

Feldstein: Kidnapping Children a Cause for Celebration?

Many have asked what has been going on in Israel since three Israeli teenage boys were kidnapped last week. One could follow both the Israeli news—where it's almost all that is being covered—and the international news—where it's barely been covered at all.

If you'd like news sources, please email me directly. But I would like to share a more personal perspective.

I returned home last Thursday night from a trip to the United States. About the same time I got home, three teenage Israeli boys were kidnapped by terrorists not far from where I live, in Gush Etzion, just south of Jerusalem. Initially this was kept quiet by the army and other security services in the hope that not publicizing it would facilitate the boys being found and returned home. By Friday morning, despite being asked not to publicize the incident, email chat lists, Facebook posts, and other media were full of announcements along with rumors about the best, and worst, outcomes. As Shabbat neared on Friday night, word was out but the boys had not been returned.

As we searched for information and prayed for a good outcome, parallel news reports were filled with our Palestinian Arab neighbors' very public celebrations. Indeed, on the way to take my kids to the pool on Friday, we passed one such celebration, and Friday night from across the valley in Bethlehem, we heard the sounds of celebratory fireworks and gunfire. This is one of the more repugnant of the cartoons expressing Arab glee at the kidnapping of the three Israeli boys.

Shabbat is our tranquil, peaceful, biblical day of rest. We

take a day each week to devote to God, to prayer, to fellowship with one another, and to rest from our work as is proscribed in the Torah. This past Shabbat, the mood was different.

Over Shabbat dinner, we spoke candidly about the situation. We discussed our fears living where we do, which aren't numerous, as proven by the fact that our kids regularly take rides from strangers—called “trempling”—with private cars being expensive and busses not so frequent.

Typically, we feel safe doing this and allowing our kids to do so as well. We talked about what to do if they were driving and how to handle a threatening situation. I told them clearly, if they feel threatened they should do anything necessary to get away from the people threatening them and get to a safe place as soon as possible. I pray that they never have to deal with this scenario, but need them to be prepared.

The following day, over Shabbat lunch, a friend introduced the idea of having our kids outfitted with chips to be able to locate them in any circumstance. Some black humor resulted, but the concerns run deep.

Saturday evening, while it was still light out, I heard more fireworks from Bethlehem and my heart sank. I thought it was our Palestinian Arab neighbors' announcement that the boys were killed. I was not alone in my fears.

We went through one of the most anxious Shabbats I can recall since the week of September 11, 2001. At synagogue, this was almost all anyone spoke about, with many people looking to one another for information and to find the person who left a radio or TV on to gather the latest news since turning on and off electronic devices is not within the spirit of the sanctity of Shabbat.

During our worship services, Psalms were recited, led by a man whose nephew is one of the kidnapped boys, and my next-door

neighbor. Here is a video of his American mother whose spirits and hopes are high, but I have to believe not far below the surface she is wrought with anxiety and fear. Our neighbors are staying quiet, preferring not to speak about it and pray for a positive outcome.

As the school year comes to a close, Israel's Ministry of Education was in high gear helping schools and students across the country deal with the kidnapping. Even little children are impacted. My eight-year-old son has taken to sleeping on his floor because he's afraid that terrorists will be able to see him in his bed through the $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch gap between the window and the blinds on his window.

Prayer gatherings continue to be held and Psalms recited. At the Kotel, (Western Wall) more than 30,000 people gathered to pray this week. Prayer has united us all, and even in the often-divided Knesset, members of a wide range of political parties came together to offer their prayers, led by the speaker of the Knesset who spent years in a Soviet prison because he sought to practice and teach Judaism.

While we have been flooded with emails, phone calls and Facebook messages because of where we live, we are fine. However, this is a national tragedy and the boys could be any of ours. My daughter was at the same bus stop a few days earlier. Another neighbor's son was there the same afternoon and it could have been him. These are all our children. And we're not targeted because we are "settlers," but because we are Jews.

Israel is wrongly accused of enacting an apartheid state and making Palestinian Arabs' lives miserable in a myriad of ways. One of the ways in which Israel is maligned is the myth that there are roadblocks and checkpoints throughout Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) that prevent Palestinian Arabs from moving freely. If that were the case, these boys would have been found within minutes as the route the terrorists took

went by a place where a checkpoint once existed. The lack of checkpoints facilitated this kidnapping.

This week, Palestinian Arabs were barred from working in Jewish communities of Judea and Samaria, but some protested bitterly that it was only for one day, a “vacation” as some said. Many even more harsh comments have been made and will continue. However, Israel is united and of strong resolve.

Unfortunate and unintended, but inevitable consequences have also come out of this. Where we live, Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews interact regularly and quite peacefully. This is the norm. Yet this week, the presence of an Arab worker in our house made each of my kids uncomfortable. It's not how I raise my children. Indeed we have Arab friends. But their discomfort is understandable.

This week, as I hosted a guest to donate blood in Jerusalem, someone expressed concern that, because of the security situation, the army rightly canceled scheduled blood donations so that soldiers could be dispatched elsewhere at a moment's notice. But as someone else said, if the situation escalates, the need for blood could become great and that's a bit of a scary thought. Text messages have been sent to blood donors requesting their help.

Other than sharing words of comfort, and anger, many are asking: “what can one do?” The first answer is to pray for the boys' safe return, and for strength and comfort for their families. Second, as one of the boys is American, call and email the White House and congressional leaders and ask that they pressure the Palestinian Authority (PA) as well. The U.S. funds the PA a great deal, even with Hamas in the government, and that ought to carry with it some influence. Third, please join us to help provide material resources that will be sure Israel always has a safe and plentiful blood supply.

A Christian friend wrote me that verses from Jeremiah 32:37-41

have been especially in his heart these days. "The words describe what we are witnessing as the Lord restores Israel. And I add them now as a prayer for the three boys, their families, for all Jews and all of you who are part of the communities living where you live:

"I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. ... I will never stop doing good to them. ... I will rejoice in doing them good, and will assuredly plant them in this Land with all my heart and soul."

Amen.

Jonathan Feldstein is the director of Heart to Heart, a unique virtual blood donation program to bless Israel and save lives in Israel. Born and educated in the U.S., Feldstein emigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a regular column for Charisma's Standing With Israel. You can contact Jonathan at firstpersonisrael@.