

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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Love and Concern for Israel



As I write this article at the end of July, we have been overwhelmed for almost three weeks with the sad and bitter news of renewed hostilities in Israel. Three brave soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces have been kidnaped: Gilad Shalit by Hamas on June 25, and Ehud Goldvasser and Eldad Regev on July 12, by Hezbollah. Both were captured in reckless raids into Israel itself in which other soldiers and civilians were murdered by commandos.

As Israel responded in self-defense, a full-scale war has erupted along the border with Lebanon. Hezbollah rockets have inflicted terror, material damage, injury and death on the cities of the north including Haifa, Nahariya and Afula and others in a barrage of destruction never seen before within the borders of Israel. Meanwhile, Israel has responded in force, determined to rout out the terrorists, a process hampered by the Hezbollah tactic, characteristic of every one of Israel's enemies, of placing rocket launching sites and munitions supplies in the midst of civilian populations.

The calamitous results of this war for all are becoming only too apparent as each day passes.

By the time you read this, events will have changed. I do not know how much more death will be experienced on both sides of the border. I do not know if a cease-fire will be achieved, or if a multi-national peace-keeping force will be established. I do not know if hostilities will rage on. I do not know if our soldiers will be returned to their families. But there are some things I do know.

Israel's enemies remain implacable. Our hope since the Six Day War in 1967 has been that peace can be achieved by granting substantially all of the territory conquered to Arab control. And for more than twenty-five years since the return of the Sinai, Israel and Egypt have had a quiet border. Israel is at peace with Jordan. But even as Israel has withdrawn from Gaza, Hamas continues to attack. Even as Israel has withdrawn from much of the West Bank, and is preparing to withdraw from more, Hezbollah provokes new hostilities. The sad conclusion to be drawn, as many commentators have observed, is that the battle is not over "occupied territories." It is over the existence of Israel itself.

In this climate, we American Jews must continue to be Israel's defenders, Israel's only unconditional allies, because we are family. As our liturgy says, "All Israel is One," and "All Israel is responsible for one another."

How do we exercise this responsibility?

We do it by staying informed and speaking out on Israel's behalf against her detractors. It behooves us to know the facts and to be able to recite them. Key among them is that Hamas and Hezbollah started these hostilities. They were unprovoked. Indeed, Israel has recognized the need for a Palestinian homeland, and has been supportive in establishing it. Further, as Israel is criticized, unfairly, for civilian casualties, we must point out that it is Hezbollah's irresponsible positioning of its forces and armaments in the midst of the civilian populations that has resulted in these tragedies. Israel is caught between the proverbial rock and hard place. To attack results in civilian deaths, including children, which is catastrophic. To hold back gives victory and encouragement to the enemy and leaves the population of northern Israel vulnerable. We must be able to articulate this dilemma which Israel faces at every turn.

We must communicate with our political leaders and governmental officials to urge them to continue to support Israel in this battle for her survival. The President and Congress are among Israel's most compassionate and understanding advocates. We must thank them for their support and encourage their continuing stand for justice in the Middle East.

We must be ready to help with donations. We have joined with the other congregations of the Kehillah of Old York Road to raise funds for the Magen David Adom, Israel's equivalent to the American Red Cross. MDA personnel are stretched to the limit in terms of money, personnel, and equipment to meet the needs of the wounded and the suffering. Our need for a generous response continues.

By the time we gather for the High Holy Days, we will know more about what kind of material support Israel continues to need in this crisis and how we can respond to it.

As the war broke out, I was planning a trip to Israel in December which included time in the North. Needless to say, it has been difficult to sign people up in the current climate. By *Rosh Hashanah*, I will announce if we are continuing with the same trip, or another form for visiting Israel. In any event, travel to Israel is urgent. Obviously, it must be undertaken in a way to maintain the safety of travelers. But Israel needs to know that we are with her with our physical presence.

One last note. I do not believe that the current situation would have escalated as it has were it not for the kidnaping of the three soldiers. The idea that a Jewish person should be a captive has been repugnant to our people from time immemorial. *Halachah* places the "rescue of captives" above most other *mitzvot*. It is a *mitzvah* which requires urgent fulfillment. The brutality of Israel's enemies has been amply demonstrated. Leaving our soldiers in their hands is unacceptable. It is because of this human and national imperative that Israel has responded so forcefully.

Finally, we must never give up on the hope for peace. We must never cease working for it. As the *Talmud* teaches us, we must be disciples of Aaron, the high priest, who "loved peace, pursued it, who loved all humanity and brought them all closer to one another in peace." I do not know how or when peace will be achieved, but we cannot give up working for it and remain human.

This is a profoundly bitter time for all who love Israel and for all who yearn for peace. We pray for the safe return of our captured soldiers. Our hearts go out to all the bereaved, both among Israelis and the innocents of Lebanon who have been placed in the cross-hairs of calamity by the recklessness of Hezbollah. And we pray that God will soften the hearts of our adversaries so that a peace of brothers can reign in the Middle East, which has known so little respect and peace.

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