

Parshat Behar – 5771
Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

Vechi Yamuch Achicha, U'mata Yadoh Imach, VeHechezakta Boh...VeCai Imach
(If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter...you shall strengthen him...so that he can live with you) (25:35)

Lo Ta'amod Al Dam Rei'e'cha (You shall not stand aside while your brother's blood is shed) (19:16)

The Torah demands responsibility for one Jew towards another on an individual as well as communal, and even global level.

Having just recently (Monday May 2) observed a Yom HaSho'ah I began to think of how We, our parents and grandparents who were not in Europe failed to act responsibly during the years of the Holocaust. Rav Soloveitchik once in a lecture pointed a finger of guilt at Jews from western countries for their lack of responsibility during that awesome period.

It has become an established tradition for Jews throughout the world, that on the 28th day of Nissan, to memorialize the six million of our brethren who died during the Holocaust period. That day is marked on our calendars as Yom HaSho'ah/ Holocaust Memorial Day. In Eretz Yisrael there is a siren that goes on at 10:00 am for one minute, as the entire country comes to a standstill. Everything stops, people stop walking, talking and traffic stops moving. What should be done and what should be contemplated during that one minute of silence?

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that Jews from western countries and particularly Jews from the United States should bow their heads in shame and feel the guilt of their silence during those horrible years. During the Holocaust period, many American Jews were not sufficiently concerned with our brethren, with our fellow Jews, and let millions of Jews go down the drain.

The Rav further made a startling suggestion-that American Jews should add an “*Al Chet*” in the Yom Kippur davening (prayers) to acknowledge their collective failure to respond adequately to news of the mass killing of European Jews during the Holocaust. The list of Al Chets of the *chata'im* (sins) we enumerate on Yom Kippur may be long and numerous but we should add this one other Al Chet. Perhaps it would be the worst, the most horrible one- *Al Chet shechatanu le'faneicha be'ra'inu Beit Yisrael she'hit'chananu eileinu ve'lo shamanu* (For the sin that we have sinned before You by seeing the suffering of our brethren who called to us and we did not listen).

This proposal of the Rav was never implemented on a communal level, but it is certainly feasible and appropriate for each of us as individuals to do so. Many of us reading this thought most probably were born after those horrible years, but we all must share the burden of the guilt of our parents and grandparents. By reciting the list of Al Cheit does not mean that we, personally committed all those sins, but collectively, as one nation, we are responsible for all them