

July 23, 2014 -
Shalom from Israel -

Today I received a note from a friend alerting me that the funeral for a fallen soldier would take place later that morning. The soldier, Max Steinberg, had made Aliyah from the US two years ago and had joined the Israel Defence Forces. He fell in Gaza. The note explained that he was a "lone soldier," a soldier without immediate family in Israel. So it would be a mitzvah to show up at the funeral.

I set out toward Mount Herzl, the national cemetery where many of the greats of Israel are buried. I wondered how many people would show up for this tragic young man. I hailed a taxi and told the driver to take me to Mt. Herzl. He didn't blink an eye. But the trip took forever. The traffic was terrible. Then I saw streams of people walking on the streets. I got out and followed them. They were all on the way to funeral. At the cemetery it was announced that 30,000 people had arrived. They came to pay their respects to this idealistic young man who had placed his lot with his people in their homeland.

His parents, brother and sister had made it from LA. His younger brother quoted sacred words, beloved by him and his brother. But they were not words from the Torah. They were quotes from Bob Marley, something like - "live for yourself and you have not lived; live for others and you live forever." I wondered about the mysterious ties that bound Max, so imbued with American culture, to decide to move and sacrifice everything to be part of the sacred, and too often bloody, drama of the Jewish people in Israel.

I do not know what animated Max, of blessed memory. But I feel that it is imperative for us, for whom he gave his life, to dig deeply into ourselves, as he did, and find ways to act so that his dedication to the Jewish people and to Israel not be wasted, cheapened or desecrated. What are we ready to commit ourselves to achieving, fulfilling, building and sustaining?

As always, the situation here is much more complex and varied than what one gets from the media or from any apps one may be connected to. Life mostly goes on. The rockets and alarms are terrible and stressful. The loss of life is devastating. The questions about the next developments in Gaza are constant and unanswered. But most of the time, certainly away from the South of Israel which is right next to the war zone, people are very busy doing the normal things they do every day. They shop and work and argue and go to the movies and laugh about nonsense and complain about whatever. They prove that it is possible to pay attention to more than one thing at a time. So the real question is whether we will use our

capacity to think and feel on multiple levels for the sake of something greater and better for ourselves and the world.

Another Bob Marley quote mentioned at the funeral was something like:
"The people trying to do evil to the world never take a day off; how can we?"

May our prayers for peace be realized speedily. Meanwhile let us work toward a world worthy of peace.

Rabbi David Greenstein