

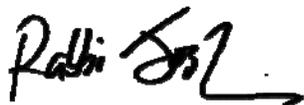
working for peace in the face of violence

It is with mounting sadness and anxiety that I have been following news out of Israel, where it seems that crisis is escalating by the hour. As I write, Israel has announced the initiation of Operation Protective Edge, designed to halt the barrage of rockets from Gaza into Israel, hundreds of which have been launched over the past three weeks and which have the range to threaten more than one million Israeli citizens. The regular rocket fire and the routine of sirens and emergency evacuations are clearly unacceptable and I pray that Israel's actions can stop the rockets while causing as little destruction and as few injuries on both sides as possible.

Israel's right to defend itself from constant aggression is unquestionable. At the same time, defense against hostility can never be confused with retribution and vengeance. Like all of you, I have been sickened to hear of the barbaric abduction and murder of Palestinian teenager Muhammad Abu Khdeir by Jewish extremists - ostensibly in response to the horrifying murder of Israeli teens Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaar, and Eyal Yifrach. This is not our way, and I applaud the Israeli government for promptly tracking down and arresting the perpetrators whom they have rightly labelled "Jewish terrorists." Grief and mourning, however sincere, can never be used as a justification for acts of retribution - a point the rabbis make about this week's Torah portion when they condemn Pinchas and disavow his act of religious zealotry: lasting and sustainable peace can only be accomplished through difficult acts of engagement and reconciliation, in spite of the pain that might provoke us to lash out.

We see this truth in the powerful model of Rachel Fraenkel, mother of Naftali, and Hussein Abu Khdeir, father of Muhammad, who have both spoken out about the need to stop violence and have reached out to one another from their shared pain and grief in powerful acts of compassion and consolation. As Yishai Fraenkel, Naftali's uncle, put it, "The life of an Arab is equally precious to that of a Jew. Blood is blood, and murder is murder, whether that murder is Jewish or Arab." It is vital that sane and reasonable people on all sides of the conflict recognize this truth: life is infinitely precious and nothing justifies the targeting of innocent civilians. Next Tuesday, July 15, I will be fasting for peace in observance of the traditional Jewish fast day of the 17th of Tammuz (marking the beginning of the period leading up to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem) - and of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting and penance. I invite you to join me in this fast, in calling for [Peace, not Vengeance](#), and in redoubling our resolve to see a lasting peaceful solution for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

With prayers for Shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rabbi Sol" with a stylized flourish at the end.