

Shabbat Parashat Vayeira  
“Ultimate Sacrifice”

This week, the topic for my d’var Torah called out to me. It has been a meaningful several days of remembrances and commemorations with the 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht/“The Night of Broken Glass,” Remembrance Day, and the 16<sup>th</sup> *yahrzeit* of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin z”l, all occurring during the last few days. Add to that mix the Torah portion in which Abraham is called upon by God to make an offering of his only son with his wife Sarah and it is as if the theme of “ultimate sacrifice” is metaphorically banging down your door.

In my classes, students often ask me, “What if it were you Rabbi Bellas?” in response to a variety of different situations. This week was no different. The question always forces me to reflect on my values, the choices I make, and my attempts to put myself in the shoes of others whose decisions and actions I am either reading about or studying. As I was preparing for the primary grades’ Remembrance Day assembly, during which I spoke about my grandfather’s z”l service to Canada as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, I wondered if I could have enlisted the way he did, leaving his beloved wife and infant daughter at home to go overseas. Every year on Yitzchak Rabin’s *yahrzeit*, I am humbled by how he spent the vast majority of his life as a man of war and then gave his life after transforming himself into a champion for peace. Could I have seen the light the way that he did? One can never really succeed at trying to put one’s self in the shoes of those who experienced Kristallnacht and the Holocaust soon after, but I am always inspired by the stories of those who clung to their Judaism even in those darkest of days or had the strength to rebel against Nazi forces. Would I have remained steadfast or risen up with arms? Finally, we read this week of the story of Abraham, whose faith in God was so unquestioned that he agreed to take his sole heir off to the sacrificial altar, going so far as to tie him down to it and raise the knife over him until an angel twice called out his name. “What if it were you, Rabbi Bellas? What would you have done?”

These are all stories of ultimate sacrifice, only of different types. I can honestly say that I have no idea how I would have responded to such situations had it been me. However, what I can do is honor the memories of those who showed the courage and bravery to make the choices that they made, stand up for what they believed in, and fought to try to make this world a better place. Indeed, this is a week of remembrance, but this must also be a week of gratitude, inspiration, and resolution. Remembering pays tribute to those who have earned it, but taking action truly will show that their memories have made a difference.

In Judaism, it is common to accompany remembrance with an act of *tikkun olam*/repairing the world. Most often, one commits to giving charity in memory of the deceased. However, there are so many other ways to improve the world. As we bring in Shabbat to conclude Remembrance Day and a week full of commemorations of acts of ultimate sacrifice, what are we all willing to give or “sacrifice” of ourselves to make this world a better place? If we all make even small commitments and live up to them, think about what a difference our combined actions would make!

May the memories of all those whom we have remembered this week be for a blessing.

Shabbat Shalom!