

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**

Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh

B'ha-alo-t'cha

The time - 1962, the place - the funeral of Rav Aaron Kotler zt"l.

Rav Kotler zt"l had been designated by Marvin Schick as the "greatest Jew ever to set foot in America". Rav Aharon zt"l had established the Lakewood Yeshiva and the Satmar Rebbe eulogized him with a quote from Rashi of this week's parsha (Bamidbar 8:3), where we are told VAYAAS KEIN AHARON, that, in regard to the Menorah which the Almighty had commanded Moshe to set up, Rashi says LO SHINA. Aharon did not deviate even one iota from the instructions he was given. The Satmar rebbe said "So, too, in regards to Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l - whether it is as Rosh Yeshiva in Kletz in Europe or as the Rosh Yeshiva in Lakewood which he founded, he did not deviate one iota from spreading Torah in the new world. Rather, he was consistently true to Torah principles. The Satmar Rebbe, in his eulogy, was not only speaking of Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l, but he, no doubt, was speaking about himself as well. He was consistent in his view of Zionism and Medinat Yisrael. (more on this later).

Yet, when it came to saving Jews, while

Rav Aaron's hashkafa was consistent, his thinking was often "out of the box". A case in point: when told by Irving Bunim, in the 1940s, that a group of rabbis was incarcerated by the Italian police and would be turned over to the Nazis, Rav Aharon asked "Who could be approached to immediately help these Jews in Italy?" The solution: The Italian Mafia would have contact with Italian officials, so Rav Aharon asked for a meeting to be set up with the head of the Italian mafia. A scene which can only come from Hollywood could be envisioned as rabbis, led by Rav Aharon zt"l requested help from the mafia.

Irving Bunim, the English-speaking spokesman, sits opposite Joseph Bonanno, Sicilian-born American Mafioso. The mafia leader asks Irving Bunim who the elderly man sitting next to him was and was told: "He is the Godfather of the Jewish People." The mafia leader was in awe and asked for a blessing. Bunim turned to Rav Kotler and said in Yiddish that "He wants a blessing from the Rav". Rav Kotler blessed him with a "long life and that he should die in bed". The mafia leader appreciated this blessing in as much that "Mafia" and "long life" are oxymorons.

There has been some debate as to the validity of this story or whether it was simply a urban legend. Either way, it is a great story and points to the great lengths that Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l would go to help other Jews.

The Satmar Rebbe also never changed his position regarding Eretz Yisrael and Zionism as "the work of the satan". After the Six Day War, which the Rebbe claimed was the work of satan, the American Agudah Convention held a debate as to whether the Satmar position was correct. Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky indicated that he accepted the Satmar position. However, after the Gerrer representative from Israel, Rav Itchie Meyer Levin - the Gerrer Rebbe's son-in-law stood up and pointed out a contradiction: regarding the Holocaust rabbinic leaders had stated it was an "Act of G-d". he asked, "How can it be that the annihilation of Jews is an act of G-d while the saving of the Jews in the Six-Day War was a act of satan?" Rav Kaminetzky, who had previously adopted the Satmar point of view, sent a note to the dais asking to publicly announce that he (Rav Kaminetzky) had changed his mind and that the "salvation of the Jewish People in the Six-Day War was unquestionably and act of G-d." This was Rav Yaakov's greatness. His only concern was truth and he wasn't afraid to publically admit that he had erred. (Daas Torah blog site Sept .13 2011).

Another instance with deviation from the Satmar position is found in the Sefer "Eim HaBanim S'meicha". The author, Rav Teichtel, who had adhered to the Satmar anti-Zionist position, came to the conclusion that it was an erroneous position and that the Anti-Zionism was the cause the Jewish trouble in Europe,

as the Jews were not encouraged to leave or even discouraged to leave the shores of Europe for Eretz Yisrael.

Today the debate over the Satmer position is largely academic and Aliya hangups are more prosaic. 🏠👉

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