic communities on Simchat Torah. This song describes Hashem observing us celebrate Simchat Torah and remarking that our love for Him is so impressive "that we even ignore our suffering and celebrate His Torah".

We ask Hashem to allow us to celebrate His Torah without any more suffering.

(written Sunday, October 8) ■

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