

Please Help Us!
Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

For many Israelis, the day began the same way. They were sitting at home, drinking their morning coffee, when the air raid siren sounded. At first, they thought it was a false alarm that was ruining the peaceful silence of their Shabbos morning, which also was Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. There wasn't anything that could ruin the festive day ahead of them.

But then the siren blared again and again. They knew it was serious. Then, depending on where they were, they heard the sound of the booms of rockets being blown up by the Iron Dome. They looked out of the window and saw empty, desolate streets, except for the occasional person scurrying to shul.

As the day went on, bits and pieces of information filtered into the frum communities from reservists being called up, from Hatzolah and Zaka volunteers, and from people with non-Jewish help. But for those away from the southern Gaza border area, the enormity of what was happening didn't sink in until later.

When Shabbos and Yom Tov were over, they found out that they had lived through what was the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Over one thousand of our brothers and sisters were killed, bombed, burned and mutilated in an historically horrific manner. Over one thousand dead. Some three thousand wounded. Over 150 taken hostage.

Do we have any understanding of the immensity of the tragedy of one thousand Jews being killed? How many people do we know? How many people live in your neighborhood? How many people belong to your shul? One thousand people is an entire world. Even one Jewish life is equal to an entire world. Is there any way to absorb what happened?

Tears. Only tears.

Some three thousand Jews wounded. Devastating. Who knows how many of them will survive? Do we have any idea of what it means when in war time a person is listed as wounded? It doesn't mean scratches. It doesn't mean things that a Band-Aid, or Tylenol, or Acamol can fix. We're talking about the types of wounds that last for a long time, that may never heal, inflicting hardship and incessant pain. Nebach, we can cry for those people.

And how about those who were taken hostage by savages? Eini eini yordah mayim. Rivers of tears are shed for each person those beasts are holding. We shudder at the thought of what they must be enduring. Who knows where they are and how they are being treated? Who knows what condition they are in physically, let alone mentally? We daven for them with all of our hearts that they be allowed to live and be kept whole and pure. We daven that they be returned to their loving families bekarov.

The enormity of the tragedy is so immense that it is difficult to grasp and feel what happened. Tragically, we have become sort of immune to attacks in which one or two people are stabbed, shot, rammed or blown up by a bomb. We read the news, are pained for a moment, and then our focus shifts as we turn the page and some mundane topic occupies our mind.

Yes, it's hard to wrap our minds around the thought that one thousand innocent Jewish people were brutally murdered just because they were Jews.

This horror is reminiscent of the Holocaust era, when Jews were rounded up and chased through forests to be shot and killed just for the crime of being Jews. Everyone knows the awful stories about the atrocities that annihilated so many of our people during the Holocaust. Nobody thought that those same scenes would be repeated in this century in a Jewish country.

The terrorists went from house to house, room to room, shooting at anyone they found, no matter their age. They dragged people out of the miklatim, killing them. Men, women, and children. Old and young, it made no difference to them, just like the pogroms in Kishinev and cities and towns across the Jewish Diaspora. Anyone who thought that those days had ended got an awful awakening.

We have thankfully forgotten what war is.

The simplicity of the attack, consisting of a bunch of backward savages armed with guns, overpowering the most technologically advanced country in the world, was too much to bear. They killed hundreds of people escaping from a festival, shooting them as they ran and then later as they sought to flee in their cars. They dragged them out of the vehicles and shot them. They took others as hostages.

The unskilled animals took over some 23 towns, killing entire families and a dozen policemen in their station, and overrunning army bases while beheading soldiers. They seized an army tank with the crew inside and killed them.

There was nobody there to protect them. It took many agonizing hours until Israeli forces were able to break through to rescue Jews under siege in the moshavim. The great state that prides itself on its army failed its people.

And when it is all over, the government, the Knesset, the army, the police and the Shin-Bet will establish committees to figure out what went wrong, how they failed on so many levels, and how to prevent such a tragedy from occurring again. But the people's belief in the army won't fade. They will cling to their trust in the intelligence, the police, the Shin-Bet, or the entire vaunted defense complex.

How could it be that the most advanced army, with the most courageous fighters, backed by the world's best intelligence agency and the toughest government in Israel's history, allowed such a catastrophe to happen?

It is staggering that thousands of terrorists participated in the attack, yet nobody noticed. The attackers came by land, crashing through the world's strongest border in eighty places and rushing through. No alarms went off. Nobody monitoring the area saw anything. How can it be?

Terrorists came by air, flying over the border on paragliders, yet nobody saw them coming. No radar picked them up. No human intelligence and nobody guarding the border saw them. How is it possible?

It was possible because Hashem willed it so. When Hashem is on the side of the Israelis, they are the mightiest, working miracles and fighting like no one else. And when Hashem wants to teach Am Yisroel a lesson about who their real Protector is, who really fights their battles for them, and who it is that keeps their enemies at bay, then things that make no sense happen, and the strongest, mightiest, and brightest are shown to be helpless without the brachos of Hashem.

To me, this is a source of great nechomah, for we see clearly and plainly that the reason a calamity of this magnitude has not previously occurred is because Hashem prevented it from happening. We see that the amazing Yad Hashem has been there for Am Yisroel all these years, preventing something this atrocious from happening. We can be appreciative that we merited the protection of our Divine Father and we can pray that we merit again, all across the world, that He continue to protect us from all those who seek our destruction.

When we see the realization of the klalos we studied a few weeks ago in Seder Devorim, we know that when we rectify our ways, we will return safety to all of Israel and enjoy all the brachos Hashem has promised those who follow in His path.

The Chofetz Chaim, as quoted in the sefer Chofetz Chaim Al HaTorah in this week's parsha (perek 4, posuk 4) says as follows: If there is a time when Am Yisroel veers from Hashem's path and mixes with the nations, this creates a kitrug in Shomayim and catastrophe is paskened for them, r"l.

But in His infinite mercy, Hashem, who desires that the wicked repent and not be killed, does something else. What does He do? He sicks the goyim on them to fight and torment them so that He can fulfill the posuk which states, "VehaElokim yevakeish es hanirdof – Hashem sides with the victim." This is so even if a tzaddik is pursuing a rasha and certainly when a rasha chases a tzaddik.

And so, continued the Chofetz Chaim, who could have been speaking about today's events, this is the explanation for what is happening in our time. When we see that our nation has been made for a laughingstock and our people are led like sheep to slaughter, killed, hurt, lost and embarrassed, we have to know that the Pamalia Shel Maalah has declared that we are, r"l, deserving of destruction.

But Hashem, in His compassion, seeks to find us meritorious and works for our benefit. Therefore, He turns us into nirdofim, victims, in such a terrible way, so that He can find sources of merit to save us. And He enables us to absorb the blows and defeat our enemies. They will crumble and fold, while we will rise and be strengthened and victorious.

Apparently, Rav Moshe Shterbuch had a premonition that something awful was going to happen. On Sukkos, he spoke to the talmidim of his yeshiva, and this is what he said: During the Holocaust period, one year before Simchas Torah, word reached them in the yeshiva in London about the terrible butchery that was being perpetrated by the Nazis against European Jewry. The bochurim in the yeshiva were overcome with grief and were crying bitterly over the fate of their relatives.

They approached the rosh yeshiva, Rav Moshe Schneider, and told him that they would not be able to dance that year on Simchas Torah. Rav Schneider responded, "Hitler can kill us, but he cannot uproot even one minhag Yisroel. We will sing and dance as usual."

Rav Shterbuch continued with his message: "We don't know what the future holds for us. We are in a very dangerous state now and must daven to Hakadosh Boruch Hu that He save us and that we should be able to remain strong and rejoice when Hashem returns to His nation, and simcha and sasson will return to us speedily in our days."

We just celebrated the beautiful Yomim Tovim of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres, during which we proudly stood reciting Hallel, shaking our daled minim as we recited the request, "Ana Hashem hoshiah na – Hashem, please help us."

The Bais Halevi would say that when we plead for Hashem's assistance in Hallel and say, "Ana Hashem hoshiah na. Ana Hashem hatzlicha na," we don't do more than utter a simple request. Please help us. Please help us succeed. We don't give examples and offer suggestions of what He should do to help us or what we need.

He explained that this is because Hashem doesn't need our advice to tell Him how to help us. He knows what to do. We need to let Him run things His way, for that way, we will all succeed and merit what is beneficial for us.

We have all become armchair political strategists trying to make sense of the bizarre. Instead, we should find ourselves in the bais medrash, concentrating on learning Torah, recognizing that what happens is Divinely orchestrated for reasons we may or may not understand with time.

We don't understand what is happening. It is beyond human comprehension. But we are people of faith and we know that there is a Divine plan unfolding behind the scenes, way deeper and more impactful than we can imagine.

Far be it from me to try to understand Hashem's plan, but permit me to offer a thought, if only to demonstrate that we have no comprehension of the world's topical issues and events.

When it became known that Iran was on a mission to secure for itself nuclear weapons with which to threaten Israel and the world, people began to panic. Israel wanted to bomb the Iranian reactor, much as they bombed the one Saddam Hussein was contracting in Iraq. America put a stop to that idea, and people again began worrying that Iran would secure the bomb and wreak havoc in Eretz Yisroel.

I had heard that my rebbi, Rav Moshe Schapiro, had spoken about that crisis, so when I met him in the United States at that time, I took the opportunity to ask him how he understood what was going on. He answered that he saw it building to a crescendo, with a showdown with Iran that would precipitate the coming of Moshiach.

Much has happened since he spoke those words. The US administration struck a deal with Iran, which took the issue off the table. The next president changed all that, backing out of the treaty. That began to isolate Iran and squeeze the regime economically, forcing them to curtail their nuclear ambitions. With the current administration, the United States returned to the previous appeasement policy.

It makes no sense to us. How can they be so blind? How can they be so foolish and misguided?

But we must all recognize that all that transpires is part of a Divine plan. We may not always understand the workings of Hashem, but we must recognize that He is what causes everything to happen and nothing happens randomly, just "because." As observant Jews, we must ensure that we don't act erratically and foolishly in golus. We may be in for hard times, but let's keep it all in perspective and remember that it is up to us and our maasim tovim to determine the outcome of this trying period.

Rav Moshe Schapiro foresaw back then that the showdown with Iran would lead to the coming of Moshiach, and for all we know, the recent events will bring about the arrival of Moshiach. Let us hope and let us pray.

We don't know what the Ribono Shel Olam's plan is, but we beg him, "Ana Hashem hoshiah na." Please, Hashem, help us and save us from anyone's evil plans.

Let us do what we all know is incumbent upon us to merit the Divine mercy as the world prepares for the coming of Moshiach tzidkeinu, bimeheirah beyomeinu.

We are Jews. No matter where we find ourselves and how dire our circumstances are, we never give up and are never beaten. As bnei Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, we know that if we cleave to Hakadosh Boruch Hu and follow in His ways, in the end, we will triumph.

Let us turn to Torah and tefillah, let us complete the teshuvah process we began during Elul but apparently didn't finish, and let us practice ahavas Yisroel for real, loving one another. Let us feel the pain of our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel. Let us imagine that they are our sons and daughters, and plead with Hashem for mercy and rachamim.

Let us pray that this awful war will be the final step leading to the geulah sheleimah. Amein.