

July 18, 2008

Shabbat Shalom once again from Crane Lake Camp!

I will be returning home on Sunday after an enriching experience teaching about Israel, working with several campers on guitar skills, helping students who will become Bar/Bat Mitzvah maintain their reading and chanting progress for their simchah, and assisting the Crane Lake songleaders in adding music to worship and programming.

There are always Israeli counselors and staff members at Crane Lake Camp. These young people offer a sense of connection to Israel for the entire camp community. This year, their participation in camp life made all the more poignant the news that Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, the two Israeli soldiers whose release Israel negotiated with Hezbollah in Lebanon, had actually died near the time of their capture at the beginning of the war two years ago. The fact that Hezbollah did not reveal that Goldwasser and Regev had died, tied with the celebration in Lebanon of the release from an Israeli prison of Palestine Liberation Front member Samir Kuntar (who had murdered an Israeli man and his 4 year-old daughter in 1979), indicate the nature of some of Israel's immediate neighbors. Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Authority, congratulated Kuntar on his release. That may not bode well for the possibility of a change in attitude among Palestinians towards Israel. Newspapers in some Arab nations criticized the celebration of Kuntar's release and decried the policies of Hezbollah two years ago and now.

This is not the first time that the State of Israel has agreed to such an exchange. Knowing that Regev and Goldwasser might have already died, Israel pressed ahead with this agreement because, for the Israeli community, everyone counts. This is the message of this week's Torah reading, Pinchas. The Israelites took a second census of their numbers, especially the men who could fight, if necessary. They listed names, families and tribes, demonstrating that everyone among the people had something to contribute to the community. This is the lesson that I have seen in Israel's approach to negotiations for soldiers they believe to be alive but that they fear might have died. The grief of one family is felt by all families. The need to show respect for such feelings of the relatives of those captured overrides the fear that such negotiations might show, in the eyes of some, weakness or a lack of resolve. In this case, the importance of every person is the primary value.

We mourn with the Goldwasser and Regev families, and hope, still, that the One who makes peace on high can inspire us to make peace even when it seems like a distant dream.

Hoping for peace....Shabbat Shalom.

**-- L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.**