

Jews Unify in Prayer Vigils for Kidnapped Teens

With ongoing prayer vigils taking place this week around the globe for the safe return of three kidnapped Israeli teens, Rabbi Hillel Skolnik takes solace in the resolve of the Jewish people.

Skolnik, who serves as rabbi for the Southwest Orlando Jewish Congregation, said Thursday night at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Orlando that despite the tragic abduction of Gilad Shaar, Naftali Frenkel and Eyal Yifrach on their way home from their yeshiva (Jewish studies) a week ago in Gush Etzion in the West Bank, Jews throughout the world continue to remain strong and united. Approximately 100 to 125 attended the prayer vigil for the young men at the JCC in Maitland.

"In many ways, you could easily get the picture that our world is falling apart, that it is fractured in terrible ways," Rabbi Skolnik said. "These are difficulties and tragedies that we take very seriously in both Israel and here in the U.S. There are many who suffer around the world.

"Unfortunately, more often than not, it takes these difficult moments to bring communities together. What you try to do in these moments is harness that energy and these opportunities to come together and use it for solidarity, but also use it for good in happier times."

Thursday night's prayer vigil included readings from Tehillim (Psalms 121 and 130), and the Hebrew songs "Kol Ha'Olam Kulo" ("Jewish Courage"), and "Acheinu Kol Beit Yisrael" ("As for Our Brothers, the Whole House of Israel").

Israel Hayom, an Israeli newspaper, reported Friday morning that Frenkel's uncle, Yishai Frenkel, told an Israeli radio station that from "all indications we have been receiving,

based on information not on faith, these boys are alive.”

The *New York Daily News* reports that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says the militant group Hamas is behind the kidnappings of Shaar, 16, Frenkel, 16, and Yifrach, 19.

Israel Hayom also reported that overnight Thursday, Israeli Defense Forces “searched 200 locations in Judea and Samaria and arrested 25 suspects. During “Operation Brother’s Keeper,” more than 200 Hamas members have been detained as suspects.

Charisma columnist Jonathan Feldstein, who lives in the same neighborhood as one of the youth’s relatives, said this week that, “from across the valley in Bethlehem, we heard sounds of celebratory fireworks and gunfire,” in reference to the teens’ abductions.

“What’s strange to me is that people consider it’s acceptable to kidnap three students. What’s strange to me is that people use it as an occasion to celebrate,” Skolnik said.

Reports say that Israeli Defense Forces are tirelessly scouring the country in an attempt to find the Jewish youth.

“From what I understand, they are doing everything they can be doing and what they should be doing,” Skolnik said. “We are living in a blessed time knowing that in the state of Israel, there is an Israeli army that comes to the defense of Jews. It’s comforting to have that reassurance.”