

Letter from Israel: A Brit Under Attack?

Greetings from Israel to all my Darchei Noam congregants and friends. I am here enjoying my grandkids and especially my newest grandchild, Naftali Betzalel Ozarowski. He is named after one of the young yeshiva students recently murdered as well as a cousin of mine lost as a child in the Shoah.

It was certainly a memorable experience being the sandek for Naftali's brit with rockets and sirens going off around the country. Baruch Hashem it all came off without a hitch, but we had to prepare for the possibility of a siren while it was taking place. Where to hold the ceremony in the shul? Where would people go if a siren goes off in the middle or at the meal? What do I and the mohel do if it was just during the brit? (The mohel said just keep going; it's best for the baby not to move.) And besides, he said, he had Eliyahu Hanavi at his side... what better protection could there be?)

My title for this article is an intended double entendre. What are the implications of this period in time and history for our covenant with God and our Land?

I want to share some impressions and experiences with you. I have been through about a dozen az'akot (sirens) since I have been here, in both Alon Shvut and Yad Binyamin, the places where my kids reside. About an hour after the brit meal had concluded, we were having a little family reunion at our kids' home when the sirens went off. Twenty-one of us crowded into Ahuva's room, the designated protected room. We said Tehillim and sang a little. We were able to go out about ten minutes later. At my other son's place, we all gathered with the neighbors in the protected first floor well in the Kollel apartments at Gush (Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shvut). It was a great way to socialize! In both places, the atmosphere was annoyed, a little frustrated and a little apprehensive. I believe my kids were typical of most Israeli kids, a little scared but not a lot. Kids are being encouraged to talk about their experiences and we did do that together. They seem pretty resilient. They ask questions about the news and the bad people who shoot at us. We try to explain in a non-prejudicial but honest way.

There were plenty of other times when we did not hear sirens but lots of booms and air activity.

We did not take any dramatic tiyulim, unlike my past visits. We did simple, close to home, family bonding things together like go shopping, go to the library, pick the kids from camp, daven together and the like.

The amazing thing has been the exceedingly low Israeli casualty rate. We must thank Hashem and the Iron Dome for that. Renowned Israeli poet, songwriter, and storyteller Yoram Tahorlev tells a story from the last Gaza campaign. He writes that people were using (some would say overusing) the term "Nes" - miracle, when people escaped injury. "It was a nes that kids were not in nursery when the missile hit.... it was a nes that I was not home when our home was shot at...." Others responded, "What miracle? People simply followed the directions of the Home Front Command (to take proper shelter), that's all!" Tahorlev himself said, "If you ask me, I think there were miracles! In our land, if people follow directions, that's a nes!"

Hayim Herring emailed me on his and Terri's way back to Ben Gurion Airport after Shabbat when a lot of rockets were being fired, "We got to see what our AIPAC dollars are going for!"

Israelis love to sing, and they have already written songs about this war. I heard them on the radio as I was driving between my two sets of kids. One was a song about Hamas and all the past wars with them in Gaza. Snuck in between the Hebrew lyrics was a line in English:

Summertime
And the livin's not easy
Missiles flyin'
And the color is red

And another one, a parody of a well-known Sfardi tune we love to sing on Simchat Torah:

Mi pi E-I, mi pi E-I
Yevarach kipat barzel (the Iron Dome)
Refael, Refael (the name of the company that made it)
Ein kamoch b'Yisrael

Our brit took place even while under attack, while rockets and sirens were flying. We have welcomed a new baby, who has my last name, into the Covenant of Israel. As far as the Covenant between us, Hashem and our Land, as far as I can tell, it is still very much in place and not under attack. As the well-known Israeli song says, "Ein lanu erez acheret". (We don't have any other Land). People are managing, they are together, life is going on, we are mourning our losses, and we hope things will get better. We are still faithful to the Brit.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Joe Ozarowski