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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

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Rechavam Zeevi



On the sixth yearzeit of the assassination of Rechavam Zeevi, who was serving as Israel's Tourism Minister at the time, was a general in Tzahal and headed the Moledet party, we present what Rav Aviner said in the yeshiva on the day of his murder.

We can ask, is it a mitzvah to attend the funeral of Rechavam Zeevi, may Hashem avenge his blood? He was a heroic person. In the army, he was a heroic, courageous warrior, who displayed self-sacrifice for many years, and afterwards when we entered politics he remained heroic. There are many people who when they are generals, they are heroic; but when they enter the Government, they become weak and frightened. He remained heroic. He was not afraid of anyone. The Rambam writes in the Mishnah Torah (Hilchot Melachim 7:15) and in Sefer Ha-Mitzvot (negative commandment #58) that it is forbidden to fear when one is in the army. This is based on the verse, "Do not fear, do not panic and do not tremble before them" (Devarim 20:3). And just as it is forbidden for one to fear in the army, it is forbidden to fear when one is not in the army. Our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook, explained that it is forbidden for anyone to fear because the entire Nation is at war. Rechavam Zeevi did not fear and he sacrificed his life. Someone who does not fear is sometimes killed, like a soldier who does not fear, because he is always in the front during the battle. As a civilian he also fought, and he was murdered by the enemies of our Nation.

He was a great believer in the Land of Israel and the Nation of Israel, and they therefore rose up against him.

A civilian who fears violates a severe Torah prohibition against Hashem and against the Nation of Israel. Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector explains that if one sins against Hashem, he can repent; and if one sins against another person, he can repent; but if he sins against the Nation of Israel, it is impossible to repent. If someone sins against another person, or two people, or three people, he can ask for forgiveness, but someone who sins against the Nation of Israel by leading the Nation in a distorted way, how can he repent? Who can grant him forgiveness? How can he go to each and every person and ask for forgiveness? One must therefore be extremely careful.

All of this also applies to judges. The Torah tells us (Devarim 1:17): "Do not tremble before man." Our Sages teach that if a person threatens a judge and says to him, if you do not rule in my favor I will burn your produce, I will burn down your house, I will kill your son – he should not fear. There are those who say that in a situation involving a death threat, the judge need not risk his life, and our Sages exaggerated in the examples they brought. According to this, if a person wants to actualize his threat, the judge is not required to sacrifice his life, since the Torah does not say to judges – "be killed and do not transgress." Rav Yehudah Gershoni ztz"l, however, said: Even in the case of a death threat a judge needs to be willing to sacrifice his life to uphold his position without any fear or fright. The reason is that if one backs down, the existence of justice in the Nation is threatened. If there are not trustworthy judges, everything will crumble. Ha-Rav Shlomo Goren ztz"l explained that the whole discussion of when one must be willing to sacrifice his life is only for a mitzvah incumbent upon an individual. For a mitzvah incumbent upon the community, however, one must always be willing to sacrifice his life, because the existence of the Nation hinges upon these mitzvot and they supersede the life of an individual.

Rechavam Zeevi was a true hero. He never feared, and he fought for the Land of Israel and the Nation of Israel in every possible way. His inclination was not to be an individual person, but to be a communal person. Anyone who is murdered by terrorists is because the terrorists want to injure the Nation of Israel, and even more so here, because he was on the front line of the struggle. This funeral has a National value, because he was a Minister in the Government, and because it is the first time terrorists killed a Minister and because he was a great warrior for the Land of Israel and the Nation of Israel. It is therefore a great mitzvah to attend his funeral.