

May 18th 2018 / 4th of Sivan 5778

Dear chevreh,

It has been a deeply upsetting week regarding Israel, Gaza and questions of responsibility.

Shouldn't Israel have the obligation to defend its borders? Shouldn't Gazans have the right to protest peacefully without risk? What happens when most are peaceful and some are provocative? What should the response be of the IDF? (See this piece: <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-why-is-israel-using-lethal-force-against-the-protestors-of-gaza-1.6092579>)

Who am I, as an American Jew, to have such strong feelings and opinions? Which sources can I believe? And how do we stomach the poorly-timed opening of the American embassy in Jerusalem, with the Administration's choice of particular Christian preachers as religious speakers who share none of our liberal values and are using us to fulfill their political and religious ambitions? (See this piece: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/14/opinion/jerusalem-embassy-gaza-protests.html>) What is a progressive Zionist committed to democracy to do, think, believe?

There is a wide spectrum of views about Israel at KHN. I know there are deeply committed moderate Zionists, left-leaning progressive Zionists, those who have little relationship to Israel and many others. In the larger Jewish community, there are people identified with the BDS movement, with right-wing Zionism and everything in between. Some people move back and forth. I welcome you all to talk with me and to talk with each other respectfully.

Rabbi Benjamin Weiner of the Jewish Community of Amherst writes, "As I sift through the various media reports, it has repeatedly occurred to me that only a true sage, or a fanatic, would know exactly what to make of them —would be able to boil it all down to an absolute and incontrovertible judgment of right and wrong. Being neither sage nor fanatic I find myself instead stuck in a quagmire of competing perceptions and interpretations, feeling grief and shame at the horrendous loss of Palestinian life, anger and frustration at the failure of many to recognize the explicit threats of violence against Israeli civilians, and, fundamentally, despair that as Jews we are enmeshed in an evolving historical tragedy that lays atrocity so frequently on our doorstep, when all we really want is to thrive." (<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/news/statement-recent-events-israel-and-gaza>)

Maybe this predicament is largely due to (at least) two competing narratives which are so different that people rarely function in the same universe of ideas. The origin story of Israel reads vastly differently by most Israelis and Palestinians. Largely, for one group, Israel's existence became a day of independence; for another, a *nakba*, a catastrophe, a dispersion. How do we keep both narratives in our mind, both peoples' traumas, even if we feel pulled by our own peoples' stories, traumas, history and yearnings that led to the modern-day State of Israel? How do we act and give tzedakah with these complicated realities in mind as Jews in the Diaspora?

Rabbi Marc Gopin writes (with permission to publish): "It is disheartening and remarkable how long the human mind, from the most uneducated to the most educated, can persist in paralyzed neural nets of cognitive consistency, only citing one set of facts that makes them comfortable, that calms down the angry beast of emotional confusion. Let millions die in pointless wars rather than believe for one minute that two opposing truths can both be true, that two opposing positions can both be ethical, that two opposing sides can contain highly ethical, principled members, and highly deceptive and murderous members. Thus maintaining one position without question is an exercise in willful ignorance, and places

lives at risk due to the hardening of irreconcilable positions and ethics. This is the essence of all destructive conflicts and wars. We are all guilty some of the time, but some more than others. Only self-examination, only commitment to listen to all evidence, is an antidote to this deadly human disease.”

One piece I found particularly helpful, by Tablet writer Yair Rosenberg, tries to lay out all the current events around Israel and Gaza in their complexity as he understands them: <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/262329/gaza-media-explainer>

Let us continue to sift through the voices and narratives of journalists, religious leaders, scholars and activists, and listen to the various voices and narratives within ourselves with empathy, compassion, and prayers for a way out of this nightmare. Both the Jewish people (of Israel and many in the Diaspora) and the Palestinian people (in Palestine and in their Diaspora) have national identities and attachments to one land, so we need truly visionary leaders – which we do not currently have, at least at the national level – to forge a path toward peace and co-existence, hopefully in two states. May we all create openness and non-defensiveness within ourselves, allowing ourselves to hear and truly listen to others.

Shabbat shalom and Chag Sameach,

Rabbi Diana