

CHIZUK & IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

by Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness

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This week's parsha begins with Moshe giving a painstaking, accounting of all the funds donated to the Mishkan. As the project reached its conclusion the time had come for a full and detailed report. We often like to forget that such a final reckoning (DIN V'CHESHBON) will be required of each and every one of us as our life project reaches its end and we ascend up high. The words chosen to be engraved upon one's Matzeiva, gravestone, attempt to succinctly sum up the essence of our being.

Nechama Leibowitz, for example, shied away from any honorifics, and requested that only one word appear on her tombstone: MORA, teacher. She felt that this fully described who and what she was, and that any other description would be superfluous. Rav Soloveitchik, similarly, regularly told all: You ask me who I am - ICH BIN A POSHETER MELAMED - I am a simple teacher.

This past week (10 years ago) my Mother-in-law, Chaya Sarah bat

Yona, "Bubby" as she was known to all, passed away. If one were to inscribe but one word on her Matzeva it would be the term "Survivor" (grandmother to many many grandchildren). This in keeping with Emil Fackenheim's notion of the 11th commandment Jews were entrusted with after the Holocaust - "Thou shalt survive and not perish."

In her beloved memory I will briefly outline a few scenes from her life story.

Survival, in her case as a young seventeen year old in Nazi occupied Hungary, meant carrying forged documents posing as a Christian girl. She never forgot the local priest who stood by her when she was threatened by a local boy suspicious of the fact that she never attended church. "I understand why you do not attend", he quietly told her, "and will not allow the young man to harass you again." Although they were long anticipated as saviors, when Russian forces finally arrived at the village she was hiding in, they began to brutally question the locals in search of Nazi collaborators. When they did not like the answers she offered to their questions, the soldiers began to beat my Mother-in-law, who in utter exasperation, being at her wits end, screamed out: SH'MA YISRAEL. The Russian commanding officer menac-

ingly demanded she repeat her words. Totally bewildered, and not knowing what he wanted from her, she again cried out: SH'MA YISRAEL. The officer told everyone to leave and confessed to her that he, too, was Jewish. Since his own family, wife and children, had been murdered by the Nazis he was now looking to avenge their deaths. In his remorse the officer offered to adopt her, and bring her back to Russia with him, yet she declined hoping that if she would return to her hometown she might discover surviving family members.

Not finding any living immediate family member, she quickly married another survivor, and they jointly decided that they must go up to Palestine. Throughout the war she had repeatedly promised herself that if she survived, the only place she would want to live is in her own Land. After clandestinely crossing many borders, they found themselves on a Ma'apilim ship headed for the shores of Israel. Several months later, after their ship had been stopped by the British navy and they were interred in a camp in Cyprus, Bubby gave birth to my wife at the local British military hospital. When they were finally allowed back to Palestine, and after the War of Independence in which my Father-in-law took part, they settled in Haifa.

Several years later, the pressures of living through the TZENA, a strict regime of austerity and food rationing, coupled with rosy promises from cousins abroad led them towards the shores of North America. My Mother-in-law always regretted this move and for many years, whenever the family faced financial or health crises, she linked it back to this decision, seeing in it a punishment for having left Eretz Yisrael after having survived the catastrophe of Europe.

Coming to modern day Israel, one of the most developed countries on the globe, no longer entails any such hardships. One need not illegally smuggle across hostile borders, as a taxi will gladly convey you directly to the airport. When we imagine our final accounting, we must ask ourselves: Will our children be able to write on our gravestone: "Proudly decided to make Aliyah to the land of our fathers". Or better yet one simple word : OLEH 🇮🇱👉

These weekly words of Torah wisdom can be found in my recently published book "Eretz Yisrael and Aliyah in the weekly Parsha". It can be ordered by calling 052-336-0553 or by ordering it on Amazon