

## On One Foot

Mindful that Mike Freer MP has raised the question of sensitivity to Jewish and Moslem teachings around deaths in Parliament, one of the common questions I get asked is how Judaism relates to the death of non-Jews. As well as concerning non-Jewish friends and business colleagues, it can also touch us very personally and within the family.

The Talmud presents an example from this week's Parasha. As Bnei Yisrael crossed the sea on dry land and then the waters closed around the Egyptians, we are told that the Angels wanted to join in the Israelites' joyous song. However Hashem admonished them stating, "My children are drowning and you want to sing?" (Megilla 10b). From this derives the Minhag that we spill wine from our cup on Seder Night as we remember the Plagues. We are instructed to be mindful that Hashem cares for lives lost – even amongst our enemies.

In the Talmud (Berachot 16b) we read that Rabban Gamaliel mourned the passing of his non-Jewish slave, Tabi. Good domestic staff is difficult to find and the Gemarra does suggest that the appropriate expression of condolence might be, "May Hashem replenish your loss." Nonetheless we are told that Rabban Gamaliel observed his mourning because Tavi was inherently a good man.

This instance has been cited in a number of Piskei Halacha over the ages as a basis for saying Kaddish for worthy non-Jews.

In his Sefer HaChassidim in 12<sup>th</sup> century Germany, R' Yehuda HaChassid affirmed the saying of Kaddish for Christians who had saved Jewish lives at times of persecution. This has been followed by later poskim with reference to those who risked their lives or harboured Jews during the Shoah.

It is also the basis for Tshuvot by Rav Moshe Feinstein z"l and Rav Ovadiya Yosef z"l for the non-Jewish parents and family members of converts. Technically, the halachic status of a convert is as someone reborn and they are not *halachically* related to their parents or siblings. However, to deny one's righteous parents would be insulting within the family and a Chillul Hashem. Mourning should be observed and Kaddish should be recited. (The question of attending non-Jewish ceremonies is one which needs to be handled sensitively on a case by case basis.)

The continuation of the Gemarra on Raban Gamaliel mourning Tabi cites the exhortations of the Sages as they finished their prayers. R' Zeira included a prayer that we should not bring disgrace on ourselves nor shame on our ancestors. R' Safra prayed for Hashem's blessing of peace over all peoples on earth.

Just as we celebrate the righteous in their deaths, may we honour Hashem and His creation by acting righteously in our lives.