

CHIZUK & IDUD

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

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Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh

Vayikra 2018

Sacrifice in Life

This morning (6 years ago) I saw a new Pesach Hagadda containing insights by Rav Yechezkel Yaakov Weinberg zt"l, the author of the SRIDEI EISH and the last head of the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin. Although during his lifetime I had only one encounter with Rav Weinberg, my interest was piqued. As a young college student in the early 60s, I participated in a student exchange program, and thus found myself traveling through Europe. During this trip I had the occasion to spend a Shabbat at a kosher hotel in Montreux, Switzerland. Luckily, I was informed of the unique minyan for Mincha convening on Shabbat afternoon in a small shul adjacent to the apartment of this great Gaon. After Mincha, Rav Weinberg spoke of how Jews are commanded to live in this world and not try to escape into other spiritual realms as is true in other religions. He suggested that the Chassidic blessing given by

Rebberes wishing one Hatzlacha both B'GASHMI'UT V'RUCHNI'UT, in worldly as well as spiritual matters, indicates that while striving for spiritual accomplishment one should be grounded in this world. I left the town immediately after Shabbat, and never had any more direct contact with Rav Weinberg till his Levaya in Jerusalem a number of years later in 1966.

The biography printed at the beginning of the new Hagadda describes the events I remember from that unusual day. At the time, I was studying at Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, and together with most of my fellow talmidim, I stood by the old Yeshiva building near Rechov Hanevi'im, waiting to accompany the Aron (coffin). Two prominent members of the Mizrachi Party, Dr. Zerach Wahrhaftig and Dr. Yosef Burg, (who had studied at the Hildesheimer Seminary), had arranged for the burial procession, and had planned its exact route towards the cemetery in Sanhedria.

However, Rav Yechezkel Sarna, had other ideas. The Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim, who had once studied together with Rabbi Weinberg in Slobodka, was unwell. Although he had had been ordered by his doctors to stay in bed, he felt it was his responsibility to act.

Thus, the sick and elderly Rav made his way to the crossroads of Nevi'im and Straus. As the procession wound its way along HaNevi'im Street, Rav Sarna pointed straight ahead and directed his Talmidim not to turn in the direction of Sanhedria, but rather to lead the coffin to the cemetery in Givat Shaul: "The deceased will be buried in the grave prepared by me, next to Rav Eliezer Yehuda zt"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Mir." "I know that the Gaon was close in his lifetime to many different circles of people", he later explained, "they all wished to be honored by the memory of the Gaon, and to bury him in their portion of the cemetery. And yet the Gaon was truly a man of Torah and Yir'a raised in the Beit Midrash." (-Curiously omitted was the fact that the Rav had received a Doctorate from a German University.)

So it was that the battle of the living over the legacy, and body, of the deceased had been decided.

Many noted how the strange story of Rav Weinberg's Levaya, was a fitting end to a life which was full of twists and turns, often tragic and heart-breaking.

In a volume entitled LIFRAKIM, Rav Weinberg has the following to say on Parshat Vayikra and the notion of sacrifice: "All mankind, whether Jew

or non-Jew, has a strong connection to sacrifice. We sacrifice today for tomorrow. Our days of youth for the days that come afterward." Man gives up something he possesses today for the hope of attaining something he considers more important.

Personal life as well as national life has its ups and downs. Indeed, Rav Weinberg's own life was anything but a straight upwards trajectory.

As Rabbi Yitzchak Blau points out, rather than focusing on the narrower meaning of the burnt offerings brought on the Altar, Rav Weinberg sees the sacrificial order as a symbol of the willingness to sacrifice in all realms of life.

When we think of modern-day tales of sacrifice, the story of the creation of Modern Israel comes to the fore. We all know that manifold sacrifices were - and continue to be - necessary in order to allow this country to thrive.

Rav Weinberg suggests that the ability and willingness to make sacrifice is the basis of man's humanity, separating mankind from the rest of the animal kingdom focused on their immediate needs as they claw at their prey. Without sacrifices there can be no advancement in science, in art, etc.

Now (in 2024), we are witnesses to the ultimate sacrifices so many of our soldiers have made in Gaza for the people of Israel. May their memory be a blessing!

This symbolic lesson of Parshat Vayikra, with its heavy focus on the importance and centrality of the sacrificial order, is very relevant to Aliyah as well.

There are many who, although having seriously contemplated Aliyah, are deterred by the heavy sacrifices involved. For some, the sacrifice would be most immediately, and acutely, felt economically, while for others the thought of Aliyah is synonymous with the heavy sacrifice involved in the weakening of close family ties and social connections.

The price may be real and even painful, but one thing must not be forgotten: If earlier generations would not have been willing to make sacrifices, and on a much larger scale (-imagine Aliyah sans airplanes, telephones or Zoom!) we would not be where we are today.

So, as we begin reading Chumash Vayikra and celebrate the 73rd year (now the 76th) of the State of Israel - the question we ask is: When are you planning to join us here? 🏠👉

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