

Leaving Israel

July 28, 2014

Dear Friends,

Leaving Israel is difficult for Lori and me. The attachments to children and grandchildren, of course, always make it difficult to leave. This year, however, it was even more difficult to leave as this visit allowed us to see first-hand a bit of what it means to be an Israeli. I understand much better now what it means to live in the crosshairs of one's enemy. As we left, we felt as if we had strengthened our already strong bonds with Israel.

I have also learned that "normal" for Israelis means something quite extraordinary compared to what it means for most others. There is no Hebrew word for extraordinary. It seemed to me, as I watch a war unfold before me, what we call extraordinary is, for Israelis, simply... life.

These are some of the powerful images that I bring home:

- As sirens sounded, we witnessed our children transform, in the blink of an eye, into models of confidence and control, carefully and efficiently guiding to safety their own children and others around them.
- I saw wrenching scenes of parents sending children who, despite looking grown up in their army uniforms, are still children going to war.
- I saw parents and friends figuring out ways to support their children and all of those in the IDF.
- I saw neighbors organize in order to find ways to reach out to soldiers, bundle gift baskets.
- I saw friends raise money in order to send air conditioned containers to the edge of Gaza, so that those coming out of battle could sleep somewhat comfortably, some for the first time in days, rather than sleeping on the ground, in the overheated air of the south.
- I felt privileged to see Israelis, normally brusque and occasionally impolite, engage in "gimilut chasadim," gentle acts of kindness.
- I shared tears during shiva with the father of a "fallen" soldier.
- And I understood, in a new and deeper way, that it is more difficult for parents to say good bye to their children than for children to say good bye to their parents.

It is both good and painful to come home. This Shabbat during our services I will take a few moments to fill in some of the details of a very complicated picture of the extraordinary, the joyful and the joyous Israel. I hope you can attend. In the meantime, let me thank those who have read and responded to my letters. Lori and I greatly

appreciated your good wishes. And on behalf of all of Israel, thank you for your prayers.

Please continue to pray for peace
B'vrachot Shel Shalom V'Shalva,

Neil S. Cooper

Rabbi