

**Remarks for Community Memorial Service for Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad**

**Shaar, and Eyal Yifrach**

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Jewish Community Center Arts and Education Building.

We gather here this evening to honor the memory of three boys slain because of who they were: Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaar and Eyal Yifrach. We mourn their loss and share, however small, a portion of their families' grief. We mourn as parents and children; we mourn as Jews, and as human beings. We grieve the potential now gone to waste, the dreams now gone unfulfilled. We come together as a community in sadness to remember three futures that never will be.

Three weeks ago Naftali, Gilad and Eyal were perhaps strangers to us all. After their abduction, we felt personally connected and almost immediately they became "our boys" around the world. We gather tonight recognizing the broader meaning that their fate represents for us as a community, as a Jewish people.

But is there not something unusual about our collective response to this event? Is there not something even unsettling about the outpouring *for these particular three boys* given the other profound suffering and tragedy in the world, even in our own backyard?

Perhaps...but I do not think so. Jewish rituals of mourning differentiate between different kinds of relationships based on our connectedness to the departed: we are not, for example, required to sit shiva for strangers. The fact that we gather to recognize these boys, in no way minimizes the suffering of others. Instead, it recognizes the larger significance of their loss to us as a community.

What, then, is that significance? What does *their* loss represent *to us* in particular that requires this collective response?

Perhaps the intimacy we feel for these boys stems not only from the inherent tragedy of their young lives cut short. Perhaps we recognize that this assault represents an assault on something larger than ourselves, on the very fabric of the Jewish people and the values upon which our community is built.

These boys were murdered because they were Jewish, their lives used by others to advance a political agenda meant to undermine the

integrity of the Jewish people's project of self-determination. We feel this loss personally because we are part of that collective body. Along with any parent who must know that there but for the grace of God could have been our own children, we each also suffer in the harm that this attack represents to us as a people.

The murders reflect an additional assault on the values of our community itself. Jewish community is the means through which our people express a tradition that has contributed beauty, justice and humanity to our world for millennia. Judaism teaches that human beings have been made in the image of God, and as such, we are each ends in and of ourselves, not to be used as means by others for their own purposes. The murders of these three boys for political ends violated core moral principles of our tradition, the ethical fabric of our own lives.

These principles also require us to speak clearly when injustice is committed in the name of these values. Even as we are here to pay tribute to these three boys, we must clearly condemn the brutal murder today of 16 year old Palestinian Muhammad Hussein Abu Khdeir in what appears to have been a revenge killing. Each of us must not hesitate in condemning these kinds of actions when they occur, nor harbor any ambivalence about

speaking out against this kind of brutality. As Gilad's own uncle has said of this event, "Murder is murder...Whatever the nationality or age...there is no justification..."

But we are gathered here now to honor the memory of our three boys. Along with the events in Kansas City, the killings of Naftali, Gilad and Eyal demonstrate that our history is never really past. Our gathering tonight demonstrates that we are one people, with one shared destiny. We use this occasion to reaffirm the very character and vibrancy of Jewish life, its values and tradition. And in doing so, the memory of these boys will indeed become a blessing.

Let us now remember.