



TRUMPELDOR'S ANNIVERSARY

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Upon an anniversary of a man's death, Jews say Kaddish. What kind of a connection is there between a song of praise to the Master of the Universe and sadness and graves? The significance of Kaddish probably consists in that the Sacred Name, which is praised, is not the name of your God, but the name of the God of the deceased. That holiness for which he lived and for which he perhaps died. Viewing it from this aspect "Yisgadal ve Yiskadash" therefore means, "Although you man, are dead, the holiness which you served remains great and sacred, and we, who have survived, will continue to serve your ideals and continue to fight until the final victory."

Therefore, we must ask ourselves before we celebrate the anniversary of the death of a great man, "Is this serious? Am I prepared to follow his example?" If this is so, then you have the right to say Kaddish for him, then you are his heirs. But if this is not so, then your Kaddish is a falsehood and the commemoration is a farce.

Today, on the Jahrzeit of Trumpeldor, we must pose the same question. Among those commemorating this occasion we find the most bitter and fierce opponents of everything which has a connection with a sword, weapon and revolver. But Trumpeldor's name is especially connected with these ugly instruments. True, he created the Hechalutz and that is a shining gem in his crown, but it would be foolish to deny that in the memory of the masses of our nation, Trumpeldor is primarily a soldier. The phrase, "hero of Tel-Hai" is familiar to them, and to many perhaps it is the only thing they know about Trumpeldor, that and the Legion. And at that, they do not distinguish between the Gallipoli Legion in which he created and led for some time and the Palestinian Legion in which he did not participate. They do not distinguish. They know three words: Trumpeldor, Legion and Tel-Hai.



Trumpeldor's legend which has been created by the masses is the legend of a Jewish soldier and not that of a party man. That is why his name is so popular with the masses. It is not true that "Jews do not like such things." That is a product of imagination. In the hearts of the simple Jew who belongs to the masses, there lives a tremendous excitement and amazement, perhaps even a yearning, for a strong hand, which will take up the cudgels on behalf of these grievances. This is apparent to everyone who has seen Hassidim with long beards attend a foot-ball match of the Viennese "Hakoah." This also pertains to woman. From the rabbitzin to the market dealer, all know the name of Breitbard.

It is also incorrect to persuade oneself or others that the masses appreciate in Trumpeldor not the hero, but the victim, the man who died nobly and not the man who fought nobly. This is not true. We have had thousands of martyrs and sacrifices in our generation and not one of them has been enwrapped in Legend. Trumpeldor's greatness consists not in that the Arabs slew him, but that he defended the Yishub and killed many murderers before he himself fell.

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Trumpeldor as a Jewish soldier, Tel Hai as a Jewish fortress, these are no errors but an example and a Torah for our young generation.

That the fashion of attacking and murdering Jews has not yet disappeared from the face of the earth cannot be disputed, even the blind can see this. Only one question remains – what is the best way of meeting this fashion? One must not forget that even the opponents of Trumpeldor's methods do not like pogroms and seek means of avoiding them. These people think that the best means is not to answer with "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." In such matters they agree with great and fine thinkers like Tolstoy and Ghandi who say that turning the other cheek influences the worst enemy more than a strong hand.

This is a nice and delicate theory, buy this does not mean that it is true. The best proof of this lies before our very eyes and is called the history of the Galuth. It is true that people have not attempted to realise Tolstoy's theories. We Jews have tried



it. Not only have we tried, but have systematically carried it out with superhuman patience in the course of many generations.

The character of humans is neither black nor white. It is only a product of circumstances between the conditions of the appetite and the possibility of satisfying it. Humans have desires and they try to satisfy them by means of "least resistance". If the resistance is too great, the merchandise isn't worth the trouble and they drown their desires. But when they see there is no resistance at all – they say, this is permissible, and the desire is increased.

Take a sacred spot and write there - "it is permissible" – then there will be found many people who will profane it. Perhaps civilisation consists chiefly in that the number of objectives which "may be profaned" is continually being limited.

Today there is no place in the world where one finds placards stating "abandoned". There is but one exception and that is the Jews. That is why youth loved Trumpeldor so much. Not his hammer, not his shovel, not his plow, but his sword. To this youth, Tel Hai, is more precious as a fortress than as a commune. In their eyes it is a symbol that there are means of being freed from desertion.

The significance of Trumpeldor's death is similar to the significance of the teaching of Hannukca. And just as in the case of Hanukkah, the real significance of this historical occurrence has been distorted.

The miracle of Hanukkah consists fundamentally in the heroism of the Has-moneans and of their soldiers. The pilpulistic thinker of the ghetto made this a problem of oil which burnt an entire week, although there was so little of it. I do not wish to say that the tradition of the oil is not a fine tradition. Perhaps it is very symbolic. But historically speaking, this is a distortion of truth to minimize Tel Hai. Tel Hai is the same as Port Arthur and Sebastopol for the Russians and Verdun for the French; a fortress which the enemy attacked with weapons and which the Jews defended with weapons. Trumpeldor' was the leader of Jews capable of defending themselves.



And the Kaddish in memory of that event echoes. As long as we shall remember your name, so long will your example be great and holy; and we shall follow in your footsteps.