

Ten Ways In Ten Days To Help Israel
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Haaretz Newspaper. Benjy Hillman, age 27, of Ranana, was killed in action. 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 Ranana, 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.(Jack Riemer)

How could I not speak about Israel this year? How many of you have worried about Israel since the fighting broke out in July on the Lebanese border? How many of you were glued to the TV and newspapers trying to follow throughout the day and evening the progress of the battles and the carnage of the war? As I talked with you, we exchanged feelings of being sick at the situation with missiles falling on Israel's northern cities. Hezbollah militia crossed an international border and killed 8 Israeli soldiers and captured two. Israel had to respond. But the war was not just about this one incident. It had been brewing for six years. In 2000 under Prime Minister Barak, Israel was certified by the UN as having pulled completely out of Lebanon. Hezbollah, the Shiite militia in the South sworn to Israel's destruction was supposed to be disarmed according to UN Resolution 1559. The Lebanese army was supposed to move to the south and secure the international border, between Israel and Lebanon. But instead, the Hezbollah militia ruled southern Lebanon while a weak Lebanese government and army stayed away from the south. For six years the Iranians and Syrians poured millions of dollars into arming it to the hilt. Thirteen Thousand rockets and missiles were installed and aimed at Israel. Six years of bunkers and tunnels were built and land mines laid to make it costly for Israel's soldiers to fight in the mountainous terrain. Worst of all, the missiles were placed in the middle of civilian populations. Rockets and missiles were placed next to schools and hospitals and in apartment buildings. When the war broke out, Israel was forced to fight against a clever and ruthless enemy. Hezbollah had no concern for civilian life, either Lebanese or Israeli. It targeted its thousands of missiles directly at Israel's civilian population, with the aim of killing as many civilians as possible. It launched its missiles from the midst of the thickest of civilian

population, slipping out of military uniforms into civilian garb. Its ethos was a cult of death.

Israel chose to fight mostly an air war. They knew from past experience they didn't want to get trapped in a land war in Lebanon. Hezbollah had six years to dig in and very sophisticated anti tank weapons. There was concern for the lives of soldiers who would be killed and wounded in a land war. Eventually 30,000 reservists were called up but a land incursion never really was put fully into effect. This left much of Hezbollah in place. A ceasefire was finally established. The Lebanese army has already balked on what was to be their job of disarming Hezbollah and interdicting a resupply of arms from Syria. A UN force is growing in strength. It's made up mostly of NATO countries with the job of keeping Hezbollah from launching another war across the border on Israel.

As a result of having survived Israel's onslaught, Hezbollah's stock has gone up in the region. It was able to hurt Israel within her borders, something conventional Arab armies were not able to do in previous wars since 1948. Syria and Iran were able to fight a proxy war against Israel with few negative consequences. However, the war was very costly for Hezbollah. Much of its infrastructure and a quarter of its fighting force were destroyed. Vast areas of Hezbollah home territory have been leveled. Shiek Nasrallah admitted that if he knew Israel was going to respond with such force he would not have carried out the killing and capture of Israeli soldiers.

What about Israel? The situation in Israel during the war was very bad. About a million Israelis were in bomb shelters or fleeing their homes to the middle and south of the country. The trauma of missile attacks will be long lasting. The economic toll is horrendous. One of our members told me about his relatives. The financial losses have put a tremendous strain on the family. There is post-traumatic stress when children were forced for three weeks to live in shelters and sealed off safety rooms. They endured the sound of missiles crashing down while worried about their father who had been called up to battle. The Jewish national fund estimates that it will take fifty years to reforest thousands of acres of forest that were burned down due to fires started by rocket attacks. In the meantime there is much divisiveness over the handling of the war effort. Reserve soldiers are protesting every day in front of the Knesset. There has been established a body of inquiry to see why the war was not more successful. It is predicted that Prime Minister Olmert will be driven from office. The future of the Kadima party, which ran on a withdrawal from further territory in the West Bank, may not last. Many are predicting a weak ceasefire with rearming of Hezbollah and an eventual war again as just a matter of time.

Most alarming has been the radical Islamization of the conflict with the election of Hamas in Gaza and the war with Hezbollah. Both come from a radical religious base that seeks the total elimination of the state of Israel, and of all Jews as well. According to the President of Iran, this is part of a messianic spread of Islam that

will take over the world with Israel being the first step. It has gone from years of work on a two state, Palestinian and Israeli solution to a no state solution: the elimination of Israel and the Palestinians being absorbed in an Islamic empire.

So it is a very somber New Year this year when we open our hearts to Israel and worry and pray for Israel. In this difficult time, I think the first thing we need to do is to remember how important Israel is to us. How important is Israel to you? Where would you place yourself on a continuum of strongly agree to strongly disagree with these statements? I think of the Jewish people as one family in Israel, North American and around the world. Israel plays an important role in my life. Israel plays a significant role in my Jewish identity. I feel an obligation towards the State of Israel. The recent conflict has strengthened my connection to Israel. As a part of the Jewish People I feel that Israel has been fighting on my behalf. As a citizen of a Western Democracy I feel that Israel has been fight on my behalf. I would hope that most of you would find yourself agreeing with most of those statements. Yet not all of us have the experiences or the knowledge to answer in the affirmative.

I know I grew up placing coins for Israel in blue boxes and getting Israel Bonds for my Bar Mitzvah. I rejoiced at the victory of the Six Day War. I was fortunate enough to go on a NIFTY youth trip the summer before I entered college and to study and live in Israel during my first year of rabbinical school. And I have been there many times since. I wonder how many of us feel the wonder of living in a time when the State of Israel is in existence? I wear a coin around my neck minted in the year 136 in the Bar Kochba rebellion. It was the last independent government in Israel until 1948. How many centuries have we said at the end of the Passover Seder, Next year in Jerusalem? How many prayers three times a day in the amida for the return of our people to our own homeland? After the Holocaust how important a place of refuge has it been when so many millions were murdered because the doors to other nations were closed to them? Over 700,000 Jewish refugees thrown out of Arab lands have found a haven in Israel. Over a million Jews persecuted in the former Soviet Union have recently found a haven in Israel as well as Ethiopian Jews and others? What about Israel as a national liberation movement of the Jewish people? As the world diversified with nations, how important to have a Jewish nation where Judaism could flourish and grow as a majority culture. Israel has brought about the rebirth of the Hebrew language and a place where you can observe Shabbat and Jewish holidays as a natural part of life with the rest of the nation, not having to ask for special permission to get off from work or go against the scheduling of soccer and little league games. Jewish art and music and theater bring the idiom and symbols of our traditions into creative modern Jewish culture. Israeli archeology gives us a deep connection and rooting with our past as we touch the history of our ancestors. Israel has been a beacon of democracy and civil rights in a vast sea of dictatorships and oligarchies. In Israel the Supreme Court wrestles with issues of civil rights for all its citizens. Jews do all over the world walk a little taller because of Israel's might. Israel has been a contributor way beyond its size to

the development of modern medical technology like the CAT scan and modern medical cures and treatments.

Israel is under constant pressure with terrorism and enemies who are sworn to her destruction. Fighting a militia that embeds thousands of missiles in civilian populations and uses civilians for cover makes it a very difficult to fight without civilian casualties. Yet Israel made a valliant effort. Areas were leafleted before bombing, asking civilians to leave the areas so they would not be harmed. It bombed some Hezbollah headquarters at night when no one would be there to destroy the infrastructure without harming civilians. It tried to verify with sophisticated satellite imagery exactly where missiles were in an attempt to avoid indiscriminate bombing. Yet Hezbollah often wore no uniforms so as to blend in with the civilian population. With missiles all around neighborhoods some civilian casualties were bound to occur. But look at the difference between Israel and Hezbollah in this regard as Rabbi Eric Yoffe the head of the Reform Movement has written. "We can be proud that Israel is the only true democracy in the Middle East. While the war was raging, opinions criticizing it from every direction appeared in a free press. It tried extra hard to avoid civilian casualties while fighting against an enemy that purposely used civilians as shields. And when there was a terrible collateral damage at Kana where 27 children were killed, in Yediot Aharonot, Israel's largest daily, the lead editorial proclaimed, 'In a national sense we are all guilty, because small nations are nations of collective responsibility. This killing is on the head of all of us.' And it went on to say that what Israel must do is take responsibility and ask forgiveness. Can we imagine this conversation taking place in the ranks of Hezbollah? As Jewish children continued to die, can we imagine Hezbollah taking responsibility and apologizing? Can we image them pledging to do everything in their power to put an end to civilian deaths? No, we cannot. Because Hezbollah is fascist in its politics, fanatic in its religious zeal, and dreams not of peace but of death---death to Israel death to Jews and death to America. Once again even amidst the tragedy of innocent lives lost we see with utter clarity who shares our values and who is worthy of our support."(Eric Yoffe August 1, 2006)

So we must be begin by remembering how important Israel is to us and how Israel though imperfect does a pretty good job of living up to the values we believe in and support in the context of Hamas suicide bombers and those of Hezbollah who make war hiding behind civilians.

Caring about Israel we must next ask what can we do to help Israel, to support Israel? Here I believe everyone can and should do something. Living in a smaller community we often don't know of all the ways we can help Israel. I'm going to list a few and I challenge you to find one way to help Israel and actually do it in the next ten days before Yom Kippur. You can go to our home page web site under ways to help Israel for assistance or pick up a sheet with this information on it on your way out of services today.

1. The Union for Reform Judaism has a special campaign at this time to help Israeli's effected by the war. During the war they provided places for people fleeing the north to stay and activities for those who had to live in bomb shelters. Now the congregations of the Reform movement are holding support groups dealing with post-traumatic stress. They are giving our funds to those who have deep financial needs from being away from their homes and stores and work during the war. You can contribute on line to the URJ Special Israel appeal.

2. American political, diplomatic, financial and military support for Israel is crucial. AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee is the main Israel lobby in America. Through grass roots democratic political activism and education of national and state political leaders, it helps maintain strong American support for Israel. You can join AIPAC on line and they'll keep you informed of what's happening in Washington and how you can help through letters and phone calls to elected representatives.

3. All of you can participate in an AIPAC project this week and it will only cost you a 39 cent stamp. Four hundred and eight congressmen voted for House Resolution 921 expressing strong support for Israel's right of self defense in the Lebanon war. Congressman Farr voted for the Resolution and is considered by AIPAC a friend of Israel. However he has received many calls and letters criticizing him for his support of Israel. I would like to see 150 letters or calls to his office in the next week thanking him or Anna Eschoo if you are in her district, for their strong support for Israel's right of self defense. We can not be lazy or apathetic about courting our congressional representatives support for Israel.

4. The New Israel Fund and Brit Tzedek V'shalom. You may love Israel and be concerned with some of Israel's social justice struggles. The New Israel Fund strengthens grass roots democratic organizations in Israel that work for the poor and the elderly, minority rights and civil liberties. If you love Israel and want to help her live up to her highest ideals go on line and give to the New Israel Fund. If you are concerned that more dialogue take place between Israel and the Palestinians, you can support Brit Tzedek V'shalom. Instead of complaining that not enough is being done to build bridges between Israel and the Palestinians you can help build those bridges.

5. Nearly 20% of Israel's forests were burned down by first started from missile attacks. Help begin the reforestation program that it is estimated may take 50 years. One family just purchased a grove of trees in honor of their new grandson. For \$18 you can be a online rebuilder of forests destroyed by Hezbollah.

6. Magen David Adom. The Israel organization is now for the first time in history affiliated with the international Red Cross. These are the first responders to missile and terror attacks. Their mobile units are fully equipped and save lives when moments count.

7. Want to invest in Israel rather than make a donation? Buy Israel bonds. Israel Bonds is particularly involved in water movement and management which is the life blood of the Israel.

8. Get in the habit of becoming more knowledgeable about Israel so you can feel closer to Israel and also speak out about Israel in the community and with friends and co-workers. Read on line the Jerusalem Post or Haaretz news papers in English. Read Alan Dershowitz's book, The Case for Israel, or his new book What Israel Means To Me: Interviews with 80 Prominent Writers, Performers, Scholars, Politicians, and Journalists..

9. Shop Israel. Everyone loves to shop. Google shop Israel and you can find all kinds of Israeli products you can buy on line from tasty foods to beauty supplies from the Dead Sea. Use them or give them as gifts. You can help strengthen the Israeli economy while you shop.

10. This one you can't do in 10 days but begin thinking about going to Israel. One of our young people who went on a post college trip last year wrote, "Yesterday, I cried at the Western Wall while praying. The wall itself doesn't mean so much to me but the feeling I got from the people around me as I touched the wall and prayed brought tears to my eyes. I had a mini breakdown yesterday at the Holocaust Museum. I found the names of our families listed on the walls of the exhibits of people killed and on the survivor list from Poland. This land is amazing and so are the people who live here." Travel to Israel. It will be a very special gift you give yourself and strengthen one of Israel's vital industries which has been hurt badly by the war.

If you care about Israel, if you were worried this summer about Israel, then choose one of these 10 ways in the next 10 days to support Israel and go on line and help Israel before we gather again on Yom Kippur.

Finally: Hold on to hope. Last week one of my favorite columnists Thomas Friedman wrote a beautiful op-ed piece titled, "A Positive From Lebanon." (Sentinel, Sept. 14, 2006). He wrote, "Listening to the Post Lebanon war debate in Israel leaves me wanting to say just one thing to Israelis: Get a grip on. Israel is behaving like it lost the Lebanon war and now needs to tear itself apart, limb-by-limb, with investigations and new elections. Clearly the Israeli Army's logistics broke down, and clearly it was ill prepared for a guerrilla war against Hezbollah. And clearly it is a sign of the health of Israel's democracy that Israelis feel free to castigate their leadership. Nonetheless, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert did a better job under the circumstances than he is being credited with and more important, the situation evolving in south Lebanon now has the potential to offer a whole new model for peacemaking. (Regarding Olmert, this war was not easy to manage because it was about everything and nothing. But precisely because it was about nothing it was also about everything. If Hezbollah could just attack

Israel-unprovoked—claiming among its goals the liberation of Jerusalem and using missiles provided by an Iranian regime that says Israel should be wiped off the map, then it was a war about everything and Israel had to respond resolutely.) ...The Israeli response was brutal but it did send a deterrent message, which Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah leader received. As he put it in a interview on Lebanon's NTB, "If I had known on July 11 that the operation would lead to such a war, would I do it? I say no, absolutely not." Even he doesn't think he won. (Give Nasrallah credit for honesty. What Arab leader has ever been so self critical" Nasrallah was reacting to those Lebanese voices that said: Thanks for passing out \$12,000 to families who lost homes in the fighting but had you spent that money on schools and jobs, rather than a stupid war we'd all be better off.") The fact that Condi Rice and the French foreign minister working with the UN were able to secure an international peacekeeping force in south Lebanon is a potentially key achievement on two fronts. If the force works—still a big if—Hezbollah will not be able to directly attack Israel without getting embroiled in a conflict with 15,000 French, Italian Indian and possibly Turkish peacekeepers. That is a big new strategic problem for Hezbollah, Iran and Syria. They can't hit Israel now without harming their ties with the EU. More important what have we learned in recent years? One: Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon are unsustainable. And two Lebanon and the Palestinians don't have their act together enough yet to control border areas when Israel leaves—either by agreement like Oslo or by just unilaterally withdrawing and throwing the keys over the fence. As a result, the peace process has not been "land for peace " but "land for "war". The UN/European force evolving in Lebanon may offer a new model. ...The Europeans have to understand that something very big is at stake in this force."(Said the Israeli political theorist Yaron Ezrahi.)They have to prove that demilitarization in south Lebanon can give Israel security and Lebanon both sovereignty and an effective international partner to maintain order. If that happens, he added, " it could revive the chances for an eventual Palestinian-Israeli deal on the West Band and Gaza." Friedman concludes, "Yes it's a long shot but maybe something good can actually come out of this good for nothing Lebanon war."

We have lived through a brief but difficult war. We are living through a tense ceasefire. So I say three straightforward things this morning.

- 1.Let us remember how important Israel is to us.
- 2.If Israel is important to you then let's do something about it. You can and must at this critical time. Let us in the next ten days do one of the ten things I mentioned to help Israel.
- 3.Let us keep hope that out of the destruction and death of this Lebanese war some new hopes for peace may emerge. Amen.