

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

July 11, 2014 | Section 2

News, Events, and More

FROM THE FOUNDING PRESIDENT

My Eyes Flow with Tears: Reflections on the Murder of Our Boys

By Rabbi Avi Weiss

The following is a transcript of remarks delivered on Shabbat morning, July 5, 2014.



My father, who lives in Jerusalem, is ninety-five years old. I've never seen or heard him cry uncontrollably – until last week. Speaking just moments after the news was released that the three kidnapped Israeli boys, Gilad Sha'ar, Eyal Yifrach, and Naftali Fraenkel, were dead. He sobbed. Over and over he cried out, "They killed the boys, they killed the boys."

There are no words that can properly reflect what we are all feeling. But as we move forward, I offer some reflections dealing with the challenge of what we can do now – humble suggestions, as I am the first to acknowledge that I do not have any real answers.

1) Continue to remember the families: The Yifrach, Sha'ar, and Fraenkel families have comported themselves with great nobility. During these days they have been surrounded by thousands of people expressing their sympathies. But the hardest part of *shiva* is when *shiva* ends. It's therefore important that we continue to be with the families. And so, as a small gesture, there will be three large cards in the lobby of our shul (The Bayit) addressed to each of the families. I encourage families, including children, to come in and write words on them that come from the heart. My wife Toby and I will personally deliver the cards when we visit Israel in a few weeks. I urge every synagogue and Jewish institution to consider doing the same.

2) Remember the role of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces): In the search for the boys, thousands of soldiers

put their lives on the line. Never should we forget that when the IDF tried unsuccessfully to save the kidnapped soldier Nachshon Wachsmann twenty years ago, not only was Nachshon killed, but the leader of the commando raid, Nir Poraz, also lost his life. At this challenging time, each of us can make a difference by doing something for the IDF. We can contribute to Friends of the IDF, recite *tefillot* (prayers) for them daily, and we can commit to calling a soldier that we know: a relative, a friend or especially a *chayal boded*, a soldier who serves even as their family lives abroad. Special honor should be given to young men and women from America and around the world who have committed themselves to serve in the IDF or in Israel's National Service (*Sheirut Leumi*).

3) Maintain a sense of *Ahdut Yisrael* (Unity of Israel): During these past weeks, we felt especially close to each other. Across the political and religious spectrum, we lived and breathed as one people. The families of the slain boys led the way. Yair Lapid, a member of the Israeli cabinet who is more to the left, was invited to speak at Gilad's funeral. Rabbis responded respectfully to Racheli Fraenkel as she joined the fathers in reciting *kaddish*. This sense of crossing lines for the sake of unity must continue. It is important for each of us to resolve to show respect to those with whom we disagree, never impugning their motives.

4) Categorically reject revenge attacks: With a loud and strong voice, we must say **no** to individuals who take the law into their own hands, killing innocents. Racheli Fraenkel said it best. As soon as she heard that Muhammad Abu Khdeir was kidnapped and his body burned in a Jerusalem Forest, she said, "If the young Arab really was murdered for nationalistic reasons, this is a horrifying and shocking act. There is no difference between blood and blood. Murder is murder. There is no justification and no atonement for murder."

In this spirit, I believe we must be careful of our understanding of the word *nekamah*, oft translated as revenge. *Kel nekamot Hashem*, Psalms 94:1 (said in the

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Wednesday morning prayers), does not mean that the Lord is a God of revenge. Rather, it means the Lord is a God of retribution. Revenge is an emotional lashing out and engaging in collective punishment. Retribution is rational. It is justice based upon a rational system of reward and punishment.

During these past days, I've thought that maybe the word *nkm* is associated with the word *kum*, to rise, or *kiyum*, to be sustained. When on Shabbat mornings we declare that before our eyes may the world know *nikmat dam avadecha hashafuch* (Psalms 79:10) – what we're saying is may the time come when the spilled blood of your servants, O God, be forever sustained; that is, their legacy, their teachings, what they lived for and died for be forever remembered.

5) The Place of Anger: Anger is an emotion. We cannot control what we feel, but we can control our actions, and we should not act based on anger. I am angry. I am very angry. But we reach the highest levels when our emotions can take a back seat to our actions. It's my prayer and my belief that the government of Israel and the army of Israel in the aftermath of the killings will react calmly and deliberately, at a time and a place of their choosing, in a way that targets those individuals who committed this heinous crime and those who support them.

6) Bring Back Our Boys is part of a larger issue: Even as our boys are laid to rest, we should continue to be in the forefront of the universal struggle to **#bringbackourgirls**. It has been noted that the murder of a person is the murder of a person, but the murder of a child is the end of civilization – the murder of the world. We will continue to be in touch with the NGO's of **#bringbackourgirls**, and we plan to stand and raise our voices together with them.

7) Respond to hatred with love: The Midrash says that while Bila'am could have instructed an assistant to saddle his donkey for travel to curse the Jews, he did so himself because his hatred for the Jewish people was so great that it defied the rule. And the Midrash continues that we must do all we can to counteract hatred which defies the rule with acts of love that defy the rule. Here too, we can all make a difference. Each of us can think of one act, one kindness that we can do for another that perhaps can tip the balance of the world.

One final thought. So many prayers were offered for the boys in synagogues, in schools, at bar and bat mitzvahs, as we broke the glass under the *chuppah*. Were our prayers in

vain? It was Rabbi Soloveitchik who once argued that acceptance of prayer is a wish, a hope, but it is not its central core. He wrote, "the foundation of prayer is not the conviction of its effectiveness but the belief that through it, we approach God intimately... The basic function of prayer is not its practical consequences but the metaphysical formation of a fellowship consisting of God and man."

And I would add that prayer is also the formation of fellowship and sistership between our people and all peoples. Our prayers these past days have not been in vain, as they brought us closer to God, closer to our fellow person, closer to our boys, Gilad, Eyal, and Naftali.

In the aftermath of the murder of Jerusalem teen Muhammad Abu Khdeir, the rabbinic team of our shul (The Bayit) released the following reflection with pain and anguish:

Today is one of the dark days in the history of *Medinat Yisrael* as we read of the arrest of six radical Israeli Jewish youths in connection with the brutal murder of Jerusalem teen Muhammad Abu Khdeir last Wednesday. Although we do not have complete information yet, we wanted to share initial reflections with you.

Although we as a people do not believe in collective guilt, we do believe in collective responsibility. We must condemn this terrible act in absolute terms, offer our comfort to the Abu Khdeir family, support Israeli law enforcement as they bring the perpetrators to justice, and be vigilant to eradicate from our midst the teachings of hatred and violence that can lead to this kind of egregious act.

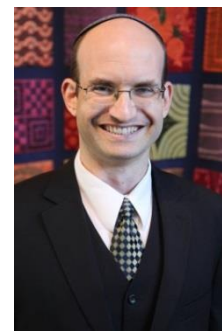
We pray that from this horror, from this darkness, there will come some light and an ultimate end to violence in our homeland.

NEWS

Rabbi Haggai Resnikoff to Join YCT Faculty

YCT is pleased to announce the addition of Rabbi Haggai Resnikoff to our Torah faculty. Beginning in the 2014-15 academic year, Rabbi

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Resnikoff will assume the position of Rebbe in Gemara and Halakha. In this capacity, he will give *shiurim* on *gemara* and *halakha* to students and be a central part of the morning *sefer* learning. Rabbi Resnikoff will also serve as Director of Community Learning, helping increase the impact of the yeshiva and its students on the wider community.

Rabbi Resnikoff is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. He received *semikha* from YCT in June. He has learned at Yeshiva HaKibbutz HaDati in Ein Tzurim, in the Hebrew University Talmud Department, and in various *batei midrash* in Jerusalem.

Mazal Tov to Rabbi Yonah (YCT '07) and Rachel Berman



Mazal Tov to Rabbi Yonah (YCT '07) and Rachel Berman on the birth of their baby boy, Lev Baruch (Lev Benjamin).

Yonah is the Rabbi of Kadimah-Toras Moshe Congregation in Brighton, Massachusetts. He is also a beloved faculty member at Boston's Jewish Community Day School.

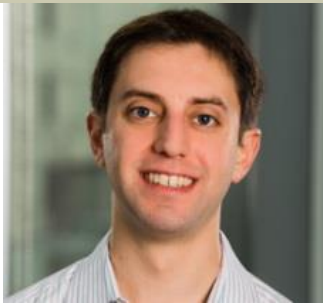
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Name: Andrew Scheer

Home Town:
Woodmere, NY

Graduating Class: 2015

Special Interest: Chaplaincy



About Andrew:

Andrew Scheer entered rabbinical school with a dual mandate: to be with Jews wherever they are, and to operate on the belief that Jewish teachings have something to offer everyone. In his four years at YCT, Andrew has worked with Jewish communities in Maine, Alabama, Nashville, Senegal, Nairobi, Tokyo, and many other places. Andrew has led Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur services at Rikers

Island Correctional Facility; this experience remains a high point of his time at the yeshiva.

Andrew is honored to be a Wexner Graduate Fellow and liaises with colleagues across denominational boundaries in order to achieve the thing about which he cares most: being there for Jews in their hour of need. Andrew serves as a Chaplain Candidate in the US Army Reserve and led a Birthright Trip entirely composed of students from America's service academies (West Point, Naval Academy, Air Force Academy, Coast Guard Academy, ROTC). He will act as Chaplain of the US Military Academy Preparatory School at West Point this summer, responsible for the spiritual care of 240 budding cadets.

After graduation, Andrew would like to serve as a chaplain in a military, prison, or hospital setting.

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