

Three Things That I Know About Israel for Sure

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It is not very shabbasdik in Israel right now, to put it mildly.

I know that it is not very shabbasdik because, for the first time sirens have been heard in Tel Aviv warning of missiles from Gaza, and areas like Rishon LeTzion, one of the partner cities of our Metro West Federation, has been affected.

I know that it is not very shabbasdik in Israel right now, because, for the first time, sirens have been heard in Jerusalem, announcing incoming missiles in the holy city, the capital city of Israel

As Shabbat began, we know of hundreds of missiles flying in both directions: from Gaza into Israel, and from Israel into Gaza.

And therefore, like every other Jewish community in the world, our thoughts and our prayers at this moment are with our people in Israel. Our thoughts and our prayers are with the people of Sderot, and Ashkelon and Revivim and Beersheva, and all the other cities and villages and kibbutzim in the South of Israel, who know that they dare not be more than fifteen seconds away from an air raid shelter at any time, because fifteen seconds is all the notice that you get before a missile arrives. May God be with them this Shabbat, and may they be safe.

What can I, as a rabbi, say to you about what is going on in Israel at this moment?

I am not a general, and so I know nothing at all about what strategy works, and what strategy doesn't work. I don't know how you identify a missile site, and how you distinguish it from a haystack or some other place. I don't know if the response will be an effective deterrent, and will stop the barrage of missiles that it has been enduring for so long, or if they will close off hundreds of tunnels that go thru Gaza to Egypt, from Gaza to Lebanon, from Gaza to Syria, Tunnels through which weapons, missiles, missile launchers and ammunition and the like enter Gaza all the way from Iran.

What I can tell you is that Hamas has strengthened and expanded its weapons capabilities over the past 4 years, and that, through its words and deeds continues to preach to all, that it's goal, its only raison d'etre, its only purpose to exist, is to, in its own words, to drive Israel into the sea....

I I want to share these three truths about Israel that I do know, with you today, so that you may know them too.

One: I know---and I want you to know--- is that Israel is morally justified in what it is doing. Have no doubt about it. A million Jews live in the Southern part of Israel. That is the equivalent of forty million people in the United States. As of now, there are 4.5 million Israel's who are in the path of Hama missiles

Therefore, I ask you : Would America tolerates for a minute a situation in which forty million of its citizens were bombarded with missiles day after day, week after week, month after month---and not retaliate.

Is there any nation in the world that would not do what Israel is doing today?

For the past 11 years, there have been 13,000 rockets and missiles aimed and shot at Israel. That is the equivalent of about three rockets every day for 11 years...

In the past few days alone, there have 400 rockets and missiles aimed at Israel, not at military targets, but at population centers, at schools, and buses, and hospitals, at apartment buildings and at hotels, at playgrounds and centers for seniors, simply at every citizen of Israel ...

Do you have family right now, as I do? Ask them what they are going through...ask the children from sderot who are being moved from their homes this Shabbat to live elsewhere, to be sheltered and fed elsewhere.

Is there any government in the world which would allow its people to endure this kind of bombardment --with no end in sight--- and not respond?

I don't think so.

And therefore, I have no doubt--- no doubt whatsoever---- that Israel is morally justified in responding to these attacks in the way it is doing. And you should have none either. You should also have no doubt that all of Israel's actions are more than justified under International law as well

And therefore, your first responsibility and mine in this hour of Israel's danger is to rise to its defense.

We can do so by speaking up on its behalf

By speaking up in the halls of congress and the senate I hope you know already that the President and the US congress has already passed a resolution, less than 48 hours after the start of this latest violence, reinforcing the US commitment to Israel and its rights for self defense

We can support Israel by giving ...we can do so by giving of our means. We can give---just as our parents gave in the time of the Six Day War, and in the time of the Yom Kippur War. On thursday night, as I attended a meeting of our Metro West Federation, the Federation executive board has already approved an Israel Emergency Fund--

You can support the work of AIPAC, and the extraordinary work that the JNF is engaged in at this very moment..There is information about both of these projects on the table of the rotunda

You can vote with your feet. Our Federation is also organizing an emergency solidarity mission to Israel, leaving Sunday and returning early Friday morning...if you want the details, you can speak with me after the service

There are many things that I don't know, for I am no expert on the Middle East or on strategy or on diplomacy, but this I know in the innermost recesses of my gut: Israel is justified in what it is doing!!!

And therefore, I ask each and every one of you who is here today to join me in speaking up for Israel, and in acting on behalf of Israel, and to do so now!

The second thing that I know for sure is that if Israel has to fight its enemies again, as it has had to do so often in her 64 year history, that Israel will fight against its enemies as carefully and as cautiously as it can, and to the extent that it is humanly possible, it will aim its missiles at its enemies, and not at their women or at their children. In the last days Israel has dropped thousands of leaflets and made thousands of phone calls, warning the residents of Gaza to avoid areas being used by Hamas

Understand that this will be very difficult to do, for several reasons. You know these reasons, that have not changed One is that Hamas makes a point of placing its missiles next to the homes of civilians, and next to hospitals and next to mosques, and next to schools. It does so because it wants Israel to strike at these places, so that it can photograph the wreckage, and tell the world how cruel and brutal Israel is. That is what you are seeing and hearing last night and right now in the protest rallies on the streets of New York

And the second reason why it will not be easy to avoid doing damage to civilians is that shooting missiles is not such an exact science, and it never will be. When an Israeli drone struck the car in which one of the worst and one of the most brutal of the terrorists was traveling, there was nothing they could do about the fact that a child was in that car with him.

And yet I know--I know in my heart--I know beyond the shadow of a doubt--that Israel will try its best—to the extent that it can--to avoid doing damage to civilians, to avoid doing damage to women and children, to avoid doing damage to schools and mosques and hospitals, wherever possible.

How do I know? How can I be so sure?

After all, Israeli soldiers are only human. Some of them come from the Southern part of the country. Some of them have seen their parents and their siblings wounded and killed by missiles that did not come at them accidentally, but that were deliberately aimed at them. Would it be any wonder if they wanted to retaliate by doing the same thing?

And this is the week in which we have seen an American soldier put on trial by a military court for having allegedly lost his capacity to control himself, on his fourth tour of duty in Afghanistan, and for having gone out in the middle of the night and shooting sixteen civilians. If an American soldier, under duress, can crack and lose his self-control, and do something like that, who are we to say that the same thing cannot happen to an Israeli soldier?

And yet, I say that I am sure, that I am absolutely sure, Why? Because this week I read an interview with Daniel Mandell. Do you know who Daniel Mandell is?

Daniel Mandell is a twenty three year old soldier in the Israeli army. He is in the Education Department of the army, and his job is to teach battlefield ethics to Israeli soldiers.

If you don't know who Daniel Mandell is, you may remember his brother. His brother was Koby Mandell, who, while playing hooky from school and exploring a cave near his village with a friend, was brutally murdered near Tekoa. Koby and his friend were so brutally beaten up that they only way they could be identified was by DNA and by dental records. And yet, he has a brother who now teaches military ethics to soldiers? Military ethics? He says about Israel--- We want our soldiers to have a clean conscience and clean souls when they come out of the army.

I have a colleague in Israel, whose name is _____

His son was called up to the reserves, but he sent his son a prayer, a prayer that I would like to share with you:

Dear Precious Son,

Your mother and I, as well as your brothers and sister, are all very proud of you, and proud of all your friends who are with you, and proud of all the IDF soldiers who are prepared to fight for our country and our people. Just as our hearts are with you, the whole country is with you. You are acting on our behalf. I wish I could be there with you.

I know you probably didn't have time to pack any books to take with you when orders came to head south, so I am sending you a little something from the Rambam, which I am certain you know, but which is always good to read over again. May these words of Torah protect you and your comrades, The Rambam writes: at the time of war a person should think that the entire existence of Israel depends on him...

Therefore, my precious son – be not afraid. Put your trust in Hashem, for you are bringing honor to Him and His Nation and His people...

And one more thing I am sure of. That Israel is justified—I have no doubt; that Israel will fight fair---I have no doubt.

My third belief is an act of faith, for which I have no proof and no evidence. It comes from the Torah that we have read today. We read today in this weeks Torah portion about Jacob and Esau—Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, and Esau, the founder of the Arab people,,we read how Esau was driven into a rage after Jacob tricked him Jacob flees for his life, and he will have to live in exile for twenty years as punishment. Both men, Jacob and Esau, feel themselves to be the victims. And yet, two weeks from today, we will read of how these two men, now older and now wiser, will find God in each other, and will make peace.

It happened once. Could it happen again?

I have no proof, but I have hope. I want to believe that that will happen again--- someday---eventually--- perhaps in our lifetimes, and if not, at least, some version of that in the next few days

Ken yihi ratson. May this be God's will, and may it be our will too, and may it be the will of the Arabs too.

And until then, may the promise that God made to Isaac in this week's Torah portion, come true for us, his descendants:"Gur b'aretz hazot, v'ehey imach, v'avarechecha"---Live in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you.

May this come true, and may this be a quiet day, a peaceful day, for Israel and for her neighbors, for Israel and for all those who care for her, for all the Middle East, which is starving, not for oil, but for a little bit of peace. And to this, let us all say: Amen.