

## Nelson Mandela 1918 - 2013

With the death of Nelson Mandela, the world has lost one of its most beloved and admired public figures. Mandela, who overcame twenty-seven years of imprisonment at South Africa's notorious Robben Island Prison to become the country's first black president, was a giant of justice and humanity. Despite his commitment to the former he never lost sight of the latter, which is what enabled him to transcend the understandable bitterness or hatred he might have felt and become a leader for all South Africans, able to lead that country from a brutal era of apartheid to unity. In this way, Mandela embodied the Bible's principle of "*bakesh shalom v'rodfehu*," "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14) - not merely hoping for a momentary peace but seeking the means to make that peace lasting and sustainable through reconciliation and overcoming past hatreds.

As I write these words, I am keenly aware of the fragile preliminary peace negotiations taking place between Israel and the Palestinians at the behest of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. At this moment it is hard to see how any lasting agreement to this conflict might be reached because of the justified level of suspicion and resentment on both sides. Mandela's humility, compassion, and commitment to moving past what *was* to envision what *could be* are a model and inspiration to us all and give us hope that we will one day see Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace.

South Africa and the world have lost a giant who dedicated himself to justice, peace, and the dignity of all people. *Zichrono l'vrachah* - may the memory of his example be ever for a blessing to us all.

Rabbi Josh