

Good Shabbos Everyone. The primary discussion in this week's Torah portion Vayikra is regarding the Korbanos - sacrifices which we brought in the Mishkan - tabernacle and later in the Beis HaMikdash - Holy Temple, in Jerusalem. The root of the word Korban is "Karov" meaning closer. Today we do not have the sacrifices to grow closer, but often times, when we make personal "sacrifices" we grow closer to Hashem.

A married couple recently revealed how they turned their backs on their violent neo-Nazi past – after discovering they were both Jewish. The one-time skinheads grew up as part of a hate-filled white power gang in Warsaw, the capital of Poland and once the site of the largest Jewish ghetto in Nazi-occupied Europe. But now they are devout members of an Orthodox Jewish synagogue.

The truth about their roots had been buried by their parents to escape persecution from first the Germans and then the Soviet-controlled post-war government. Even when the couple started spewing anti-Semitic slogans and attacking Jews, their parents still kept silent about their heritage. Pawel and Ola Bromson met at school when they were twelve and married at eighteen.

By then they were heavily involved in the neo-Nazi movement that was rife in Warsaw's concrete jungle housing estates. Just 350,000 Jews remained in Poland after the war, a tenth of the population from before the Holocaust, and many fled in the quarter of a century that followed. For those that remained, parents often decided it better to keep their true faith a secret.

But Ola remembered something her mother once let slip about her Jewish heritage. And when she checked at Poland's Jewish Historical Institute she learned the truth – that not only was she a Jew, but so was her husband. She was in shock.

'Something told me to do it. It was unbelievable. 'It turned out that we had Jewish roots. It was a shock. I didn't expect to find out that I had a Jewish husband.' She said she did not know how to tell Pawel the truth. 'I didn't know how to tell him. I loved him even if he was a punk or skinhead, if he beat people up or not.'

When she did, a disbelieving Pawel confronted his parents. He said he had been a skinhead and a nationalist '100 per cent'. 'It was all about white power and I believed Poland was only for Poles. That Jews were the biggest plague and the worst evil of this world,' he said.

It was difficult to describe the emotions he felt at learning he was Jewish, he said. 'My first thought was what am I going to tell people? What am I going to tell the boys? Should I admit it or not? I was angry, sad, scared, unsure.' He was unable to look in the mirror, he said, because he hated what he saw – a Jew. But as he came to terms with his identity he approached Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich, who became a mentor to the couple.

Pawel (now Pinchas) added that he does have regrets – 'but it's not something that I walk around and lash myself over'. 'I feel sorry for those that I beat up but I don't hold a grudge against myself,' he explained. 'The people who I hurt can hold a grudge against me.'

Today, the couple are active members of the Jewish community in Warsaw. Pinchas is studying to work in a slaughterhouse killing animals according to the Jewish Kosher requirement and Ola is working in the synagogue's kitchen as a kosher supervisor.

Rabbi Shudrich paid tribute to them for having the courage to turn their lives around. 'The fact that they were skinheads actually increased the amount of respect I have for them,' he said. 'That they could've been where they were, understood that that was not the right way, then embraced rather than run away the fact that they were part of the people who they used to hate. 'I think also it says on a personal level, never write somebody off. Where they may be 10 years ago doesn't have to be where they are today. And the human being has this unlimited capability of changing and sometimes even for the better,' he added. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**