

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*

With Yom Yerushalayim around the corner, we are getting ready to joyously commemorate the fiftieth year since the reunification of the Holy city in 1967. Thinking of the current state of affairs, though, it is clear that as the years go by Arab claims on Jerusalem have not changed nor dissipated. This reminds me of a story which firmly validates the French expression "plus ca change plus c'est le meme chose" - "the more things change, the more they stay the same!...

In the beginning of the 20th century, Rabbi Joseph Chaim Sonnenfeld zt"l (the chief protagonist to challenge Rav Kook zt"l in his role as Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem) was very active in working to enlarge the Jewish Yishuv of Jerusalem. Amongst other things, Rav Sonnenfeld helped establish the new neighborhood of Batei Ungarin, built next to Me'ah Shearim. In the year 1921 major disturbances broke out between Arabs and Jews. Beginning in the city of Jaffa, the rioting quickly spread to many other cities including Jerusalem. The Mufti of Jerusalem incited his people against the Jews specifically targeting the new Jewish "settlements" outside of the Old City walls. With tensions flaring, Jews were inhibited from going to the Kotel for several days. One morning, in the midst of all the events, Rav Sonnenfeld announced his plan to walk to the new neighborhood in order to serve as Mohel for a Brit taking place there. Cloaked in his Tallit and Tefillin he began to set out on the path which lead through the closely packed Arab homes. Although

his family tried to dissuade him from leaving the Old City, Rav Sonnenfeld was adamant, quoting aloud the Rabbinic adage: Sh'luchei Mitzva Einan Nizokin - "On a mission to do a mitzva one is not harmed." At the conclusion of the Brit one of his students offered to accompany him back home but Rav Sonnenfeld refused saying that "When performing a mitzva one will not be harmed, neither coming or going (Pesachim 83), therefore I am not afraid for my own safety, but for you it may be dangerous!" The student tried to persuade his Rebbe to at least take the safer, albeit longer, route home via the Jaffa Gate. Here too, the Talmid was unsuccessful, as Rav Sonnenfeld declared: "I will march through Damascus Gate lest our enemies, the Arabs, have reason to think that any part of Jerusalem is out of bounds for Jews."

This story makes one ponder - Ein Chadash Tachat HaShemesh - Plus ce change... However, the realization that so little has changed on this front in over a hundred years can lead to a sense of despair: Will our enemies ever recognize that Yerushalayim is ours?

In a heavily censored passage in his "Hilchot Melachim" (Laws of Kings 11:3,4), the Rambam suggests an answer to a similar question: The Christians (and to a lesser degree the Muslims) have appropriated our Torah, perverting its message and declaring it to be their own - won't they ever see the truth? The Rambam explains that the phenomenal success of these religions may, and should, be seen in the following positive light: These erroneous belief systems which are adhered to by such great multitudes, are intended to pave the way for the arrival of the true Mashiach!

Notwithstanding the false claims put forth by both Christianity and Islam, they have infused the whole world with some of the basic concepts of Torah. For example, writes the Rambam, even the peoples inhabiting the 'farthest islands' have heard of the concept of the Mashiach, and thus when Mashiach Ben David - the King of Israel from the House of David - will finally arrive - speedily in our days - they will quickly recognize him.

Similarly, the global fixation with the Holy Land and Jerusalem lays the groundwork for the future fulfillment of the prophecy of 'Ki Beiti Beit Tefilla Yikarei L'chol Ha'amim" - the spotlight of the world already shines on Jerusalem today.

Who knows? Perhaps, the world's desire to take possession of the Holy Land may serve as a reminder for all those Jews who have long been estranged from Eretz HaKodesh and Jerusalem; Perhaps hearing others sing the words of the prophet: "Let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob... For Torah shall come forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem... They shall beat their swords into plowshares... and they shall never again know war (Yeshayahu 2:2-4) - may wake us from our own spiritual slumber and propel us forward...

As more and more Diaspora Rabbis, together with their congregants, realize that it is the time to act and move to Israel, insuring that they celebrate next Yom Yerushalayim here as residents of the Holy Land, we will surely bring ourselves one step closer to the fulfillment of these prophecies!

Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness, Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh