

Defending Israel
Temple B'nai Shalom
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During Operation Protective Edge, Alice and I called our cousin Larry in Israel. Larry's oldest son, Amit, served in Gaza as an IDF reservist. Larry told us the following story.

Hamas had built tunnels extending from Gaza deep under nearby Israeli communities. They stored tranquilizers and handcuffs in them. Hamas intended to raid Israel through the tunnels and capture and kill Israelis.

To destroy the tunnels, the IDF needed troops on the ground.

The IDF assigned Amit to enter Gaza with his unit to locate and destroy tunnels.

The IDF would warn residents to leave an area. Amit and his unit would then investigate on foot.

In one house they found fifteen Muslim women and children. Amit said to them. "What are you doing here? Did you not understand our warnings to evacuate?"

One of the women answered, "No. We knew nothing. We heard nothing. We did not know you were coming."

She was lying.

The soldiers took the people out of the house. Then they investigated. The house concealed the entrance to a tunnel.

They led the people away to safety while the IDF prepared to destroy the tunnel.

Then one of the women said to Amit, "We are hungry. They left us with nothing to eat."

So Amit and his buddies dug into their own rations and provided food and drink to the women and children.

IDF soldiers like Amit must follow the IDF Code of Conduct. That code defines three core values for all IDF soldiers to follow. One of these mandates every soldier to protect human dignity. The Code states, "Every human being is of value regardless of his or her origin, religion, nationality, gender, status or position."

The section of the Code entitled "Purity of Arms" states:

The soldier shall make use of his weaponry and power only for the fulfillment of the mission and solely to the extent required; he will maintain his humanity even in combat. The soldier shall not employ his weaponry and power in

order to harm non-combatants or prisoners of war, and shall do all he can to avoid harming their lives, body, honor and property.

No other army in the world known to me places ethical conduct at the heart of a soldier's duty in this prominent fashion.

Israel started Operation Protective Edge in July to protect its citizens from the constant barrage of Hamas mortars and rockets. The response by Hamas was to launch more rockets. Hamas aimed them at civilian targets, including Jerusalem, Haifa and Tel Aviv. They tried to kill Israeli civilians. They did not care that many residents of the target cities were not Jews. They were trying to kill anyone they could. It did not matter whether the victims were Jews or Arabs.

Because of Israel's brilliance and diligence, Hamas failed. The Iron Dome succeeded. The system spotted rockets and their destinations as they were launched, ignored the ones that would fall in empty land, and destroyed more than 90% of the rest. Israel had created shelters for its citizens and installed sirens that warned them to run for cover.

Israel soon discovered the second threat, the extensive network of tunnels reaching into Israel to kill or capture Israelis. That was when Israel expanded the war to send in troops, including our cousin Amit. Here too Israel succeeded. Israel persisted until it had neutralized the tunnels and destroyed the great majority of Hamas rockets and launching sites.

Hamas expected that Israel would be unable to bomb the rocket launching sites imbedded in civilian areas or destroy the tunnels concealed there because of the predictable deaths and injuries that civilians would suffer. Either that or Hamas wanted its own civilians to be killed in hopes that the world would blame Israel.

As the operation proceeded the headlines and stories focused attention on the deaths of civilians, just as Hamas had hoped. Israel's detractors even accused Israel of genocide.

Professor Asa Kasher led the effort to create the IDF code that I mentioned earlier. He held an endowed chair in ethics and philosophy at Tel Aviv University.

Professor Kasher evaluated the performance of the IDF during Operation Protective Edge. He concluded that the IDF complied with its duties under the code.

Israel's detractors claimed that Israel killed civilians when doing so was not necessary and that Israel violated the requirement of proportionality. Professor Kasher found both claims to be false.

As Professor Kasher explains, Israel did not forfeit its ability to protect its citizens against attacks just because Hamas used human shields. Instead, Israel took extraordinary measures to limit civilian damage while insisting on its legitimate right to bomb rocket launchers in order to protect its own civilians.

The IDF first issued clear warnings designed to remove non-combatants from the scene of battle. They distributed leaflets urging residents to leave. They made personal phone calls warning people an attack was imminent. Before an attack they even dropped non-explosive missiles on the roof. This "knock on the roof" served as the final warning before an attack.

Sometimes the IDF could not accomplish a mission without endangering the lives of civilians. In those cases, the IDF complied with the principle of proportionality. As Professor Kasher explained, under that principle an army can take actions that it knows may kill or injure civilians if the expected gain in military advantage is proportionate to the expected damage.

Professor Kasher concluded that Hamas, not Israel, is culpable for deaths of civilians in Gaza. Hamas in the first place sacrificed the well-being of Gazan civilians by building the tunnels. They did not use for peaceful purposes the concrete and other materials that went into those tunnels. They did not build homes and schools. They did not even build shelters to protect their own civilians.

Moreover, Hamas continued the war long after ceasefire offers were accepted by Israel and rejected by Hamas. The final terms Hamas accepted were the same as the earlier ones. By then, more than two thousand in Gaza were dead.

Israel identified and reiterated sustainable quiet as the single goal of Operation Protective Edge. Israel achieved the goal of quiet with the present ceasefire. Israel must now ensure that the quiet continues and remains. Israel must work with other countries to destroy Hamas weapons and eliminate any tunnels that may remain. Israel must also prevent Hamas from regaining its ability to assemble weapons or dig tunnels.

Meanwhile, Israel needs our help to rebuild its economy and strengthen its defenses.

We should show our support in person by visiting Israel. Understand the situation in Israel first-hand by being there.

We can do more than just go for a short visit. We can arrange to visit for longer to serve as a volunteer. Among other programs we can assist at a military base for a period of one or two or three weeks with all our expenses during the week paid by the IDF. Israel welcomes volunteers of all ages and provides a simple application process.

And we can make aliyah, moving permanently to Israel..

In a dramatic show of support and a radical change to her life, one member of our congregation has done just that. Theresa Levine made aliyah this month. She sold belongings that she could not bring with her, such as her car, and gave away her beloved ice skates. She said good-bye to her family and friends. She investigated where to live and how to make a living in Israel.

After all that preparation she made the move. She is now living in Haifa.

Theresa sent us an email this week. The subject was "Israel" with four exclamation points. Here is an excerpt:

You and the rest of B'nai Shalom have been in my thoughts. I miss my shul family in Braintree.

It has been an amazing adventure so far. Everyone in Israel has been so kind to me. I'm using the busses and finding my way around; running errands like opening my Israel bank account and learning to shop for groceries.

I am meeting with my new rabbi this afternoon. I'm nervous about so much, despite all the studying I did (under your guidance). I don't want to do the wrong thing (I want an Israeli Meryl and Mary Lou to guide my way!)

Thankfully most people here in Haifa speak English- but I'm starting to use Hebrew wherever I can in my conversations.

All my love,

Theresa

Even if we don't go to Israel, we must educate ourselves on the issues. We must be ready to counter anti-Israel claims.

I recommend subscribing to sources available on the web that provide reliable analysis of the truth about Israel. I will include links to the best sources when I send you my sermon by email:

HERE THEY ARE:

AIPAC - <http://www.aipac.org>

Caroline Glick - <http://carolineglick.com>

Daily Alert - <http://dailyalert.org>

Daniel Gordis - <http://danielgordis.org>

Gatestone Institute - <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org>

Honest Reporting - <http://honestreporting.com>

Please explore them, sign up to receive updates, and keep informed. Then you will be prepared to discuss Israel with friends and neighbors.

We can also help Israel by correcting erroneous claims in local media. I joined a group called PRIMER. I invite you to join as well and will also send you that information by email. HERE IT IS: <http://primerma.org> We alert each other when we find biased, misleading and factually false media reports. We send corrections and have enjoyed success in seeing them published.

Finally, we can help Israel today, right here, right now. We can buy Israel bonds.

Israel needs our financial help after this war. Operation Protective Edge will cost Israel as much as four billion dollars.

Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke about Israel's needs last week. He pointed to the Islamic State and other enemies of Israel that surround her. "We need a very strong defense," he said. "We need a strong army and also a strong economy. Achieving a balance between them is one of the central goals before us. I intend to achieve both strong security and a strong economy."

As just one example, we need to help Israel strengthen her defenses against rocket and other attacks. Not only by Hamas. Also by Hezbollah and Iran and the Islamic State terrorists.

Israel has the Iron Dome to protect it from attacks such as those from Gaza, fired from launchers a few miles away. Israel is developing two other levels of missile defense. They are called David's Sling and the Arrow Theater System. David's Sling will protect Israel from rockets fired 65 to 200 miles away. The Arrow system will protect against long-range and ballistic missiles. With all three systems in place, Israel can defend herself against rockets fired from nearby and far away.

All of these defenses are expensive. Each Iron Dome installation costs about 100 million dollars. Each Iron Dome missile costs about 50 thousand dollars. The Arrow and David's Sling systems are even more expensive.

Israel hoped to have these in full operation next year. But limited funds may force a delay. Our help can speed the development and deployment of these essential defenses.

Let us not be the generation that failed Israel in her hour of need. When future generations ask us what we did when we could have helped Israel, we must be able to respond that we answered the call.

Please now take out your pledge cards and look them over. If you don't have one, the ushers will pass one to you.

Take a look at the amounts listed. Find the amount you purchased last year, or better still the highest amount you can stretch to purchase this year.

Got it?

OK, now, please think again. Please buy a bond at the level just above that one. And remember: you are making an investment, with an excellent rate of return, while also helping Israel.

Israel needs our help now.

As we look over these cards, please make a decision here and now. Please hand in your card after folding the tab of your choice. If we take the cards home with us, we are less likely to help Israel to the extent she needs.

As we are considering our pledge cards and the ushers are collecting them, we will sing Am Yisroel Chai, led by our Cantor.