

TORAH THOUGHTS – A HERO IN VIRGINIA

On July 9th, Rabbi Reuven Bauman was a chaperone for a day camp trip to a coastal Virginia state park. One of the children was struggling in rough waters, and without hesitation the rabbi rushed in to save the boy. At least one other passerby jumped in as well. The youngster made it back to shore, but Rabbi Bauman was swept out to sea.

After looking for many hours, the coast guard reluctantly called off the search; it was virtually impossible that the rabbi could have survived. Sadly, his body was found on Sunday.

Rabbi Bauman tried to fulfill the mitzvah *pikuach nefesh* or “saving a life.” It is based on the biblical verse, “Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.” (Leviticus 19:16) While Rabbi Bauman died in the attempted rescue, his bravery might have inspired the one or more who jumped in. Further, it might have comforted the drowning boy, calming him so he was more able to help himself. We don’t know.

While I commend the rabbi’s heroism wholeheartedly, there is more to consider about *pikuach nefesh*. The Torah also teaches, “You shall keep My laws and rules, you shall act on them, people shall live by them.” (Leviticus 18:5) We should **live** by the mitzvot, meaning that we should not follow a commandment if it is very likely we will die as a result. A weak swimmer, for example, should not dive into rough waters in order to save someone. Instead, he should call for help, throw the drowning person a float, and the like. He is not “standing idly by,” nor is he putting himself in grave danger.

I assume that Rabbi Bauman, as a chaperone for the trip, was a good swimmer. *Zichrono levracha* - may his memory be for a blessing.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Rabbi Bauman was married with five children. To send a message to Mrs. Bauman or to any of the Bauman/Stern families, an email address has been created for this purpose at comfortforbaumanfamily@gmail.com
2. A fund was started to support the rabbi’s family. As of this writing, 5,200 donors have given almost \$470,000. To contribute, go to <https://www.charidy.com/baumanfamily>

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Pont