

The Hostage Deal: Israel's Stand for Life and Freedom

Our hearts are full. "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24, ESV). Today, we cling to hope as we take the first steps toward bringing our loved ones home.

For nearly 500 days, a shadow has hung over our nation. Israelis—infants, elders, entire families—were ripped from their homes, torn from their lives, and plunged into the abyss. They were kidnapped by Hamas, imprisoned in Gaza's hellish tunnels and subjected to cruelty beyond words. Their only crime? Being Israeli. Being Jewish.

This week, we read the opening chapters of the book of Exodus and hear the timeless cry of our ancestors in Egypt: "I have seen the affliction of My people ... I know their pain." Those words resonate in our hearts as we witness the suffering of the hostages, enduring horrors that defy comprehension.

Hamas is not merely an enemy. They are the embodiment of darkness. Last week, a chilling video emerged of Liri Albag, an 18-year-old girl held hostage since Oct. 7, 2023. Her face was gaunt, her fear palpable. Around her neck was a dog collar. A young woman, dehumanized and degraded, treated as less than an animal. This is who Hamas is—a force devoid of humanity, a cult of death reveling in cruelty.

And now, a hostage deal. Is it fair? No. It is excruciatingly lopsided: a handful of our loved ones for thousands of their killers—many with innocent blood on their hands, many who will return to their murderous ways.

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So why would we make such a deal? Why negotiate with savages who mock the sanctity of life?

Because this is who we are. This is what it means to be Israel.

This is more than a battle for territory or security. This is a war of values. On one side stands Israel, a nation that sanctifies life above all else. On the other side are those who glorify death, who hide behind human shields and who store weapons in hospitals and mosques. This is the eternal battle between light and darkness, between those who cherish life and those who revel in its destruction.

For Israel, every life is sacred. We have made the agonizing, illogical and profoundly moral choice to do whatever it takes to bring our people home. We cannot rest knowing that our babies, our grandparents and our loved ones are languishing in the cold, merciless depths of Gaza, enduring unspeakable torment.

This is not a decision born of weakness. It is a declaration of strength—a profound reflection of the enduring values of our people, shaped by the Torah and etched into our national soul. It is a statement to the world that we will sacrifice, endure and persevere to honor the sanctity of life.

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The United States has stood firmly by our side. The new administration has made it clear that Hamas will face severe consequences if the hostages are not released. Its declaration—"there will be hell to pay"—reinforces a shared truth: Israel's values are America's values. Both nations cherish freedom, democracy and the inalienable dignity of life. But freedom is not free. It requires vigilance, sacrifice, and an unyielding commitment to justice.

Hamas has been explicit about its goals. “First, the Saturday people,” they proclaim—the Jews. “Then the Sunday people”—the Christians. First, Israel, the “Little Satan.” Then America, the “Big Satan.” This is a shared struggle, a fight for the soul of humanity.

This hostage deal is neither fair nor just. It is painful, and it feels wrong. Yet it is also a resounding declaration to the world: We choose life. We choose hope. We choose to uphold the values that make life worth living.

If Hamas honors this deal, some of our loved ones will return home. Many, tragically, will not. But we believe that our prayers—offered with tears, hope and trembling over these many months—have been heard. We thank God for His mercy and compassion, and we pray for the hostages’ healing, for their strength to reclaim life and for the resolve of our people to continue sanctifying life even amidst the darkest trials.

As we open the book of Exodus and recall our ancestors’ liberation from bondage, we are reminded that the story of Israel has always been one of hope triumphing over despair, of life prevailing over death. May we continue to stand firm in our mission: to bring light into the darkness, to sanctify the life God has gifted us and to uphold the values that define us as a people.

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