

Israelis: 'We Choose Life'

Toward the end of his life, Moses makes a fascinating declaration to the Jewish people that would seem so intuitive one has to ask why it's even mentioned.

In Deuteronomy 30:19-20 he charges, "I call heaven and earth to witnesses against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Just as it should be evident to us all to choose life, it should be evident that in Israel this Scripture is played out every day as an affirmation of that, "that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." Last week, this became evident in a way I had never considered.

Recently I read something saying that with the increased wave of terrorist incidents and overall tension in Israel that has resulted, living is an act of resistance. I shuddered. "Resistance" is a common Palestinian Arab buzzword for violence and, with a statistical margin of error that would make it irrelevant were it not something so serious, Israelis' living is not about violence but about choosing life. Living is living.

This week I planned to donate blood as I try to do at least 3-4 times per year. Earlier that day there had been a terrorist attack in a Jerusalem-area "Rami Levi" grocery store where a Palestinian Arab teen stabbed two Jewish shoppers. I was going anyway, and brought one of my daughters with me. When I walked in to the hall in which the blood drive was

taking place, one of the phlebotomists with whom I am friends (person who draws blood for Israel's national blood bank) and who also serves as a paramedic in Israel's national ambulance service which Heart to Heart supports, asked me if I had "heard the news." It turns out I had, but I hadn't.

My friend told me that one of the people most severely wounded in the terror attack that day was a friend of his, another paramedic, who was injured while trying to disarm the terrorist. I knew that the attack took place. I had not known that someone whose job it is to save lives had put his own life at risk. Making things all the more meaningful is that my friend the phlebotomist/paramedic is an Israeli Arab who, like most of us, does not distinguish between the life of a Jew or an Arab.

Life is life. Those who try to take life are committing a grievous sin. Once, following a particularly heinous terror attack on a religious boy's high school, leaving several teenage boys dead, he wept to me calling terrorists "animals." Yes, even a Muslim Arab can choose life as if Moses was speaking to him too.

As a result of the terrorist attack however, my daughter and I were just two of a relatively large number of people who came out to donate blood as a life affirming response to that day's terrorist attack. Nearly double the number of expected donors came out, repulsed by the curse of death, to affirm life.

Two weeks ago I had the privilege to bring friends from CrossTalk International ministries to donate blood in Jerusalem. Earlier that week there had been another heinous terrorist attack in a Jerusalem synagogue, with terrorists literally butchering four rabbis to death, and shooting an Israeli Druze policeman in the head, wounding many others.

That attack reminded many of the attack on the boy's high school as being particularly atrocious. My friends from

CrossTalk affirmed life by giving their blood to save lives in Israel.

Waiting on line to donate that day was a woman who looked familiar. She was among several waiting patiently for their turn to donate, and choose life themselves. After some time, I realized who she was: the mother of one of the boys murdered in the terrorist attack at the boys high school a few years earlier. No doubt the attack that we had just experienced that week reminded her of the attack in which her son was murdered.

What's a mother to do? I'm sure she prayed quite a bit that week, but she also gave blood, choosing life in the face of death.

This week's terrorist attack in the grocery store hit close to home. We have a branch of "Rami Levi" near our house in the Judean Mountains. It's one where Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews live, work, and shop all right next to one another, coexisting quite nicely with everyone looking for the same deals on vegetables, breakfast cereals, laundry detergent, etc. Almost everyone.

I wasn't about to let a terrorist in one store disrupt my life and made a list of things we "needed" to go to our "Rami Levi" to shop. Security was tighter. Arab customers were wanded and had bags searched. Jewish customers were asked if they were armed, and if so to produce their license. As her parents were being searched, a pre-teen Palestinian Arab girl stood next to me and smiled. I don't know why she smiled, but the inconvenience wasn't too great for her family to come out shopping on a Friday morning. In the bread section I saw her mother choose a fresh loaf of challah, the special braided bread Jews traditionally eat on Shabbat. Yes, we can get along.

I was more cautious as to my surroundings. No getting absorbed in texting or emails. I looked to see if the people in front

of me, next to me, or behind me was “a member of the tribe” or one of our “cousins.” I went to “Rami Levi” today for milk, cheese, bread, fruit, cereal, etc.

But I went to choose life.

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