Tragedy of the Yasur Helicopters

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We still mourn here, the tragedy which rocked this nation to its core in a v can see from the outside; even we cannot grasp it yet.

Even inside each home the reactions are different, depending on age, p but also on previous experiences. Having witnessed more than the norma can only imagine too well, cannot escape old scenes that haunt day and n nephew, a medic who was there all night, will never be the same. I am again that people in this country who have not lost close relatives ar between those who witnessed and experienced things first hand and thos second hand. The former group cuts across families, and isolates individua pain. Sympathy and sorrow are shared by all; having to relive what o never have had to endure is private. We are one in our pain, but not in its in its nature.

We nearly went mad with worries about Moshe, my nephew, all night, bec at dawn, when he had completed the gruesome task of gathering the ch torn remains of friends, could he call home to tell us he was alive. Like "experiencers", Moshe will--in all likelihood--have to revisit this event. Th his induction into the hall of vivid sorrows.

As time goes on and normalcy is required, the language changes, but th and expressions remain the same for a while longer. By Saturday, which a the second day of Rosh Hodesh Adar (the beginning of the month of Ada came by to visit and talked about "the weather", made light talk and sough Only in parting, the expression besorot tovot ([may we hear] good tiding how fragile our "return to life" still is.

Among the families who lost a dear one, the respite was no more than a s in the shiva (seven day period of mourning). For their near ones, there w visitation, the preparation of food for those mourning, the need to find wo unspeakable. For the relatives of soldiers who were spared, the care-pa prepare and send, the letters with just enough but not too muc acknowledgement of what had transpired. For these soldiers, the pain at friends, at being unable to attend funerals of friends, the irrational but e sense of guilt over having survived; the determination to go on. For those the scene of the tragedy, there remains the need to integrate the awful carnage, put it away until the dragon spits its fire again, when what experienced and witnessed here will become the reference, will come back New grief will blend with old; consciousness shifting to auto-pilot, until wounds too become old scars.

Unlike in normal combat, these soldiers will have to cope with the s helplessness that is the hallmark of a people *without* an army, of v without recourse. In the surrealistic Gulf War, the mothers and children o hand, and Holocaust survivors on the other, were the most deeply tr segments of the population. I imagine the leadership that allowed itse intimidated into accepting this role of impotence still lose sleep over thi though. But what must it have been like for those survivors, many of who almost as ghosts, and immediately joined the struggle for statehood, what m been for them to seal the rooms, enter them, and wait for the gas...

Here, too, the feeling of helplessness was overwhelming. The air-forc mourning not only the loss of colleagues and their charges, but their training and their confidence in it; the air-force industry agonizing possibility of technical error, and the haredi -- the ultra Orthodox -- realizing that with all their pride in their way, in their prayer and learni all unprotected. Underlying the transferring of blame that was and is ye lies this feeling of inexplicable vulnerability and confusion, for which no technical or spiritual -- will ever offer more than barely partial rationale, of avoiding such a tragedy in the future. I hope the conclusions at the enc soul and fact searching will be expressed more tentatively this time.

Now we enter this year's Adar, a month traditionally dedicated to the cel redemption and empowerment against all odds, still licking our wounds Adar's bus tragedies, hoping against hope that things can only get better or at least, that they will. We convince ourselves to be optimistic: for the And the children will look at every picture of every face of every fallen s at every name. My son will find parallels to his own name. My son went the day after not knowing whether his cousin was alive or dead. I called th let him know as soon as we heard that Moshe was intact, but what went t mind till then, and since? At fourteen, knowing what comes after high-sch volunteered was that it was too soon to make plans for the future, since wh army, it was still too far away.

We look upwards, inwards and all around us in our quest for a th understanding, a glimmer of hope, but the fog of uncertainty is as thick a We pray, but have lost confidence in our access to the Divine; He seems these days... The Wall was not heavily crowded when the public prayers to kept thinking of how meager "our" presence was compared to what ha Fridays at the mosque on the Temple Mount. But we were numb; fasting, some level is an imitation of dying, was so much easier than speaking to God. The poetry within us is just too bleak.

The "ason" -- the calamity, as it is still called -- will continue to stir our spirit, and whatever we take from here, will walk with each of us, brand our spirit's stem. Not even an army of psychologists will ever fully u impact on our progeny, our future choices, dreams, prayers. May we al translate our sorrow into constructive wisdom. May our spirits possess th to expand themselves in their pain and include the needy in their healin time the "ason" becomes the one before the last and requires a more spe ("ason hayasurim"?) may we be given the comfort of empowerment an redemption even as our Queen Esther did, after she was forced by circun compromise herself so much.

Moses' hauntingly mournful prayer in Psalm 90, pleads with God that H joy commensurate with the years of torment He subjected us to, and contemplating the role God plays in human error, concludes with the words

> "And let the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us; Establish Thou also upon us the work of our hands; Yea the wor of our hands Establish Thou it."

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I attach a poem I wrote. Yasur is the name of the helicopter in Israel.

Dance of the Yasurs[1]

Almost as one they took off into the darkness
The bitter cold engulfed their skeletons
A night bereft of moon tried to hold onto
Clouds plucked away from mountain peaks.

Engulfed in fog
Yearning for warmth
    -- for any contact
They approached each other
Rotor to rotor; frame to metal frame.

Swooning thus they circled for a moment,
Then they collapsed,
She, veiled in her wedding cloak of fire
Almost as one
Onto a land bereft of skies.
*****
In the bosom of the Yasurs
Seventy three men
    -- their wings folded
Tied helplessly against
This war-less fire
Of their chariot.

Seventy three names
Three score and thirteen attributes of God
Scarred forever, charred
Longing for rest in the shelter of a mountain
Bereft of its shadow

[1]1 Yas'ur, a migrating bird, is the name used in Israel for the CH 53 helicopters involved in the fatal collision in which all 73 soldiers aboard lost their lives.

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Must abandon their asphyxiated purpose
To the merciless abyss
Yawning above.

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