

Extending a Helping Hand to Israeli Soldiers

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Dear Friends,

As I wrote earlier this week, leaving Israel was difficult. Now that I am back, I can say that it is difficult, in different ways, to be home. While in Israel, one is surrounded by people who are supportive of Israel, by people who are deeply invested in the outcome of this military incursion and by those who have personal connections to those in the thick of "Protective Edge." There was both pain and comfort that filled each day. In Israel, whether one is fighting, assisting or comforting, each person plays an active and helpful role.

Here in the U.S., I am aware of the sense of safety and security which this nation provides. Here one need not listen for sirens, run to "*MeMaDs*" (residential protected places) or worry about something coming out of the sky aimed at you. At the same time, I feel deeply the sense of distance and the lack of connection to Israel. From here, I feel far removed. Finding ways to help takes a bit more energy and creativity than before.

In order to help, however, there are a number of organizations that are providing direct, material help to Israeli soldiers. The soldiers are camped outside of Gaza (in undisclosed areas, making it nearly impossible to locate and visit soldiers) and rotate in and out of Gaza for their missions. As they come out, various funds and individuals are delivering usual and unusual gifts: pizza, candy and snacks abound. Somehow, word got out that soldiers do not have enough underwear so crates of briefs have found their ways to the front lines. Children from throughout the country write regularly to tell the soldiers that they are grateful for their service and for helping to keep them safe.

Before leaving, I discussed a different initiative with some of the neighbors of my daughter, Tamar. Each of those with whom I spoke had served in high ranking positions while in active duty and who continue to serve in the reserves. Now, as civilians, they were looking for a way to continue supporting soldiers and Israel. From their own experiences, they agreed that soldiers needed something different besides food and underwear. Specifically, they needed air conditioned places to sleep and hot showers. Apparently, the soldiers coming out of Gaza are not able to return to bases. Instead, they are living in make-shift camps, sleeping in tents and without showering facilities. This *ad hoc* group of neighbors has put together an effort that they are calling *Shenatnu Mishelo*, through which they are trying to fill this need.

I have [attached a letter](#) of explanation from this group, describing who they are and what they are doing. This is not a preexisting organization. Rather, this group has been hastily created to address the immediate needs of the soldiers. I am donating money to this group. I know the people involved and know, as well, that 100 percent of the money they collect will go to the purpose described. Since they need their donations in Israeli shekels, I will wire my dollars through a transfer which will come to their account in shekels.

If you would like to send money to this group you may do so as described in the letter. Alternately, if you would like to send a check to me, I will collect the money and wire it with my own donation. I will send the money on Monday of next week.

Mine is only one suggestion of ways to help support our soldiers and Israel. You may have discovered other organizations also providing help. I know that by donating, I feel as if I can help, even if only in this small way.

Again, I will speak more about Israel on Shabbat morning. In the meantime, I hope you will continue to pray, if not for peace, then for calm, for quiet and for an end to killing.

With blessings to you, to our soldiers and to Israel,

Neil S. Cooper

Rabbi