

I know that it might not be cool to admit, but I enjoy the Star Trek movies, and even the television series. I wouldn't classify myself as a Trekkie; I can't recall details from every episode, I don't speak any Klingon, and I struggle to do the Vulcan salute, based on our own hand shape for the Priestly blessing. But I like the stories, characters, and I actually think there is a lot that we can learn from those brave men and women who boldly went where no man had gone before.

As many of you will know Captain Spock, from the Planet Vulcan, was noted for his dedication to living his life by logic and reason, with no allowances for emotional responses. In one of the movies, when he himself is about to die, there is a moving exchange with his close friend and commanding officer, Admiral James T. Kirk. With Spock accepting the fact that he is about to die, he reassures Kirk: 'were I to invoke logic, logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few'.<sup>1</sup> There is no arguing with the Vulcan logic.

And yet in the next installment of the movie series, Kirk and the crew of The Enterprise risk their ship, their careers and their lives to save Spock. And in the poignant moment where the two friends are reunited, Spock is unable to understand why they have come back to rescue him. To that question Kirk simply responds: 'Because the needs of the one ... outweigh the needs of the many'.<sup>2</sup> Human emotion, devoid of logic and reason, can sometimes alter the balance between what should be done, and what must be done.

For the people of Israel, and Jews around the world, this debate between logic and emotion has been played out in the case of the release of Gilad Shalit in exchange for 1,027 convicted terrorists.

On Tuesday last week, as we prepared for the celebration of Sukkot, it was announced that a deal had been signed between the Israeli Government and Hamas for the

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<sup>1</sup> Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan.

<sup>2</sup> Star Trek III: The Search for Spock.

release of Gilad. When I first heard the news I was overwhelmed with joy and excitement. I could honestly not focus on any of the work at hand, and instead found myself compulsively searching the internet looking for stories and articles, desperate for every piece of information, which would further prove that the reports were true. At the same time there was a part of me that remained hesitant and unconvinced, fearing that something would derail the initiative. I experienced a sense of excitement marked by suspicion, hope mixed with fear.

As that week progressed it became increasingly clear that the exchange would go through and that Gilad would finally be returning home. And at the same time we learnt about who would be moving in the opposite direction. Ahlam Tamimi, the woman who drove a suicide bomber to the Sbarro Pizza restaurant in Jerusalem, which killed 15 people out for lunch. The perpetrators of the lynching of two Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip, Abed el-Aziz Salha and Rami Ibrahim were also on the list. And Abed al-Hadi Ganaim who in 1989 seized control of the 405 bus and drove it off a cliff, killing 16 of its passengers. As the list of the 477 prisoners to be exchanged in the first stage of the transfer was made public, there was resentment at the price being paid, anger over punishments going unserved, and fear as to what these murderers and terrorists may do in the future.

And then on Tuesday morning we awoke to pictures of Gilad Shalit as he began his walk to freedom. He was recognizable as the young man in the picture which was on our bimah until Wednesday; but he looked paler and almost emaciated. He walked hesitantly, but for many who had feared that this day would never come it was simply a relief to see him alive and free. We shed tears of joy for a son being reunited with his parents. We celebrated Israel's commitment to bringing every child home. And we watched the embraces which he received from the Prime Minister, the Chief of Staff and finally his parents.

And at the same time we were forced to watch the scenes from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, where terrorists and murderers were given a heroes welcome. We listened

as the crowds celebrated their triumph and called for more Israeli soldiers to be kidnapped to free other Palestinian prisoners. And I wondered about what hopes there are for our shattered peace process.

It is not logical that 280 people serving life sentences should be released from prison unrepentant and unreformed. It is not logical to release terrorists who have been responsible for death and destruction, providing them the opportunity to kill and maim again in the future. And it is not logical that one person's life is worth the lives of 1,027 others.

When looked at through the eyes of logic, this is a terrible deal. It encourages terrorists to kidnap more Israeli soldiers. It allows murderers to go free to kill again. And it sends a message that what cannot be achieved by negotiation can be gained by force.

But it is not always about what is logical. Sometimes the logical course of action is the wrong course of action. Sometimes it is about the heart ruling the head. Sometimes the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many.

In this week's Torah portion of Bereishit we read about the creation of the world, and how we are all descended from Adam and Eve. The Rabbis were fascinated by the idea that the whole of humanity descends from one single human being, and they interpreted these verses in a variety of directions. In one interpretation, the Jerusalem Talmud suggests that we are all descended from one human being so as to teach us that whoever destroys a soul, it is as though that person destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is as though that person saved the entire world.<sup>3</sup> Within Jewish tradition, while it is important to save as many lives as possible, the saving of a single life is given a supreme value, equivalent to saving the entire world. Gilad Shalit was that single life, saved by the Government of Israel in a deal, which despite many many grave reservations, brought him home safe and sound.

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<sup>3</sup> The passage is in the Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 4:1, and a similar passage is in the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 37a.

On October 7<sup>th</sup> 2000 three Israeli soldiers: Adi Avitan, Benny Avraham and Omar Sawaid were abducted across the Lebanese border by Hezbollah terrorists disguised as UN soldiers. Their cause was adopted by the British Jewish youth movements, who campaigned tirelessly for information about their fate, and for their release. At that time Haim Avraham, the father of Benny travelled tirelessly around the world meeting with Jewish groups, Synagogues and politicians to campaign for the release of his son. I had the opportunity to meet him on several occasions, and these encounters left an indelible mark.

Haim and his family were trapped in an unbearable situation, not knowing the fate of their son, and whether he was dead or alive. They clung to a hope that Benny would return to them safe and sound, but they worried about how he might be suffering at the hands of Hezbollah and they feared that he may already have been killed. He was stuck in a state of limbo, unable to move forward with his own life, without knowing about the fate of his son. When a soldier is killed, the family is informed and able to begin the process of mourning. But Haim, despite losing his son, could not grieve or mourn; the uncertainty left him trapped in a situation of daily despair, anguish and mental torture.

Almost three and a half years after his son was captured, a deal was agreed between Hezbollah and Israel. Over four hundred prisoners were released in exchange for the bodies of Adi, Benny and Omar. And finally Haim Avraham could begin to mourn for the loss of his son.

According to Jewish law this imperative to redeem captives is a mitzvah rabba – a commandment of great importance. In the Talmud it explains the reasoning behind this by teaching that captivity is worse than famine, the sword or death, because it encompasses all of these three punishments.<sup>4</sup> And it is not just the captive who suffers these trials, but everyone who cares for him is also afflicted by pain and suffering.

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<sup>4</sup> Talmud Baba Batra 8b.

Redeeming the captives was so significant that Maimonides said that money intended for feeding or clothing the poor should be diverted and used instead for redeeming captives.<sup>5</sup> And it was even permissible to sell a Torah scroll if the money raised would help bring people back home.<sup>6</sup>

This week the State of Israel fulfilled this imperative and brought Gilad Shalit back home. We are filled with joy at the sight of Gilad back with his family, but we know that Israel has paid a heavy price to buy his freedom.

In his article about the release of Gilad Shalit, Rabbi Avi Weiss drew our attention to the contrast between the words of Ecclesiastes and the interpretation of the great Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai.<sup>7</sup>

In Ecclesiastes we read that famous passage: 'A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven... A time for killing and a time for healing... a time for weeping and a time for laughing... a time for love and a time for hate, a time for war and a time for peace.'<sup>8</sup> Ecclesiastes imagines a world of 'either-or', a world in which there are set times for different emotions, we do not simultaneously love and hate, but independently and separately we experience our emotions.

Yehuda Amichai takes issue with the words of Ecclesiastes, in his poem: 'A Man in His Life', he writes.

'A man doesn't have time in his life to have time for everything.

He doesn't have seasons enough to have a season for every purpose.

Ecclesiastes was wrong about that.

A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,

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<sup>5</sup> Maimonides: Gifts to the Poor 8:10.

<sup>6</sup> Tosafot Baba Batra 8b.

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Avi Weiss' article is available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-avi-weiss/gilad-shalit-release-reflection\\_b\\_1018161.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-avi-weiss/gilad-shalit-release-reflection_b_1018161.html)

<sup>8</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1,3,4,8

to laugh and cry with the same eyes,  
with the same hands to throw stones and to gather them,  
to make love in war and war in love.  
And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,'<sup>9</sup>

We do not experience our emotions independently. There are times in our lives when we love and hate, when we laugh and cry. Life is not black and white; it is a rainbow of colors and shades, blended and mixed together in different proportions at different times throughout our lives. The release of Gilad Shalit is one of those moments when we feel the stark contrast between positive and negative emotions. We celebrate and we mourn, we are filled with joy and regret; there is hope and there is fear.

The Jewish wedding is a reminder of this important lesson. At the end of the ceremony, a moment of supreme joy, as we celebrate two people who have committed themselves to each other in love; a glass is broken as a reminder that our world is still broken. The shattered glass is a highly potent symbol, once broken it cannot ever be repaired. On the occasion of Gilad's release the broken glass represents the hundreds of lives shattered by terrorists who have been granted their freedom. We experience joy and sadness.

And yet on Tuesday I was so very proud to be a Jew and to be a Zionist.

On Tuesday Israel made a statement about the type of country she is. A country which cares so deeply for human life that it is willing to release 1,027 terrorists to save one of its children.

On Tuesday Israel demonstrated that commitment which she has to every single one of her children, all of whom are required to serve in the army to defend the Jewish State. There was something so powerful about watching Staff Sergeant Shalit first saluting

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<sup>9</sup> The translation of the poem: 'A Man in His Life' is taken from: <http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/yehuda-amichai/a-man-in-his-life/>

Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Chief of General Staff, only to be embraced by them moments later. This was not about rank or status it was about the joy the entire country felt at the return of their son.

We cannot know the consequences of releasing 1,027 terrorists from Israeli prisons, and if history is any guide the majority of them will in all likelihood return to their violent struggle.<sup>10</sup>

But for now we can celebrate the fact that Gilad Shalit is back home. Today we can enjoy our first Shabbat services for over a year without his picture on the bimah. And tonight Gilad has celebrated Shabbat with his family for the first time in over five years.

Any price which Israel was forced to pay was always going to be too high, but any price was always going to be worth paying.

In the international media Israel will often be accused of having a disproportionate response to acts of terror. This week we saw the real inequality and imbalance present in Israeli society; we saw that Israel disproportionately values the life of each and every one of her citizens.

This week we saw Israel fulfilling the dream that she would serve as an Or LeGoyim, a light unto the nations.

This week I am especially proud to be a Zionist and a member of the Jewish family.

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<sup>10</sup> According to Shin Bet Security Service Chief Yoram Cohen experience shows that 60% of the people released return to terror.