

For They Are Our Brothers
 A Sermon for Ki Tetzet
 By Rabbi Susan Grossman
 Beth Shalom Congregation
 Columbia, Maryland
www.beth-shalom.net

Shabbat Shalom

I had the opportunity this week to join over 300 rabbis who gathered in Washington for a special briefing from AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. We had the opportunity to listen to top notch policy analysts about ISIS, Iran, Gaza, and what this all means to Israel and America.

One of the most powerful speakers was a young man name Mosab Hassan Yosef. Perhaps you have heard of him. He is also known as the Green Prince. He is the son of Sheik Hassan Yosef, one of the founders of Hamas, the radical Islamist group that has terrorized almost all of Israel since July. This is the group that has fired over 4000 rockets into Israel, and has held their own people hostage as human shields when Israel warns them to leave before bombing Hamas rocket launchers and ammunitions depots. This is the group that diverted cement and building supplies sent to build schools into building large and sophisticated tunnels. The tunnels start in Gaza, reach under the border into Israel, sometimes up to a mile, with the sole purpose of serving to attack Israelis. One of their plans called for the largest terrorist attack ever, to be bigger than 9/11. Hamas planned to use the tunnels to launch a slaughter the men, women and children in the Israeli communities near the border on the first night of Rosh Hashanah.

This is the organization that Mosab's father founded.

Mosab was raised as a prince among his people, groomed to take a leadership role in Hamas as he grew up. But for some reason, though all he knew was what he had been taught, he began to question everything his father and those around him preached. He began to question to himself their right to take innocent life, the life of women and especially children. He looked across at Israel, with its open society and prosperity and he began to question to himself the poverty and misery that Hamas' fight against Israel brought to the Palestinians, his people. He began to question the tenets of the radical Islam in which he was raised, the violent hatred of anyone who believed differently, who acted differently than what Hamas interpreted as proper.

As a young man, he decided he could no longer participate in the murder of innocents. He could not even stand by as such evil was done. So he decided to begin to work for Israel. At great danger to himself, he became a double agent for the Shin Bet, Israel's security agency. He went to Hamas meetings and continued to serve in important roles even as he fed information to the Israelis.

He was particularly helpful when Shin Bet would hear a rumor of an imminent attack but did not have enough details to stop it. He shared about how once the Shin Bet learned that an attack was planned in Jerusalem. All they knew was that the bomber was wearing a red shirt, was about 18 years old, and would be picking up his bomb in Ramallah. It was not enough information to stop the bomber, though. Mosab's Shin Bet contact called him and asked if he could help. Mosab told him, he would call back in a 10 minutes. Ten minutes later, Mosab said he would be able to get more information in a little while and he would call back soon. Mosab went to Ramallah and stood outside the square, where he saw a young man in a red shirt come

into the square and continue into a building. He had found the bomber. He called his contact and the swat team was mobilized, capturing the bomber and the bomb.

No one knows how many lives Mosab saved with the information he provided the Shin Bet. When asked how he feels about what he did, he does not act like a hero. He gives credit to the Israeli commandos and the Shin Bet. He says he is not being falsely humble. He just believes that if you can save a life how can you not?

That sounds like a very Jewish value, doesn't it?

Our Sages taught: if you save one life, it is as if you have saved the entire world. Our highest value is pekuach nefesh, the saving of a life.

Here was a Palestinian young man, who had every reason to hate the Jews, who was educated, indoctrinated to hate the Jews, who instead saw the humanity of his enemy and risked his life to save them. When asked, he says he loves Israel and willingly risked his life for it, for the dream that people can live together in peace.

I share Mosab's story today with you, not only because I heard him speak this week at AIPAC but because he embodies something from our Torah reading Parshat Ki Tetzei, this week.

The Torah reads, "*Lo titeteva edomi ki achicha hu*" – "You shall not hate the Edomite for he is your brother."

Rabbi Jack Reimer writes, "The truth is that the Edomites were not exactly very nice to the Israelites. When the Israelites asked for permission to cross over their land in order to reach Canaan, the Edomites said no. When they asked if they could buy food and water from them to help them on their way, the Edomites said no. So why then does the Torah say: Do not hate the Edomites?"

"If someone treated you this way, wouldn't you hate them? And would not any fair-minded person say that you were entitled to hate them?" The answer that the Torah gives is '*ki achicha hu*' – "because they are your brothers." The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, who was the brother of Jacob. And so I guess what the Torah is saying is that family is family. No matter what someone does to you, no matter how someone treats you, if they are your family, you cannot disown them. You cannot hate them. You must treat them kindly, because family is family."

At some point in his young life, Mosab realized that Jews and Arabs are family. He had good reason to be angry at the Israelis, who – albeit in self defense—have bombed and attacked Gaza since 2007 when Hamas started firing rockets every day into Israel proper. He had friends and family who had been killed in those attacks. Nevertheless he could see that the Israelis and the Palestinians are brothers. More than that, he realized that all human beings are brothers and sisters and that there is no place for hatred between people, whether of individuals or nations.

Most Israelis know this of course. That is why, even as Israel must protect its citizens, it sends supplies, electricity, water to the Gazans to try to ease the suffering of the people being held hostage by Hamas. Even though average Israelis are under rocket attack every day, sometimes every few hours, every time Hamas breaks a ceasefire, average Israelis have collected and sent diapers, baby wipes, food, paid out of their own pockets, to help the Gazans.

Our Torah reading teaches us: "Remember you were slaves in Egypt..."

The Torah reminds us that we should know what it is like to be helpless, to be mistreated. And therefore we should show compassion, empathy for anyone, even our enemies, who find themselves in the same situation.

Remembering is an interesting phenomena in Judaism. It isn't just a mental exercise. When we remember we are commanded to act upon our memory.

Our Torah reading is teaching us that whether we recognize our brotherhood with others or not, we are not to hate. Whether we recognize our relatedness or not, we are to remember we have also been in a difficult situation. We are to remember what we would have wanted others to do on OUR behalf, and then do that for those who are in need, even the needy of our enemies.

That's powerful stuff, especially in a dangerous neighborhood like the Middle East. But it is what the Torah has directed us to do for thousands of years. We are not push overs. Our parsha also reminds us to remember Amalek and fight against senseless hatred and intractable enemies. But we are not to hate or needlessly hurt others. Israelis know that, which is why most Israelis mourn not just for their own dead and injured but for the terrible suffering the people of Gaza undergo because their leaders hate Israel more than they love their people. And Mosab – and many other informers that Israel relies on – know this.

It is from all those Israelis sending baby diapers to Gaza and from people like Mosab and those like him who saved and continue to save Israeli lives that I continue to have hope that some day, someday, we will reach the day when Israel and its neighbors will live in a secure and lasting peace.

May it come soon in our days, and let us say, Amen