Funerals begin for Beersheba terror victims as bereaved families mourn ‘heavy loss’

March 23, 2022

By Tobias Siegal

The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/bereaved-family-members-eulogize-victims-of-beersheba-terror-attack/>

Funerals were held Wednesday afternoon for two of the four victims of a terror attack in Beersheba the day before, with a third planned for later in the evening.

Menahem Yehezkel, 67, was laid to rest in a cemetery in the southern city while the burial ceremony for Doris Yahbas, 49, was held in Moshav Gilat, a small community close to Beersheba. Hundreds attended both funerals.

At 7 p.m. Rabbi Moshe Kravitzky, 50, was to be buried in the same cemetery as Yehezkel. The funeral for Laura Yitzhak, 43, has yet to be scheduled.

Public Security Minister Omer Barlev attended Yahbas’s funeral while Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton joined the ceremony for Yehezkel.

Barlev said “a murderous terrorist incident took place, carried out by a vile killer who murdered women only because of the hatred that burned in him, and committed this heinous crime.”

The Walla website reported that Shasha-Biton was heckled by a woman in the crowd who shouted “you are sitting with terror supporters,” apparently in reference to Ra’am, an Islamist party in the coalition that has strongly condemned the attack.

“We were all deeply shocked by the brutal trail of carnage,” Shasha-Biton said of the attack, in which the knifeman killed people at three locations in the Beersheba. “A murderous terrorist attack that brings hard times to Israeli society and everyone who lives here.”

Earlier in the day family members and acquaintances spoke to the media of the victims.

Paramedic Yisrael Uzan was one of the first responders to reach the scene of the terror attack near a major shopping center in Beersheba. When he was called over to treat one of the victims, he discovered it was his aunt, Doris Yahbas.

“We ran toward an injured person who was lying in front of a clothing store and was covered with a black cloth. We removed it and started examining her,” he told the Ynet news site,

“She was lying on her side so I didn’t notice it at first,” Uzan recalled. When he took off the woman’s face mask, he realized it was his mother’s sister. “I was speechless,” he said, but he continued to treat her.

Uzan’s resuscitation efforts failed and Yahbas, 49, was eventually declared dead, as were Yitzhak, Kravitzky and Yehezkel.

Yehezkel was on his bicycle when he was rammed by terrorist Mohammad Ghaleb Abu al-Qi’an. The others, along with two other people who were injured, were stabbed by Abu al-Qi’an, before he was shot dead by passersby.

Uzan recalled his uncle arriving at the scene, running toward him and asking about his wife. “I pulled myself together and supported him,” he said.

“She was like a mother to us, she always took care of us,” he said. “She knew everything about us. I was like her doctor, she would consult with me. Yesterday I stood over her body and said, ‘Doris, I’m sorry but I can’t help you.'”

Yahbas is survived by her three children and husband.

Yitzhak, the first victim of Tuesday’s killing spree, was on her way to meet her husband when the terrorist spotted her at a gas station and attacked her from behind, repeatedly stabbing her while she attempted in vain to defend herself.

“This is a heavy loss, a very heavy loss. It’s hard to talk about her in the past tense. Laura was a woman of valor, a mother, a sister, a friend,” her brother-in-law Tzvika told Ynet.

“I was told she fought like a lioness, as she did throughout her life,” he said of the mother of three. “They were supposed to move into a new home in five months. They were really looking forward to that.”

Tzvika criticized emergency medical services over their response time. “It took them a long time, a very long time. I got there from work after my brother notified me — it took me 10 or 15 minutes — and when I got there I saw the ambulance leaving. I don’t understand why it took them so long.”

It was not clear that this was indicative of how long it took the medical teams to get to the spot. Medics will often seek to stabilize a critical patient before transporting them.

The date and location of Yitzhak’s funeral have not yet been set.

Kravitzky, who was rammed by the assailant while riding his bicycle, was an active member of the Beersheba Chabad community and ran a synagogue in the city.

Zalman Gorelik, who knew Kravitzky and worked alongside him for years, described him as a kind person devoted to his community.

“Everyone remembers him, they keep calling,” he told Ynet. “The rabbi joined the Chabad center about 15 years ago. He studied at the Chabad yeshiva in Chisinau [Moldova], and immigrated to Israel. He was motivated and felt a sense of duty to give back,” he said.

Describing his work, Gorelik said he spent much of his time in the Nahal Beka neighborhood, where many immigrants from the former Soviet Union have settled over the years.

“He was there every day for the past ten years,” he said. “We ran a soup kitchen in the neighborhood, which he managed. He would collect food as part of an agreement we have with the military and hand it out to the elderly. His commitment was unparalleled,” he added.

“I think that on a day like this everyone should decide to do an act of kindness, to come together in unity and give back in a common act of mutual responsibility.”

Kravitzky will be buried at 7 p.m. at the new cemetery in Beersheba. He is survived by four children and a wife.

Yifrach Yehezkel, whose brother Menahem was also killed in the attack, told Channel 13 that his brother’s death in such a central spot in the city made him feel unsafe.

“Lately, we’ve been living with no sense of security. A huge shopping center like this should be secure,” he said.

“We’ve had incidents of rocks being thrown toward vehicles. The courts released such a criminal — how did they let him go? They release terrorists and nobody monitors their activity — this is what happens.”

Speaking to Army Radio, Yifrach described his brother as “modest and shy” and as “an observant Jew” who “studied the Torah with his friends every morning.”

Yehezkel’s nephew Nati Cohen told the Walla news site that his uncle was “a quiet man who loved to hike,” and described his death as “a hard blow, a terrible tragedy.”

Yehezkel leaves behind four siblings.

Two other women who were attacked by the assailant were taken in serious condition to Soroka Medical Center. They were stable as of Wednesday morning, the hospital said, noting it was also treating several people suffering from shock.

The stabber was identified as 34-year-old Abu al-Qi’an, from the Bedouin town of Hura in the Negev. Abu al-Qi’an, who died of his wounds at the scene, had served four years in prison for plotting to join the fundamentalist Islamic State terror group in Syria. He was released in 2019. Police said he likely acted alone in Tuesday’s attack.

On Wednesday morning, police said in a statement that two of Abu al-Qi’an’s family members, identified by Hebrew media as his brothers, were arrested and interrogated overnight. They are suspected of knowing about Abu al-Qi’an’s intentions and failing to prevent an act of terrorism.