

Dear Chavraya,

If I had been in Israel today, I would have wanted to be on the "Peace Bus" for its third ride from Jerusalem to the Gaza border. So desperately seeking rays of hope in this bleak and painful time, I wept as I read the letter I share with you below. I wept for the simplicity, the humility, the beauty, and the hope of its message. I imagine the bus as a school bus, one that stops wherever there are children, opening its doors to all. Seeking to draw people together from all across the dangerous roads it travels, the letter tells of its goal to bring Israelis on board as well as Palestinians, to bring healing and new vision to all, "Presenting a vision of peace in the conflict zone is of vital importance, as is maintaining touch between Israel's center and periphery – to stay together." Trying to bring medicines and clothes to the people suffering so severely in Gaza, the bus also seeks to make real the face of the "so called 'enemy;'" reminding all who are willing to listen that "In the eyes of an Israeli and Palestinian child you will discover innocence and remember yourself once being a child, free from prejudices and hate."

The challenge to lovingly hold all who suffer needs to be fully heard. I am deeply pained by the absence of that embrace, whether from the right or the left. In seeking peace and challenging the way of war as a solution, we need to wrestle with the fear and pain of Israelis, as well as with those of Palestinians. I often feel alone in trying to hold both in the wider Jewish community. On one hand, we need to acknowledge the threats that Israel faces. If truly supporting Israel, we need to then wrestle toward other ways of response, ways whose impact will be longer lasting than the bitter fruits of war, ways that avoid sowing the seeds of endless hatred and future wars. Narrowness of vision in calls to rally in support of Israel leaves me squinting, searching for more. It pains me deeply to feel so alien among communal gatherings of my people. Most painful to me is the paying of mere lip service to the immense suffering of the people of Gaza. In holding both peoples, we become more whole. Expanding our vision to more fully include the other, we begin the way of change that offers deeper support.

This Shabbos of *Parashat D'varim* is called *Shabbat Chazon/the Shabbos of Vision*. It is the Shabbos that comes before Tisha B'Av, day of fasting and mourning for the destruction of the two temples and of so much other tragedy that has befallen our people. The rabbis understood the temples to symbolically represent the entire world. In their destruction, all of life hangs in the balance, a reminder of responsibility for life and peoples beyond our own. In both the Torah reading and Haftarah there is an interspersing of themes of hope and destruction.

*Parashat D'varim* opens the fifth book of the Torah, *Sefer D'varim/the Book of Words*. In the face of the violence on its pages and in the world around us, the very name of the portion and of the book reminds us of what we tell young children facing conflict, "use words." The vision of Isaiah that forms the Haftarah for this Shabbos offers a choice, a vision of destruction or a vision of hope, ours to choose. It begins with our ability to talk together, to engage and challenge, *l'chu na v'niva'ch'cha/come now, let us debate, says God*.

Reference is made in this portion to the dimensions of the land, *as far as Gaza/ad Aza*. I would like to be on the Peace Bus, as it travels as far as Gaza. Even from

here, we can travel with the bus in spirit, nurturing hope by reaching out and holding all as one.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor

The Peace Bus letter – may its vision be the vision of Shabbat Chazon, the Shabbos of Vision:

Friday, August 1, 9am, the Peace Bus will leave Jerusalem, carrying medicines and clothes, as well as flowers, intended for the people of Gaza. Also postcards written by Israelis and addressed to Gazans, trying to bridge the terrible abyss. En route the bus will go through Tel Aviv and Be'er Sheva and visit the Israeli communities on the Gaza border.

Please come on board to make the message of the Peace Bus stronger and to meet people living on the border of the conflict region. Presenting a message of peace in the conflict zone is of vital importance, as is maintaining touch between Israel's center and periphery - to stay together.

Collection of medicines (everyone has some new, unused medicines he or she doesn't need, which can be donated to hospitals in Gaza), money for medicines and clothes started already on Sunday. Contact [vmmessage-peacebus@yahoo.com](mailto:vmmessage-peacebus@yahoo.com) and will make an effort to come and pick up your donation. All donations will be delivered to Gaza by our activists.

Write a postcard with a message of peace for Gaza or if you are far: send the message via email. We need them by the end of the next week. We will translate all messages in English and Hebrew into Arabic. For Thursday, July 31, 6pm, Jerusalem, is planned DEMONSTRATION at Kikar Safra, (Jerusalem Municipality Square), and decoration of the Peace Bus with flowers

We are ready to come on the 3rd Journey and deliver medicines to the people in Gaza (we start collecting the medicine and the money to buy medicines in order to provide both direct and symbolic support from Israelis to the Gazans during the humanitarian catastrophe). Let's take a one day break, collect energy and start Sunday with some ideas and actions. First things first - we need to contribute ourselves and find foundations supporting our project ...

We just got back from the town of Sderot on the Gaza border, where on our 2nd bus journey we visited families who support peaceful solution of the conflict and were inspired by conversations. We've been also on

a our condolences visit to a Bedouin camp next to Dimona, where a part of a rocket fired by Hamas (after the rocket was intercepted, but some shrapnel fell down) killed a Bedouin man and wounded his children. It was a good journey and more will follow. I apologize, folks, that the web-radio broadcasting came short this time, some technical stuff we'll have to learn how to solve.

Our vision is to create the reality where Palestinians and Israelis can live in peace and dignity. We are not offering political solutions nor do all of us have a common political view. We do not have ready recipes. But what we are certain of is that we cannot continue hating, fighting, killing each other. In 66 years of war we could not achieve any permanent solution - we believe that it's time to try a different path.

On the Peace Bus we promote principles of tolerance, understanding and non-violence. People of all religions, colors, nations, genders come together in the loving attitude to see what the media is trying to hide away from us – a true face of the so called "enemy". In the eyes of an Israeli and Palestinian child you will discover innocence and remember yourself once being a child, free from prejudices and hate. In this moment we mourn for all those who perished during this unnecessary and tragic conflict: not just in the current one, but for all the innocents who lost their lives in the war of hatred.

We want to see the perspectives of both sides: suffering of Palestinians and Israelis alike. We are all human beings who happened to be raised as enemies. And this is a real tragedy. We can not live in peace as long as other side is suffering. Therefore, the PEACE IS OUR COMMON GOAL!