

October 15, 2015 / 2 Heshvan 5776

Silence is Acquiescence: Responding to Events in Israel

Dear Friends,

What is the right response? How should we react to the relentless violence and wanton aggression against Israelis? The agenda of those who attack the innocent is clear. This is not about land or settlements. This is not about access to the Temple Mount. This is about killing Jews. That is the agenda. What is the right response?

In terms of a global response, one might, in a dream-like moment of semi-consciousness, imagine the world speaking with one voice, condemning unprovoked knife stabbings and "vehicular" terrorism against Israelis. One might hope that, in the face of unrepentant and unrestrained knife attacks perpetrated on whoever happens to be walking or driving by, the world could agree that this is the face of evil. That would be the right response. Unfortunately, the world is silent.

One would hope that the UN would respond openly and vigorously by objecting to the incitement of children to become martyrs by killing Jews. Silence.

One would hope that the US would roundly and unabashedly denounce these acts. We would hope to hear unequivocal terms of solidarity with Israel and words of support for our brothers and sisters living in Israel. That would be the correct and humane response. Even our "friends" in this country, high ranking officials in our government are "reluctant to point fingers" in order to identify perpetrator and innocent victim. And, yet, again, silence.

One might expect good people of conscience, those who demonstrate for Human Rights and for Justice would be the first to defend Israel and the first to speak out against these atrocities. Silence. Who, then, will speak up and speak out against evil? We must speak.

We must speak to those who will listen, in order to garner support for a country besieged by violence and living in fear of their neighbors.

We must speak to our elected officials, our representatives who we have chosen to be our voices. The names and numbers of our representatives can be found below.

And we must speak to those living in Israel, to those who cannot fathom the rationale which justifies the deafening silence of the world, to those who question whether the entire world has gone mad. We must let them know that we are their voices. We will not remain silent for, indeed, as the Talmud points out, "Silence is acquiescence."

For those of us living outside of Israel, this is the time to break our silence. And, it may be true, that raising our voices will not result in a change of behavior in those for whom killing a random Jew is more important than living their own life. But if we speak, we shall remind, not only the world but ourselves that silence is not a response. We shall become the voice that rejects evil, the voice that speaks for Justice when others do not. Ours must be the voice our brothers and sisters hear, a voice which assures them that they are not alone in their pain or their fear.

How should Israel respond? What should be the response of Israelis? In what ways can they, must they, change in order to continue to live in Israel? In answer to this question, I defer to an Israeli, Alexandra Benjamin. Alexandra, originally from England (as reflected in her spelling) made Aliya and served as a tour guide for a number of our synagogue trips to Israel. These words are taken from Alexandra's blog.

5 changes I have made to my behaviour in recent days

1. I no longer text or play candy crush as I walk. I want to stay alert and aware of my surroundings.
2. When I wait at a bus stop I stand behind the shelter, not under it.
3. When I walk down the sidewalk I try and walk on the side of the oncoming traffic - the better to see cars coming towards me.
4. When I leave my home in the morning I make sure I haven't left anything embarrassing out - just in case I don't come back and someone else has to enter my apartment.
5. I avoid wearing high-heels, just in case I need to run.

5 changes I refuse to make to my behaviour

1. I won't stop going out. I will go to work, go to the gym, go to the shuk, go to restaurants. This is my life and my city and I won't have it stolen from me.
2. I won't look at every Arab like s/he is a terrorist. I won't allow myself to get sucked into racist fear-mongering.
3. I won't lose perspective. I will remember that terrorism is about inciting terror out of proportion to the danger. This is still the city where I can (and do) walk safely though my neighbourhood alone in the middle of the night.
4. I won't panic. Even when I hear several sirens in a row, or when I see security forces blocking off the street. (Not every suspicious object is a bomb.)
5. I won't stop being grateful for the amazing miracle that is Israel and for the incredible things that make our society one I am so proud of.

Am Yisrael Chai.

Neil S. Cooper, Rabbi
Our Congressmen and Senators

Senator Bob Casey - 866-802-2833

Senator Pat Toomey - 202-224-4254

Rep. Chaka Fattah - 202-225-4001

Rep. Robert Brady - 202-225-4731

Rep. Patrick Meehan - 202-225-2011

Rep. Michael Fitzpatrick - 202-225-4276