

Israel Belongs to Us Because We Earned It

Hebrew writer Yigal Mossinsohn's son Ido was killed in the Yom Kippur War. He fell on the Golan Heights at nine o'clock on the morning of October 10. The following is a translation of an interview with Nahum Pundak in DAVAR.

"Ivan Ivanovich, who failed to kill Ido's grandparents during the Ukrainian pogroms early in the century, succeeded with their grandson on the Heights" - says Mossinsohn - "that's how I see it. We're once again learning our bitter Jewish lesson, which too many Israelis had forgotten: the lesson of the Inquisition, the pogroms, the Holocaust. People thought we'd done with all that, but no. No - with this difference, that here we can get up and fight.

"Ido's maternal grandparents were murdered by the Germans. His paternal grandparents hid under the bed to escape the Ukrainian hooligans. And when they got fed up with hiding under beds they came to Eretz Yisrael. They were crazy, but they were right. The sane ones went to Western Europe and the U.S.

"Going to Eretz Yisrael was a thing only madmen did. It was a dead land. Nowadays we've got only a Dead Sea, but at that time the whole place was dead. It was nearly empty. There were a few Arab villages here and there, but it was an empty country.

"Now they tell us they have a right to this land, and some of us accept that and even talk about a confrontation of 'two rights'. That's crazy. We made this country what it is today, and that's what gives us our right to it. I don't want to go back as far as the Bible, Abraham, only to the beginning of this century. That's when we won our right to this State: when we turned a Dead Land into a living country.

"The trouble is that we have forgotten all that, forgotten what gave us our right. Those of us who were born here and fought in the War of Independence used to tell our elders: 'You don't have to tell us, we know why this country is ours'. But the next generation didn't know and didn't want to be told.

"In the years between the Six Day War and Yom Kippur it used to be the fashion to say we have a right to this country because we are strong. What rubbish! Will the merits of our case weaken any time our strength falters? No. We have a right to this country because of what we made of it: we can defend that right owing to our strength.

"I have my personal loss to mourn, but I do not understand all those others who go around lamenting ever since the Yom Kippur War. We never won a greater victory, botch-up or no. We never won a more resounding military victory. I don't see any other people able to struggle out of such depths and go onto such peaks as we did in this war, as our Army did after the first two days of fighting. We should be filled with pride, instead of which we're consumed by self-doubt. Well, I always thought the Jewish People needed two Messiahs: one to get the Jews out of the Diaspora, and one to get the Diaspora out of the Jews.

"We have forgotten our past. We imagined we'd become 'a nation like all other nations'. We haven't. We musn't forget the great right that living in Eretz Yisrael has given us: the right not to die on our knees, not to be led into autos-da-fe or crematoria, but to stand on our feet and fight for our lives.

"Now we must pull ourselves out of this wholesale gloom. People who have lost their dearest in this war are mourning their dead, but the entire nation shouldn't walk around in a haze of doubts, shouldn't forget that life is something to be enjoyed. I know some people felt hurt because others had a good time having Purim parties. Why? Life doesn't have to come to a stop. I mean, there's such a thing as tact. You don't dance in the middle of a funeral procession. But why shouldn't people dance one street away from the procession? That is life, and we've got to realize that death is part of it, that the moment we are born we start dying.

"Death isn't a plague. I mean, there are people who're afraid to come near, as if the thing were catching. I had this experience myself after Ido was killed. Some people, even friends, kept away. People don't know how to cope with a thing like that, because the living don't want to talk of death, don't want to think of it.

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"A girl officer who came to see us told me that's one of the reasons why some parents didn't want the names of their fallen sons to be included in the list of the Yom Kippur dead and missing published by the I.D.F. It's a way of denying the fact: if the name isn't there, then it's as if it didn't happen.

"For myself, though, I honestly don't blame anyone. I don't know how I'd have behaved in their place. Maybe if I'd seen a bereaved friend of mine on the other side of the road I would have welcomed the chance to miss him. Yet if we'd met on the same side of the street I know I'd have swallowed my fear of the face-to-face encounter with death - I'd have stopped and shaken his hand. The bereaved suffer. But new babies are born all the time.

"We are a strange people. When we're exhilarated we soar to the stars, but when we're down we bury our face in the dust. Maybe it's part of the Jewish charm. We're a made people anyway. Only madmen could have done what we did. Just think where we started and look where we've got to. There are over three million of us here today. That's the reality, not the botch-up. The Agranat Commission will take care of that, and the guilty will be punished, but we should remember where we started and how far we have come.

"I remember when Moshe Sharett was arrested by the British in 1946 and taken to the prison at Latrun. We were in the middle of our fight against the British, and there were only 600,000 of us in this country.

"At the time of his arrest, Sharett was telling me about his father, Ya'acov Shertok, who had come here with the Bilu: *'My father would never have dreamed that a day would come when there'd be 600,000 Jews in Eretz Yisrael'*, said Sharett. Now we are over three million, and why shouldn't we be a bit awed at our achievement, instead of wallowing in self-pity and black despair?

"You know where I found my answer to the question of 'Who is a Jew'? At Latrun. The British were interrogating me and I refused to talk - not because I knew all that much, but because I just didn't want to tell them the little I did know. That's the way we were educated. I told my British

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interrogator: 'I am a Jew. I was born here, and that's why this country is mine.' They smashed a riflebutt across my head. That was their answer. I've known who a Jew is ever since."