

There is a symbiotic relationship that exists between the Jewish people and Israel, we support her and she sustains us. The Six Day War transformed American Jewry in 1967; our fragmented and disparate community came together as one to show our support for Israel as her Arab neighbors attacked on all fronts. We sent money, arms and volunteers from all walks of life. And then when we won the war, against impossible odds, we were proud – it was the first time that you saw American Jews wearing kippot in public. The UJA had found a cause for which we would open our wallets and give generously. We clamored for Hebrew and Jewish studies courses to be offered on college campuses across the country. It was a great time to be a Jew!

Over the years, we have remained proud of Israel and her many accomplishments. We have supported Israel financially, we have sent her our children on various programs, we have purchased Israeli bonds and products, we have visited from time to time and some have even made aliya to go and live there. And through it all we have prayed for peace. Some of us have been hawks, some of us doves, but all wanted peace. We negotiated with terrorists for the sake of peace, but it did not bring us peace; six years ago we pulled out of Lebanon for the sake of peace, but it did not bring us

peace; we withdrew from Gaza for the sake of peace, but it did not bring us peace. Nothing that we have done has brought us peace. Some Israelis are angry, some are sad; all are tired. I read what they have to say – I read the news from Israel, I read the Israeli newspapers, I read articles and posting on Israel, I read the writings of Naomi Ragen and Rabbi Danny Gordis. I find it difficult to read Naomi Ragen’s postings these days, she is one of the Israelis who has become angry and bitter – every posting is negative, her hatred of the Israeli government is so overwhelming that nothing else shines through. Danny Gordis’ posting are always long, often depressing, he too acknowledges that the policies of Israeli government have been flawed and failed to accomplish their goals, but he still writes with that inkling of hope that the future can be better that is hallmark of Jewish existence.

Gordis writes in his most recent posting,

Sometimes, a simple drive on a highway in the Jewish State is all it takes to restore perspective, to revive hope. A road, its exits, the places to which they lead and the history they recall – and you suddenly find yourself with faith in the future restored. If only all of us could take those drives. For especially light of these past months of grief and of disappointment, of

coming to terms with the war that we lost (as a senior IDF general admitted publicly yesterday), what we need is perspective, a reminder of where the Jewish people was just decades ago, and how far we've come.

I remember the feelings of Israelis a month into the war. We didn't know what to name this new and unanticipated conflict (Lebanon II? The Hezbollah War?), but it was consuming us. History, it seemed, had had turned on us. Unilateralism had failed. Our worst fears about Gaza and the disengagement had come to be. Even the departure from Lebanon suddenly seemed like it had been a bad idea. Hope gave way to despair. Were we really in a war that we couldn't win? What would be if we lost this war? Would we lose the next one, too? And then what would happen to us?

And then, one day in the middle of the war, I was driving the Jerusalem - Tel Aviv highway. This time, staring aimlessly out the windshield, I found myself looking at the metal remains scattered alongside the road. I drive the road so often that I hardly ever notice them anymore, but this time, I did. Immobile, but carefully painted so as to preserve them, lay the shells of the trucks that

were destroyed as Jews tried to break the Jordanian siege on Jerusalem in 1948. The carcasses of these trucks were a reminder, a source of perspective. If you had told someone in 1948, when Jews in Jerusalem were besieged -- and out of food, water and medicine -- that we'd be OK, you'd have sounded like a dreamer. You've have had nothing on which to base your confidence. Except, perhaps, for perspective, and for the knowledge that in the end, the Jews have always figured out how to survive. That there is something about our people that defies explanation, but which is real, no less real than any of the challenges we face.

But the response can't be despondency. It has to be to roll up our sleeves and to get to work. It will take a very long time to rebuild Israel's deterrent capacity and image, but it can be done. We've been dreaming of peace, but now we must begin to prepare for war, and in earnest. The Rosh HaShanah liturgy offers a reminder that ha-yom harat olam, "today is the birth of the world." Today is pregnant with possibility. Today, anything is possible. We've been in trouble before, and we've always emerged. Dedicated, wiser. Stronger. Better equipped to face the future.

In the moments before Yizkor I want us to focus on what was lost by our people this summer during Israel's war with Hezbollah in Lebanon. It was a messy war, a costly war in human terms, it went on much longer than anyone anticipated and accomplished much less than was expected. That is why people talk about it as the first war that Israel did not win. It is not only the optimism that peace in the Middle East is possible that died, but also the very real loss of many many young lives. Rabbi Jack Reimer put together an amazing collection of facts and stories about those who died in the war this summer that I share with you now as we prepare for Yizkor.

Staff Sergeant Eyal Banim, age 22, Beersheva; Sergeant First Class Shani Turgeman, 24, Tel Aviv; Staff Sergeant Wassam Nazal, age 27, Yamuel. Sergeant Nimrod Cohen, age 16, Mitspeh Shalom; Sergeant Alex Kushinsky, age 21, Nes Tsiona; Sergeant Yaniv Barron, age 19, Maccabim; Monica Lerer, age 4, Nahariya; and Benjy Hillman, age 27, of Ranana.

Benjy Hillman of Ranana. Benjy was married just twenty-one days before he died. And now, the same people who were at his wedding assembled together for his funeral. And this is what his funeral was like.

“Just three weeks ago, we watched as his bride, Ayala, accompanied by her beaming parents, radiant in her wedding dress, walked slowly down the aisle towards Benjy, who waited for her under the chupa with his sweet, shy smile. And now, in the cemetery of Rannana, Ayala walks towards Benjy once again. But this time, she is supported by Benjy’s younger brother, Shimon, and by her weeping father. And this time her young face is distorted by pain and grief. This time she is wearing black instead of white. And this time, instead of approaching the chupa, as she did just three short weeks ago, she approaches the simple wooden coffin, draped in an Israeli flag, that contains the remains of her husband.”

It says in the Torah that a man who has just become engaged is deferred from the army until he has had a year in which to rejoice with his wife. But Benjy did not get his year. When the call came—he went---with no question and with no hesitation.

Thousands came to escort Benjy on his last journey. An honor guard from the Egoz Brigade to which he belonged led the way to his grave. It took over an hour for the huge crowd to pass in front of Benjy’s grave and to offer their condolences to his bride and to his family. It was a long, hot day, and so the commander of the Egoz Brigade walked up and down the honor guard, offering them water and making sure that they were all right. Benjy would have wanted that,

because he cared so much about his buddies in the unit. That was the kind of guy he was.

Sergeant Gadi Musayeb, age 20, from Akko. Omar Pesachov, age 4, and his grandmother, Yehudit Itzkowitz, age 73, who were both killed by a Katusha missile, while sitting at their Shabbat table in Meron. Sergeant Dov Sternshein, age 31, Rishon Letzion. And Sergeant Tal Amgar, age 26, of Ashdod, who were both killed when an Iranian made missile struck the boat that they were on, off the shore of Lebanon. Rivkah Taluzzi, age 3, of Haifa. And Michael Levine, age 21, from Philadelphia.

Michael Levine of Philadelphia. Michael Levine was a product of USY. And he went to Camp Ramah in the Poconos for eight summers. When he graduated from high school, Michael Levine made aliyah, and he lived in Kibbutz Tirat Tsvi in the Galil.

Michael was back in Philadelphia visiting his parents when the war broke out. When he heard the news, he took the next plane back to Israel in order to join his unit. "Mike may have been short in height,

but that never kept him from taking on his share of assignments, and then some,” said the commander of his unit. “Mike had a great sense of humor, and he was one of the most caring, loving human beings that I know,” said his friend, Yossi Katz. He loved sports and was a big fan of the Philadelphia teams. And on the third day of the war, Michael Levine of Philadelphia died in Lebanon.

Colonel Tzvi Loft, age 42, of Caesaria who was killed when his Apache helicopter crashed on July 24. Shim Gliklich, age 80, of Haifa, who was killed when his car received a direct hit while he was driving on a road near Haifa. Shimon Zarib, age 41, and his daughter, Mazal, age 15 of Akko, who left their shelter after the first barrage of the city to view the damage, and were struck by shrapnel from the second barrage. And Uri Grossman.

Uri Grossman was the son of the Israeli novelist, David Grossman. Like his father, Uri Grossman was a passionate dove, who believed fervently in making peace with the Arabs, but like almost all of the doves in Israel, he answered the call and joined his unit as soon as the war began. He was respected in his unit because, despite his

political views, he did his share and more than his share, to make sure that the unit was always prepared and fit for action. His father, together with Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua, supported the war at first. But when it was clear that there would be a cease fire soon, the three of them spoke at a rally in Tel Aviv, and they said: if the cease fire is going to take effect in just a few more days anyway, why endanger the lives of soldiers by fighting now?

And he was right for his son, Uri, died in the last hours of the war.

Staff Sergeant Yossi Karkash, 41, from Afula; First Sergeant Yehuda Grinfeld, 27, from Maaleh Michmash; Sergeant Major Tzvi Balali, 28, from Kfar Saba; Sergeant Or Shahaar, from Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, who was killed the day before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, in the Lebanese village of Nabi Al-Awadi. And Sergeant Major Roi Yishai, 27, from Herzelia.

Roi Kline. Roi Kline was a Segan Aluf, a sergeant major in the Golani Brigade. He was born in Rannana, and he grew up in Eli, which is a settlement on the West Bank. He attended a yeshivat hesder—which

is a combination yeshiva and pre-military school there, because he wanted to be both: a soldier and a ben Torah. Even in the army, he took Torah study very seriously. He would get up at five in the morning every day in order to study Talmud for an hour, before minyan and the day's work began.

Roi also took his responsibilities as an officer very seriously. And so, on the fourth day of the war, when he was ordered to take his troops into Bnat Gibril, he went first. They fought from house to house, and then, as they turned into an alley, he saw a hand grenade coming at them. Roi called for his men to scatter, and then he threw himself upon the grenade, and he muffled the explosion with his body. And as he did, he recited: Shema Yisrael, Adonoy Eloheynu, Adonoy Echad! And as he recited the words of the Shema, he was blown to bits, but the rest of the men in his unit were saved because of what he did. Roi Kline was buried in Eli on his birthday. He was 31 years old. He leaves behind his wife, Sarah, and his two children, Gilad, who is three years old, and Yoav, who is a year and a half.

Aryeh Tamam, age 51, and his brother, Tiran, age 39, were killed in a rocket attack on Akko on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. They were fasting that day because it was Tisha B'Av. Sergeant Adi Cohen, 19, of Hadera, was killed August 4<sup>th</sup> in a harsh battle in the village of Aita-Al Shaab. Lieutenant Yiftach Schreir, age 31, of Haifa, who was killed in the fierce fighting in Bint Jbell on August 4<sup>th</sup>. Captain Yoni Shmaher, age 30, of Beit Nehemiah; Captain Gilad Kobernik, age 36, of Timrat; Major Natan Yavav, 36, of Kiryat Ono and Corporal Noam Goldman, 27 of Tel Aviv, who were killed in the fierce fighting in South Lebanon on August 5<sup>th</sup>, and Noam Mayerson.

Noam Mayerson. His father, Harvey Mayerson, came to Israel from Dayton, Ohio, and his mother, Gila, was born in Israel. And at the funeral, Harvey, who had only a few months before given the eulogy at his mother's funeral back in Dayton, now had to give the eulogy for his son. He said in part:

“When Noam was born, we lived in a place called Machon Gold. We had a big apartment, with a long hall. I worked outside the house, and I would come home every night around six o'clock. I would enter and

say shalom in a loud voice. The older children, Shira and Yehoshua, would run to me so that I could lift them up in the air and give them kisses. And then, another small child would come crawling into the hall, crawling as fast as he could, smiling from ear to ear, as if to say: 'Abba, don't forget to kiss me too!'

Noam's smile—how is it possible to forget that smile? If Noam had a trademark, it was his smile. We have looked at many pictures of him in these last hours, and in every one of them, Noam is smiling. When he finished his Tank Commander course, I tried to take a picture of him as he went marching by. I thought it would be hard to single him out in the group of soldiers, for they were all wearing the same color berets and the same color uniform. In every picture, there was a sea of khaki, but it was easy to spot Noam because, in every picture, there was one soldier, and just one soldier, who was smiling. And that was Noam!

What can we who live here say to our brothers and sisters living in the land of Israel? What can we say to the bereaved? We can say that we're doing what we can. We must ask ourselves what are we doing to help insure that

Israel survives and we are a part of this future? Make this the year that you do all that you can, not just a little something. First, let's talk about our financial obligations to Israel – on Rosh Hashanah we had our Israel Bond appeal – did you give? If not, it's not too late; visit [www.israelbonds.com](http://www.israelbonds.com). Additionally, UJA is in the midst of it's Israel Emergency Campaign in response to the devastation caused by this summer's bombings, we will be participating in this drive and I hope that you will give generously; for more information go to the Federation website, [www.ujannj.org](http://www.ujannj.org). Buy Israeli products, you can find them in stores or you can go on line and find them there, [www.israeliproducts.com](http://www.israeliproducts.com) and [www.shopinIsrael.com](http://www.shopinIsrael.com).

Next let's talk about spending time in Israel this year. Go, visit, spend your money there – they need it and they deserve it. Send your kids this summer – USY has a number of different programs there is the standard Israel Pilgrimage tour or the Eastern Europe/Israel combination, Poland/Israel Seminar, as well as Spain/Israel. If you have college aged children who have never been, then encourage them to go on a Birthright trip – it is free of charge and they have a wonderful experience, a number of our members have gone in the last few years and they'd be happy to discuss it with you, I'd be happy to hook you up. You can go with your local Hillel or with

Koach for a Conservative Movement experience; for more information see, [www.birtrightisrael.org](http://www.birtrightisrael.org). On Rosh Hashanah you heard about J2J. The UJA subsidized mission to Israel in February – it would be great if we could get a whole bunch of us to go together! If you are interested, speak to Bruce Leibowitz or me ASAP; you can get more information at [www.jerseytojerusalem.org](http://www.jerseytojerusalem.org).

Tonight when we conclude our fast, blow the shofar and recite L'Shana Haba'ah B'rushalayim Habnuya – This year in a rebuilt Jerusalem – Let's make it real, let's make sure that we are in Jerusalem this year, let's make sure that Israel has the funding it needs to rebuild that which was destroyed this summer. Let's make sure that we are doing our part to insure that Israel survives and thrives! Let's do it for ourselves, let's do it for our children as well as for those that we now remember as we turn to our supplementary readers for Yizkor.