

7/19/14

*If a person makes a vow to God, or takes on an oath, this person must not break the pledge. One must carry out all that has crossed the lips. (Numbers 30:3)*

The words of our *parashah* spur me to ask: "What is our pledge? What words have crossed our lips?"

As many of you know, I returned from Israel on Tuesday after two weeks - two weeks in which we moved from tearfully hoping for the return of our three teenage boys to reluctantly being at war. We shouldn't have been able to imagine this. *What pledge have we have broken?*

June 30: I stand in the hotel lobby in Be'er Sheva. I can't even remember how I found out the boys were murdered, but they would never come home. A text message comes in from Jessie, my 21-year old daughter in Be'er Sheva:

There was a slight increase in rockets the past few days. Find out where your hotel's safe rooms are. If you're near buildings, go in, stand in a stairwell. If you are outside, lie on the ground, cover your head. Just something our program staff told us - low chance that Be'er Sheva would get hit. End of message.

I go to bed. I can't sleep.

7/19/14

July 1: The three boys' funeral takes place in Modi'in. They are buried and we mourn.

July 2: The unspeakable happens. The body of Mohammed Abu Khadeir, 16 years old, is found in a Jerusalem forest, a revenge killing carried out by three Jews. We shouldn't have been able to imagine this. As part of a religious civilization, three Jews in our modern state brutally violated a pledge to honor life. *What a pledge we have all broken.*

July 3: Jessie heads North on a scheduled trip. I leave Be'er Sheva for Jerusalem. Be'er Sheva was hit - the first sirens sound there only hours after I leave.

July 8: I am in Jerusalem, the sirens sound in Tel Aviv. We said to ourselves, "But they won't aim for Jerusalem." But only a few hours later, I found myself in our *marhev mugan*, a safe room in our Jerusalem hotel. And everywhere I went - Mizpeh Ramon, Haifa, Zicharon Ya'akov, the Golan, Tiveria – they were destined to meet a rocket or blessed by the Iron Dome interception overhead.

But let us go back to July 2 – when Mohammed Abu Khadeir was violently murdered. We broke the pledge to honor life, the pledge to refrain from murder, the pledge to refrain from revenge. In the wake of his murder, Israelis were on the cusp of an imperative spiritual accounting, a *heshbon ha nefesh*, of how this could happen. How

7/19/14

could Jews, any Jews do this? How could this happen and what needs to change in Israeli society to ensure this never happens again?

But that spiritual accounting was a mere five days underway, when it was rudely interrupted by the onset of war. Can we still grasp this need for *heshbon ha nefesh*, now that we are at war?

I did not author this question. Israelis asked this question. Rabbi Tamar Elad Applebaum, a Jerusalem spiritual leader, one of my rabbis, asked this question. Yossi Klein Halevi, author of the book Like Dreamers, asked us this question. And both Rabbi Elad Applebaum and Halevi were unequivocal that as American Jews, we must ask: How are we as a Jewish society going to reckon with this murder?

How can we support the State of Israel at this critical time, while not losing sight of doing communal *teshuvah* for the death of Mohammed Abu Khadeir?

If we lose sight of our national *heshbon hanefesh*, we will, in the words of our *parashah*, break the pledge, we will not carry out the words that have crossed our lips. What are these words? *Oseh shalom bimromav hu ya'aseh shalom, aleinu v'al kol Yisrael, v' al kol yoshvei tevel* – may the one who makes peace in the heavens, make peace over us and all of Israel and all who dwell on earth. These words said at least three times a day - the final words of the Amidah, the final words of all of our kaddish prayers, blessing

7/19/14

after meals. These are the words that cross our lips, a pledge that puts us in partnership with God. It is a goal that we must continually work towards. Otherwise our lips may pray, but words are a broken pledge.

This spiritual accounting for his murder would be excruciating under the best of circumstances. But we are not under the best of circumstances. We mourn the loss of life in Gaza, the death of children, men and women as a result of this war. We cry for the brutality of Hamas and what this means for Gazans. On one hand, we are obligated to keep the pledge of peace front and center, but on the other, we also must protect ourselves.

When I lobbied on Capitol Hill for funding for Iron Dome, I guess I never imagined that a one and a half years later, I would emerge from a building, gaze up and see the plume of smoke directly overhead, the aftermath of the Iron Dome over Jerusalem. I express gratitude to our President and to Congress for supporting Iron Dome. One can only try to fathom what this conflict could look like without it – not only what the loss of life would have been on the Israeli side, but also how the conflict would have escalated even more on both sides.

Gratitude and support of Israel do not absolve us from a spiritual accounting and working towards peace. We want to protect the State of Israel but also to elevate an ethical imperative for peace. Here is what we need to do:

7/19/14

- 1. Digital and Social Media:** May we not partake in the onslaught of stereotyping and negativity towards Palestinians, Arab Israelis and Muslims that we are seeing online. It does not contribute to peace, but it distracts us from addressing the fact that our own Israeli society produces bigotry too – bigotry that must be eradicated. Bigotry that takes place in the form of movements such as the Jewish Task Force, and Price Tag, Tag Maḥir – these must not be tolerated in Israeli society. We must educate ourselves about such movements and to support the State of Israel in a zero-tolerance policy. That begins at home with our own digital hygiene about what we type, what we send, what we post, what we forward. It is a pledge of restraint.
- 2. Support Peace:** Support spiritual communities that are supporting dialogue between individuals. Tzion, in Jerusalem, is such a community that actively connects Israeli Arabs and Palestinians with Jews, working toward peace. The Inter-Religious Coordinating Council in Jerusalem organized a *shiva* visit to the home of Mohammed Abu Khadeir's family in Shuafat, North Jerusalem. Over 400 Jews participated in this act of contrition and peace, led by Ron Kronish who has spoken here at Kol Shofar. Both organizations deserve our spiritual and financial support – please see my webpage for more information about both communities and how we can pledge financial support for them.

7/19/14

- 3. Cleave to the land of Israel.** For many of us that means attending rallies such as the upcoming event this Sunday at Congregation Emanu-El at 4 p.m. For others it means speaking out against anti-Israel press bias. While extremely important, these acts should not be our sole expression of our love for Israel. Seek proactive ways to learn more about Israel. Learn Hebrew, study online with an Israeli, go to Israel, buy Israeli art – express your Zionism in joyful, loving ways, yes, even in the face of war.

*If a person makes a vow to God, or takes on an oath, this person must not break the pledge. One must carry out all that has crossed the lips.*

RASHI tells us that not breaking our pledges means that our words should not be profane. Our words should be holy, they should elevate to a pledge that we can honor and strive to keep. May our people be safe and may our efforts for peace never cease. Shabbat Shalom.