

Comments at the Vigil for Kidnapped Israeli Teens

Embassy of Israel, Washington, D.C.

June 18, 2014; 20 Sivan 5774

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Until the minute I arrived here today I was hoping and praying that this vigil, that this demonstration would be cancelled. I was anxiously checking my phone for a text, or an email, or a phone call from Ron Halber or the JCRC saying the event was off...Because Gilad, Naftali, and Eyal had been safely returned to their families; because they had finally been found by the enormous IDF manhunt that has fanned out across the region where they were abducted. But this demonstration sadly was not cancelled...and we continue the excruciating wait for these precious boys to be returned to the loving arms of their parents; these teenagers, two 16 year-olds and a 19 year-old, who were not soldiers, or combatants, or even carrying weapons...they were kids on their way home from school after taking their exams! How many of us have waited at home for our own teenagers who just in these past weeks took their own final exams? Could you even begin to imagine the heartache of one of your own precious children not coming home; disappearing on their way home from school? How I wish these captors, these kidnapers who purport to be religious people would read the Koran or the Bible. How I wish these Hamas terrorists who claim to act on religious impulses would read the sacred text that once and for all declared that children are NEVER to be sacrificed. Whether that child was Isaac or Ishmael, in both the Torah and the Koran God stops Abraham from going through with the sacrifice, and declares from that moment forward that you must protect children, not abuse or manipulate them; nurture them and love them, not sacrifice or kill them! THIS is the true Abrahamic tradition! And yet we see horrifying images pouring out of the Palestinian territories of that shameful new three finger salute; images of Palestinian children holding up three fingers with pride in the abduction of three Israeli kids. I felt ill reading reports of Palestinians passing out candies and delicacies on the streets, celebrating this kidnapping; or that mangled image of the World Cup Logo with three hands gripping identifiably Jewish bodies whose arms are raised in surrender. What happened to our holy, shared, Abrahamic tradition that children must never be sacrificed, and instead protected at all costs from this insanity?

Every time there is a missing or exploited child in this world it is a disgrace--a blight on all humanity. We are here today because these three kids: Gilad, Naftali, and Eyal are OUR kids. This is a kidnapping from OUR family, from the family of Am Yisrael. Did you see the heart wrenching photo of the three mothers of these children huddling together in a sorrowful embrace? No parent should have to endure the agony that they have been living now for so many days. No parent should have to wait day and night and wonder whether their child is alive or not; being fed or not; being given medical treatment or not; being tortured or not. And because Gilad, Naftali, and Eyal are not only their parents' children, but all of our children, we will not stop

demanding their safe return until they are back home in the arms of their loving parents. In the first statement made to the press by the families, Uri Yifrach, Eyal's father thanked the Jewish people all over the world for its hityachdut ha'gdolah, for coming together with remarkable unity and sending so much love and encouragement to these families. He instructed all of us: Keep praying, keep doing good deeds, keep learning Torah in honor of these children; and keep advocating in every corner of the globe for their safe return to their homes. And we say to the Yifrach, Sha'ar, and Frenkel families that we will be unstinting in our efforts to advocate for their children and unceasing in our prayers and deeds of loving kindness on their behalf. In the words of the Psalmist:

Asagveihu--I will keep him safe...

Yikra'eini v'eh-eneihu--When he calls upon Me, I will answer him

Imo Anochi v'tzara--I will be with him in distress

Achaltzeihu va'achabdeihu--I will rescue him and make him honored

Orech yamim as'bi-eihu--I will let him live to a ripe old age

V'areihu bishuati--And I will show him My salvation.

Our God, our Refuge, our Stronghold, the One in Whom we place our trust, please answer the calls of Gilad, Naftali, and Eyal, their families, and all of Am Yisrael. Comfort them in their inordinate distress. Rescue them from their captivity, and bless them with long, healthy, vigorous lives...and please God, we beseech you with hearts filled with anguish: Show Gilad, Naftali, and Eyal Your compassion. And let us say together: Amen.