

WHEN SGT. GILAD SHALIT WAS ABDUCTED AND HELD AS A HOSTAGE BY HAMAS IN 2006, I OPENLY WEPT FOR HIM – FROM THE BIMAH. ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS LOOK AT THE PICTURES OF GILAD THAT WERE DISTRIBUTED TO KNOW THAT HE WAS SWEET, INNOCENT, AND DESPITE THE WEAPON THAT HE CARRIED, THAT HE WAS A DEFENSELESS AND GUILLESS BOY. HE WAS 20 YEARS OLD THEN, A YEAR YOUNGER THAN MY SON ZACH, AND THAT IS PROBABLY PART OF THE REASON WHY I WEPT: I IMAGINED ZACH IN CAPTIVITY... AND OUR ANGUISH.

ON MY NEXT TRIP TO ISRAEL, WITH ZACH ACCOMPANYING ME, WE SPENT ONE NIGHT IN ONE OF THE SCENIC GUESTHOUSES THAT GILAD SHALIT'S PARENTS, AVIVA AND NOAM, OPERATE ON THEIR PROPERTY. WE WENT THERE DELIBERATELY TO SYMBOLICALLY OFFER OUR SUPPORT.

1 IN THE MORNING, WHEN AVIVA BROUGHT US BREAKFAST, I GAVE HER A LITTLE GIFT – AND ALSO ONE FOR GILAD- AS I PUT IT, “FOR GILAD...FOR HIS ROOM... FOR WHEN HE COMES HOME.” AND AVIVA SHALIT RESPONDED “ TODAH. MACHAR YIHYEH MATAYIM YAMIM- THANK YOU. TOMORROW WILL BE 200 DAYS”

AND I STOOD BEFORE HER, AND WEPT AGAIN- THIS TIME IMAGINING HER ANGUISH, AND ALSO FEELING GUILTY AND INADEQUATE BECAUSE I WAS STANDING THERE WITH MY BOY AT MY SIDE, AND HERS WAS.....?.

PAUSE – STRONG

IT TURNED OUT THAT 200 DAYS WAS NOTHING; IT WOULD TAKE MORE THAN FIVE YEARS BEFORE GILAD WOULD BE RELEASED. AND HE WOULD BE RELEASED IN EXCHANGE

**FOR 1,027 PALESTINIAN PRISONERS, INCLUDING SOME CONVICTED OF MULTIPLE MURDERS AND OF CARRYING OUT ATTACKS AGAINST ISRAELI CIVILIANS. THESE TERRORISTS WERE COLLECTIVELY RESPONSIBLE FOR 569 ISRAELI DEATHS.**

**PAUSE**

**GILAD WAS NOT RELEASED ALONE; THE BODIES OF EHUD GOLDWASSER AND ELDAD REGEV, WHO WERE CAPTURED/KILLED BY HEZBOLLAH ALONG THE LEBANESE BORDER WERE ALSO RETURNED AS PART OF THE DEAL.**

**WAS THE PRICE A HIGH ONE? UNDOUBTEDLY.**

**WAS IT TOO HIGH A PRICE FOR ISRAEL TO PAY? THAT MATTER IS STILL DEBATED BY ISRAELI POLITICIANS, THE MILITARY, AND ORDINARY CITIZENS.**

**2 I NEVER ASKED, BUT I DO WONDER IF GILAD AND HIS FAMILY, ALONG WITH THEIR RELIEF AND JOY, DON'T ALSO EXPERIENCE A MEASURE OF GUILT AND EMBARRASSMENT FOR THE PRICE THAT WAS PAID FOR GILAD'S FREEDOM. AND GILAD IS STILL PAYING A PRICE: IT IS RUMORED THAT HE IS EMOTIONALLY VERY FRAGILE.**

**PAUSE**

**HOW CAN YOU PUT A PRICE ON A HUMAN LIFE?**

**HOW CAN YOU PUT A PRICE OF A HUMAN LIFE WHEN THE LIFE YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT HAPPENS TO BE YOUR OWN CHILD?**

**AT WHAT POINT DOES RANSOM BECOME EXTORTION?....**

**UNREASONABLE EXTORTION.....**

**WHO MAKES THIS JUDGMENT CALL? WHO DECIDES?**

**YOU CAN ARGUE ABOUT WHETHER YOU WERE IN FAVOR OF  
RELEASING ALL THOSE MURDERERS- OR NOT — BUT YOU  
CAN'T ARGUE ABOUT WHETHER ISRAEL WAS RIGHT OR  
WRONG IN AGREEING TO THE EXCHANGE, BECAUSE THERE  
IS NO OBJECTIVE RIGHT OR WRONG IN THIS TYPE OF  
CIRCUMSTANCE. PAUSE**

**ALL OF THIS BRINGS ME TO MOVE FROM THE KIDNAPPING OF  
GILAD SHALIT- AND I USE THE WORD KIDNAPPING  
DELIBERATELY — BECAUSE HE WAS JUST A KID- AND  
PROBABLY IMMATURE, AS WELL AS FRAGILE — TO THE  
IMPRISONMENT OF TWO YOUNG MEN WITH IRON WILLS,  
GREAT INTELLECT, AND POSSESSING STRONG MORAL FIBER.**

**LET ME READ TO YOU NATAN SHARANSKY'S TRIBUTE TO  
SEN. JOHN MCCAIN:**

**3 SHARANSKY TITLES IT: JOHN MCCAIN UNDERSTOOD WHY I  
REFUSED TO LEAVE PRISON.**

**PARENTHETICALLY, I WOULD NOTE THAT WHILE I CANNOT —  
AND DO NOT BLAME HIM, I CANNOT IMAGINE GILAD SHALIT  
REFUSING THE PRISONER EXCHANGE THAT WAS AGREED TO  
AS TOO HIGH A PRICE FOR ISRAEL TO PAY FOR HIS FREEDOM.  
I SAY THIS NOT IN CRITICISM GILAD SHALIT; HE SIMPLY, IN  
MY ESTIMATION, DOES NOT HAVE THAT INNER STRENGTH.  
AND IN ALL HONESTY, I WILL TELL YOU THAT I HAVE NO IDEA  
WHETHER I HAVE THAT KIND OF INNER STRENGTH, EITHER.**

**PAUSE**

**JOHN MCCAIN UNDERSTOOD WHY I REFUSED TO LEAVE  
PRISON**

A FEW MONTHS AFTER THE 2008 ELECTIONS, I HAPPEN TO BE IN WASHINGTON AND SOUGHT OUT MY OLD FRIEND, SEN. JOHN MCCAIN. I HOPED TO EXPRESS MY SUPPORT IN THE FACE OF HIS DEFEAT IN THOSE ELECTIONS, AND MY CONFIDENCE THAT HIS LEGACY WOULDN'T BE DEFINED BY IT. I WAS TAKEN TO A SMALL CHAMBER IN THE SENATE TO AWAKE, MCCAIN, WHO IS EMBROILED IN A LEGISLATIVE BATTLE ON THE FLOOR, AND DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE THE BUILDING.

4 THE MAN WHO WALKED INTO THE CHAMBER TO MEET ME WAS GLAD TO RECEIVE MY CONDOLENCES AND ASSURANCES, BUT HE DIDN'T NEED THEM. HIS DEFEAT WAS NO LONGER ON HIS MIND. HE WAS AFIRE, INSTEAD, WITH HIS PASSION FOR HIS MOST RECENT BATTLE, THE CRUSADE TO OUTLAW TORTURE. "I DON'T NEED TO EXPLAIN TO YOU WHY WE MUST STOP THIS," HE SAID TO ME, DISMISSING THE CRITICISM HIS POSITION DREW FROM HIS OWN POLITICAL CAMP. "WE UNDERSTAND."

THE "WE" SEN. MCCAIN SPOKE OF, AND THE AFFINITY HE ALLUDED TO, WAS FORMED IN OUR VERY FIRST MEETING, WHEN I VISITED THE US SHORTLY AFTER MY RELEASE FROM THE SOVIET GULAGS IN 1986. "I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU REFUSE TO BE RELEASED ON THE USSR'S OURS TERMS 2 YEARS AGO," HE TOLD ME THEN, REFERRING TO A DEAL I REJECTED, TO THE SHOCK AND CONSTERNATION OF MANY WESTERN SUPPORTERS.

MANY COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY I REFUSED TO REQUEST AN EARLY RELEASE FROM PRISON FOR HEALTH REASONS. AFTER ALL, THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES HAD SECRETLY

PROMISED THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS THAT THEY WOULD GRANT SUCH A REQUEST. MCCAIN, WHO EXPERIENCED THE HORRORS OF CAPTIVITY AND DICTATORSHIP FIRSTHAND, UNDERSTOOD WHAT THEY COULDN'T.

HE KNEW HOW SUCH A REQUEST WOULD OF BEEN PRESENTED BY THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES, HOW THEY WOULD HAVE USED IT TO CLAIM THAT I, THEIR CRITIC, ACCEPTED OF THEIR AUTHORITY TO CONTROL MY FATE. HE KNEW HOW IT WOULD HAVE BEEN USED TO BREAK THE SPIRIT OF OTHER DISSIDENTS.

5 MCCAIN UNDERSTOOD MY REASONS, BECAUSE HE HIMSELF HAD MADE THE SAME CHOICE. WHEN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT OFFER TO RELEASE HIM AHEAD OF OTHER POWs, HE DECLINED, DESPITE THE ATROCIOUS CONDITIONS IN WHICH HE WAS HELD. SOME VALUES, HE KNEW, STOOD ABOVE SURVIVAL AND COMFORT.

MCCAIN'S FIRSTHAND KNOWLEDGE OF THESE REALITIES AND TRUTHS SHOWN THROUGH HIS ENDEAVORS THROUGHOUT HIS LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS POLITICAL CAREER. HE NEVER STOP SUPPORTING DISSIDENTS WHO SUFFERED UNDER DICTATORIAL REGIMES, AND HE NEVER FORGOT THAT SOME THINGS SHOULD TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER REAL-POLITIK CONSIDERATIONS AND PARTY LINES.

IT WAS THIS DEEP CONVICTION THAT MOTIVATED HIM TO SPEAK AGAINST A REAL-POLITIK APPROACH TO THE SITUATION IN THE SOVIET UNION, IN SYRIA AND IN IRAN, AND IT WAS THIS CONVICTION, TOO, THAT COMPELLED HIM TO FIGHT AGAINST TORTURE IN GUANTÁNAMO BAY,

REGARDLESS OF HIS OWN PARTY'S CRITICISM. HE KNEW THAT JUSTICE ITSELF, AS WELL AS THE UNITED STATES' MORAL INTEGRITY, WAS ON THE LINE.

THE MAN WHO CAME TO MEET ME IN THAT SMALL CHAMBER IN THE AMERICAN SENATE DIDN'T NEED MY ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT. HE DIDN'T NEED ME TO TELL HIM THAT HIS PRINCIPLES, AND NOT HIS DEFEAT IN THE ELECTIONS, WOULD DEFINE HIS LEGACY IN YEARS TO COME. HE WAS ALREADY AFIRE WITH THOSE VERY PRINCIPLES, AND WITH HIS DEEP COMMITMENT TO HIS COUNTRY'S MORAL INTEGRITY AND DIGNITY.

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE LOST A MAN OF RARE INTEGRITY THIS WEEK, AND I LOST A VERY DEAR COMRADE IN ARMS. MAY HIS LEGACY LIVE ON. PAUSE

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THERE IS A JEWISH ANGLE TO ALL THIS THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE PARTICULARS OF SGT. GILAD SHALIT OR WITH NATAN SHARANSKY. IT'S CALLED *PIDYON SH'VU'YIM*—THE MITZVAH — THE COMMANDMENT TO REDEEM CAPTIVES. IN THE HIERARCHY OF JEWISH LAW IT IS PLACED ABOVE FEEDING AND CLOTHING THE POOR. IT IS BASED ON A BROAD READING OF THE VERSE IN DEUTERONOMY THAT ENJOINS US NOT TO HARDEN OUR HEARTS OR TO CLOSE OUR HANDS WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE PLIGHT OF ANOTHER ISRAELITE IN NEED. PAUSE

OF COURSE, KNOWING FULL WELL THAT THE JEWS HAD A TREMENDOUS SENSE OF OBLIGATION FOR THE WELFARE OF THEIR CORELIGIONISTS,—*KOL YISRAEL ARAYVIM ZEH BAZE*H—ALL JEWS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ONE ANOTHER — IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL TIMES, JEWS WERE FREQUENTLY

SUBJECTED TO CAPTURE, AND THEN THE COMMUNITY WAS SUBJECT TO EXTORTIONIST RANSOM DEMANDS, WHICH THEY GENERALLY PAID.

THERE IS AT LEAST ONE STORY ABOUT *PIDYON SH'VU'YIM* THAT HAS A VERY BENEFICIAL OUTCOME. THE STORY IS FOUND IN ABRAHAM IBN DAUD'S SEFER HAQABBALAH, A CHRONICLE OF JEWISH TRADITION. IN IT HE RELATES THE TALE OF FOUR EMINENT RABBIS FROM BABYLONIA, WHO SET SAIL ON A SHIP. THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP, WHILE UNAWARE OF THE REPUTATION OF THESE 4 SCHOLARS, IS FULLY AWARE THAT JEWISH COMMUNITIES WILL RANSOM THEIR FELLOW JEWS.

7 AND SO, THE CAPTAIN, DOCKING IN SEVERAL PORTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, OFFERS ONE RABBI IN EACH PORT TO THE COMMUNITY. THEY OF COURSE RANSOM HIM, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THEY GOT A BARGAIN! EACH OF THE RABBIS ESTABLISHES AN ACADEMY, AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY NO LONGER NEEDS TO SEND THEIR RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS — AND THE ACCOMPANYING DONATION — TO THE BABYLONIAN RABBIS, AS THEY NOW HAVE A SCHOLAR IN THEIR OWN MIDST. AND THAT IS HOW JEWISH KNOWLEDGE AND SCHOLARSHIP SPREAD FROM THE BABYLONIAN ACADEMIES TO THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT.

PAUSE PAUSE PAUSE PAUSE

BUT THE *PIDYON SH'VU'YIM* STORY THAT I CONSIDER TO BE THE MOST POWERFUL, IS NOT THE STUFF OF LEGEND. IT IS THE REAL LIFE STORY OF RABBI MEIR OF ROTHENBURG — AND IF JOHN MCCAIN AND NATAN SHARANSKY HAD

**KNOWN ABOUT HIM, RABBI MEIR COULD HAVE SERVED AS THEIR ROLE MODEL AND INSPIRATION.**

**IN 1284 EMPEROR RUDOLPH SEIZED RABBI MEIR, THREW HIM INTO PRISON, AND DEMANDED A RANSOM. OF COURSE, THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WAS PREPARED TO PAY ANY SUM TO REDEEM THEIR REVERED AND BELOVED RABBI. BUT RABBI MEIR PROHIBITED THEM FROM DOING SO. HE REFUSED TO ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE RANSOMED; IN EFFECT, HE CONSIGNED HIMSELF TO DYING IN THE EMPEROR'S JAIL. RABBI MEIR REASONED THAT ACCEDING TO SUCH A DEMAND WOULD ONLY ENCOURAGE THE EMPEROR TO EITHER SEIZE HIM AGAIN, OR TO IMPRISON OTHER JEWS AS AN EASY WAY FOR THE EMPEROR TO LINE HIS OWN POCKETS.**

**8 SO RABBI MEIR OF ROTHENBERG SPENT THE LAST SEVEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE IN PRISON. THE JEWS, NO LONGER BOUND BY THEIR RABBI'S PROHIBITION, SOUGHT TO REDEEM HIS BODY TO GIVE HIM A PROPER BURIAL. THIS TIME, THE VENGEFUL EMPEROR WAS THE ONE TO REFUSE.**

**14 LONG YEARS LATER, ALEXANDER BEN SALOMON WIMPFEN, PAID AN EVEN LARGER SUM TO REDEEM THE SAINTED RABBI'S BODY AND GIVE HIM THAT PROPER BURIAL. ALEXANDER BEN SHLOMO HAD ONLY ONE STIPULATION — ONE REQUEST: THAT WHEN HIS TIME CAME, HE WANTED TO BE BURIED NEXT TO RABBI MEIR OF ROTHENBURG.**

**\*\*MAY GOD HEAL GILAD SHALIT.                      \*\*MAY THE  
MEMORIES OF RABBI MEIR OF ROTHENBERG AND SEN.  
JOHN MCCAIN BE FOR A BLESSING.                      \*\*AND MAY  
NATAN SHARANSKY BE BLESSED WITH A LONG LIFE.**