

YOM HAZIKARON 2009

A Gaze that cannot be Forgotten.

A letter by Yoram Duri to his friend Moshe, who fell in the Yom Kippur War, 1973.

Hi Moshe,

One again at this same time, just like the last thirty six years, I will stand at your grave, by the stone that bears your name. In the beginning I would come to the temporary plots. The terrible number of the fallen in the Yom Kippur war we needed a place to deposit the bodies, and you were among them. Only after the war – when we were freed from the reserved- were you transferred to the place which we call the place of eternal rest- the cemetery in Kiryat Shaul

I was one of the soldiers who worked with you in Tel Hashomer, and I carried your coffin draped in the national colors to the Israel cemetery. In my mind, it might as well have been today. Tomorrow (-on Yom HaZikaron) in the cemetery I will see many familiar faces; families and friends who come here every year. It is indeed a strange group that we create! In the beginning we saw parents and young women, sometimes even infants. Now there are few if any parents, a few wives, many friends who have since aged and now they come to the cemetery with their children. Who are like the bereaved families and their friends kissing the graves? They know that it is a loss that has no end, a wound that does not heal, a pain that has no release.

The stones are all simple and remarkably similar. A slab of stone and upon it a name. Yours Moshe is no different. The personal ID number, the age, the time and the place where the soldier fell. On yours it says “2062022. Moshe Mildiner. Son of Yaakov and Ida. Fell on the 20th of Tishrei in the Sinai offensive. Fell at age 23.” Laconic. Around you are the same markers- religious and secular, Jews, Druze, and Bedouin. Rows of identical stones throughout the land mark the places of those underneath with the future already behind them.

You Moshe decided to go (during the Yom Kippur war) to the dispatch area on the day you returned from studying medicine in Italy. ¹You were angered that your father called me up to the dispatch and only later did he call you. “I do not care about the process. I am now registered as a foreign student. If I am not the first in line they may not draft me for the war.” You asked me to lend you a shirt with long sleeves in order that you would not waste time going home, and you would have something to wear until you received your official uniform. Today they would make a full documentary about you on TV.² During those days, all were like this, at least the decisive majority. Today sadly 50% of the people do not go to the army. Each has their own reason. One is Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) and one is Arab. One is seeing a ‘specialist’. The forth only received orders

¹ Moshe was a reservist and not called up.

² On Yom Hazikaron there is no regular TV, but rather mini documentaries about the fallen are shown throughout the day.

from God, and the fifth “mistader”- will get by. However there are still the others- many of them. They choose to enlist, and volunteer, and endanger their lives.

Today in the cemetery you see the families. They just want one more time- one more time for that embrace that can never be forgotten. For that gaze that is impossible to forget and will never return. They all want one more time. The smell. The air. You. In this place they get a stone. A final resting place, and yet a resting place which does not give respite for those who remain. I was recently struck by the poem of Avraham Chalfi who describes the feelings of those coming to kiryat shaul, and not standing far from your grave.

First they cry
And then the crying subsides
They then remember
The one and only thing- the fallen son
They say nothing
They speak of the rain, about chit-chat
They speak of this, and then that...
The ear cannot bear it
They become silent
They get up from bench, then sit, and then rise, again
They now of only one thing
He does not return

This is exactly what Yaakov told me time and again when we met after you fell. That is what Ida told me as well. Your father was not strong enough and died from a brain condition. Certainly it is true that his brain could not conceive that you were gone.

I have always told your parents that I know there are not words that can console, there are not things that can mitigate your pain. I can only give them a warm embrace, to strengthen them, to give them an embrace of love and partnership.

I have decided today Moshe, to change my style and not to write to you about the Israel of today, about contemporary politics, but to describe what is happening around you on this Day of Remembrance. I speak of the simple, the camaraderie, and the awesomness buried here.

In the afternoon I will go to the ceremony for Division 600, our division which was stationed in Latrun, and lost 120 soldiers in the war. There we will all meet, exchange stories and tell jokes. To there, my dear Moshe, I will take you with me, because *you are part of us*. You recognize all of them, speak their language, laugh with them. There, Moshe, you are one of them.

The only difference is, they are all almost 60, but you have remained 23.

-Translated by R. Fred Klein from Maariv 4/29/09