

Dear Chavraya,

When I think of a naval blockade on the Mediterranean Sea, beyond the images of this week, a scene indelibly imprinted for me since I was ten years old comes to mind. It is the scene from the film "Exodus" and the Hagannah ship of that name, when a blue and white flag is defiantly unfurled above her rusted hull and wretched human cargo, as her crew valiantly tries to run the British blockade and reach the shores of *Eretz Yisrael*. It is an image that invariably brings tears, even as I write now, filling me with emotion as though I had been there. As with the exodus from Egypt, we were all there on that ship, it is the story of our people. From out of our own story, we are meant to listen and to learn the way of compassionate response to the stories of others.

It has been a wrenching week. The images continue to distress, of soldiers descending onto the deck of a ship, the fear that must have filled all of those human beings, those on deck and those descending. And in the end, death, and rage, recriminations and bitterness, aloneness, stories unheard, impossible to be heard, and who knows for how long, all the inevitable legacy of violence. In one small realm of the events of this week, in the face of violence unleashed, I have found myself engaged in a deeply personal wrestling, experiencing inner torment and turmoil. From my own perspective, even as I respect and acknowledge different perspectives among us, the nature of the violence we have seen is clear to me. All of it expressed as self-defense, however disproportionate, whether of Israeli forces or of those on the ship, I think all violence is wrong. I am clear in my own mind that the violence of the occupation is wrong, and so too the violence of a blockade that imprisons Gazans in misery, the violence of their own leaders notwithstanding. Even as we await a full accounting of this week's events, I think that violence in the cause of resistance, or, with all of its bitter irony, in the service of peacemaking or humanitarian work, is wrong. All of that said, I have cringed when hearing gratuitous attacks on Israel, and even in hearing critiques similar to my own, but that come from a different place of heart than their source in my heart. In the end, it has been with questions of nonviolence and the nature of its practice that I have most wrestled this week.

As the first news reports began to emerge, with urgent desire to respond, I signed on to a letter of a small group of rabbis committed to nonviolence. I feel a close bond and much respect for the other signers. The statement went out fairly quickly, a lesson in itself, and introspective wrestling began to fill the list serve by which we have communicated with each other. I have struggled all week with whether the tone of the letter was true to an essential principle of nonviolence, affirmation of the other's humanness and striving through word and deed to appeal to the best in our opponent. In a painfully strange and dizzying way this week, as a Jew committed to Israel I have found myself as "other" on both sides of the equation. So too in relation to the wider Jewish community of Boston and beyond, in the face of a lockstep, one-dimensional view of supporting Israel, I have felt as other among my own people.

In the context of wrestling with self and giving context to the events of this week and our responses to them, communication with two Israeli friends found their place among the touchstones of my thinking and feeling. One came from a long-

time friend who came across an earlier letter I had signed in regard to the Goldstone Report. This letter, signed by many of the same small group of rabbis, found its way into the "Palestine Telegraph," published in Gaza. Having come across it while doing some research, my friend was horrified. The other communication is with an Israeli pacifist who spoke at Nehar Shalom last year with a Palestinian counterpart from Combatants for Peace. Having sent him the letter of this week, he took me to task precisely for the tone of the letter, which lay at the heart of my own inner struggle. To the degree that you may be interested, I share below from these communications.

As with wrestling through the challenges that arise in all facets of life, this too finds a context in Torah. This week's Torah portion is *Parashat Sh'lach L'cha*. Moses has sent scouts out to explore the Land. All but two, Calev and Yehoshua, come back in despair and say it will be impossible to enter the land because of the giants who live there. In Chassidic literature, exploring the land is taken metaphorically to mean exploring ourselves, scouting out and taking stock of our own inner landscape. So it has been a week of scouting out the land of self. In response to the report of the scouts, the people rise up against Moses and Aaron and demand a new leader to take them back to Egypt. Of Calev, the Torah says, *vayahas Calev et ha'am/and Calev quieted the people*. Later we are told of Calev, *there was a different spirit with him/ru'ach acheret imo*. Calev was able to quiet the people because of his different spirit. In his own wrestling to be in accord with his name, which can mean "as or of the heart," Calev had to step back both from his place among the scouts and from the people. Sometimes the greatest challenge is in addressing differences with one's colleagues. However much I struggle with the conquest of the land toward which Calev urged the people, I have thought much about him this week and of what it means to discover and then to act in the way of one's heart.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor

dear Friend.

i think there is a need to separate between 2 things: the closer on Gaza that the Israeli blockade is part of it and the un-holly marriage between non-violent movement and very violent elements.

let's pretend that this would led to the end of the closer. those that mean that farther on we should advance any kind of Alaine's that "works" regardless of our believes?

if that's the case the different between Israeli or hamases "Riel politics" to the non-violent movement is just semantic. i also believe this might underline the trust in organizations like c4p and others, and surly between them and their nations.

As Shabbat approaches, Yaniv, I want to acknowledge and thank you for your note earlier in the week. I agree with you that this statement may not have been one to sign. As a pacifist for most of my life, I believe deeply in the truth that your words reflect, that our tone and manner must reflect our belief in the power of nonviolence. As part of that we need to be wary of the alliances we make. In the face of violence and injustice we cannot be paralyzed, but need to respond. The challenge is to remain clear-headed and clear-hearted in our response. I look forward to a continuing conversation over time. I apologize for not writing in Hebrew, though without pressure to respond, please feel free to write in Hebrew if you do.

Shabbat shalom,
Victor

Hi,

I was out of town earlier in the week for a wedding, and had yet hoped to write to you in time for you to receive my note before Shabbat. While I cannot write at length now, I at least want to acknowledge and respond to your email and see it as the start of an ongoing, if intermittent, conversation.

I understand your feelings in seeing the letter to Judge Goldstone, where you saw it, and in seeing the names of friends, including my own. I will acknowledge at the outset that it may have been a mistake to sign that particular letter, in that it went beyond the initial reason for the letter, which was to support Judge Goldstone's right to attend his grandson's Bar Mitzvah. At the same time, I do believe that the response to the Goldstone Report and its author, by both Israel and wider the Jewish world, has in its ferocity allowed us to avoid any element of collective "cheshbon hanefesh" (an accounting of the soul). As unpalatable as it may have been, I think an important opportunity was lost in not cooperating with the Goldstone commission.

I share with you honestly how torn apart and sick I felt in regard to the Gaza war. I also signed letters of solidarity with the people of S'derot. What is most painful is how little room there is in the Jewish community, certainly in Boston, to raise serious questions and to challenge assumptions in regard to Israel's behavior. My feelings come from a place of very deep love and attachment to Israel. Also caring deeply for Palestinians, as for all people, I was horrified at the level of destruction that was wrought. I pray that as a people we shall break out of the rigid assumption in the abiding efficacy of force, and in the search for alternatives draw on the moral creativity that lies in the Jewish soul and in the soul of Israel.

So yes, I acknowledge both the emotions out of which I signed the letter to Judge Goldstone and also that it may have been a mistake given some of the assumptions of the letter. I also want to acknowledge that we can differ on deep questions and retain affection. The perspective that each of us brings from the places in which our lives unfold can be valuable to the other. So with affection, I wish you and Rachel and your children --

Shabbat shalom,
Victor