

CHIZUK *and* 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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This week (on Thursday) the State of Israel commemorates Yom HaSho'ah. I was recently talking to an acquaintance who survived the Holocaust as a young girl. Today she lives in Yerushalayim where she cherishes the chore of caring for her young grandchildren. When the conversation turned to the events of those cursed years, she suddenly blurted out the following: "I lost twenty-six close relatives in the Holocaust." "Believe me", she continued, "a day does not go by without me thinking to myself: "Why did I survive and not all those who were so sweet and so pure." What can one say in response?

Rav Yehuda Amital zt"l, the founder of the Har Etzion Hesder Yeshiva in Alon Sh'vut, had lost his entire family during the Holocaust. He himself was deported to a labor camp where he managed to stay alive. He would often comment: "I can clearly identify the hand of G-d in the Sho'ah, but I am incapable of making sense of what I see." Although we cannot

explain (or understand) the Holocaust, we do recognize the fact that it was shortly followed by the founding of the State of Israel.

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, T'hilim 20) discusses the meaning of the verse "YA'ANCHA HASHEM B'YOM TZARA - May Hashem hear you on a day of trouble." The point we may glean, says the Midrash, can be understood via the following Mashal:

A father and son were marching together. When the son tired he turned to his father asking: "When will we finally arrive at the Medina?" (Medina here means a large city.) The father replied: "Let this be a rule for you. Whenever you see a cemetery, this is a sign that the Medina is close by." Thus says Hakdosh Baruch Hu to the people of Israel: "If you see that a great number of troubles have befallen you - at this hour know that you will be redeemed, as it says: YA'ANCHA HASHEM B'YOM TZARA.

This Midrash is many hundreds of years old, and yet it uncannily parallels the Jewish experience of the 20th century. Millions of our fellow Jews perished, their makeshift cemeteries scattered throughout Europe, and yet, right after the Holocaust, Medinat Yisrael came into being.

How are we to connect these events? Nothing can ever compensate for the priceless lives violently snatched away. Nonetheless, did the State of Israel partially serve to rectify the utter desecration of the Divine name? An individualistic expression of this tikun is found in the unique story of one of the survivors who made his way to Eretz Yisrael immediately after the war. In March 1938, while still in Vienna, Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Friedman, the Rebbe of Sadigora, was forced, together with other rabbis, to publicly sweep the streets as an act of public denigration. While doing so he vowed: "Ribbono shel Olam, may it be Your will that I merit to take a broom and sweep the streets of Eretz Yisrael." He was then handed a Nazi flag and commanded to plant it atop a high building. Once again he vowed to wave the flag of the Jewish people from a prominent place in Eretz Yisrael. Rabbi Yissachar Tamar (AleI Tamar, Shevi'is p. 69) describes how the Rebbe would awaken in the early morning hours to sweep the streets of Tel-Aviv, and on Yom HaAtzmaut he ascended to the top of the Great Synagogue of Tel-Aviv in order to wave the flag from on high.

Returning our attention to Rav Amital tz"l, I would like to quote from a Sicha he gave his students on the fortieth anniversary of his Aliya to Israel. On

this occasion Rav Amital chose to discuss the Holocaust and its affects upon him. He described how he had been plagued for years by the question which has greatly troubled many other survivors: "Millions of Jews were murdered in the Holocaust - yet I was saved. Was I saved because God singled me out... Or rather was it a mere case of chance? ... These doubts plague me until this day."

Rav Amital explained to his students that this doubt had led to his decision to commemorate his own personal salvation not on the day he was liberated, but rather on the day he made Aliya: "Because I do not know the answer, I do not have the boldness to designate a specific day as a holiday because I was saved. Thus I combine both focal points of my life, my salvation and my Aliya, into one personal holiday." ("A World Built, Destroyed and Rebuilt" p. 134).

In a certain sense all of us are in a similar position: We are a generation of survivors. We do not know why we were the ones chosen to represent the Jewish people in this generation (- are there not others more worthy?). Like R. Amital we can only conclude that we must make the most of our lives by living it fruitfully, here in Eretz Yisrael!