

Operation Brother's Keeper

Reflection Program



Created by Dr. Elana Heideman and Samantha Vinokor

On June 12, 2014, three Israeli teenagers were on their way home from school when they were kidnapped by terrorists. In the 18 days that followed, the Israeli military and intelligence organizations searched for them, their plight was publicized worldwide, their families demonstrated dignity even amidst their struggle, and a #BringBackOurBoys viral social media campaign reached a global scale. While their families waited for news of their sons, all of Israel, and the global Jewish community, adopted the boys as their own. On June 30, it was reported that the bodies of the boys had been found near Hebron, and it is believed that the boys were murdered soon after their capture.

The disappearance and death of Eyal Yifrah, Gilad Shaer, and Naftali Fraenkel united the people of Israel at a tragic time. Followed by the fear and loss of Operation Protective Edge, the summer of 2014 became a summer of solidarity and love between Jews in Israel and around the world. As we approach the summer of 2015, we invite you to reflect back, and look forward.

This reflection program seeks to educate about the boys through the lens of Jewish peoplehood and collective responsibility, and the shaping of Jewish response to the impact of terror on our lives. The sources and suggested activities are guidelines and are by no means exhaustive, but we have tried to provide a nuanced engagement with what has become a national tragedy for the whole Jewish world. We hope this will serve to assist you in your pursuit of exploring the personal connection to Israel as part of our Jewish life and identity.

Jews around the world bond over the kidnapping and murder of three young boys, Israeli yeshiva students Eyal, 19, Gilad, 16, and Naftali, 16, who were captured on June 12, 2014. Together, we will explore how this bond is drawn from our inherent connection to one another as Jews, the concept of Jewish peoplehood, and the relevance of Israel to Jewish life and identity.

Program Goals:

- To engage students with the story of Eyal, Gilad and Naftli and the impact their story has made on the global Jewish community.
- To analyze the Jewish response to this tragedy in terms of Jewish views on prayer, mourning, revenge, and unity
- To explore the idea of Jewish peoplehood, shared responsibility and our commitment to Israel and to one another.

Guiding Questions:

- What does it mean to feel connected to individuals you do not know personally? How does our Jewishness provide for such a feeling of “family?”
- How might you define “Jewish peoplehood?”
- How does the name Operation Brother's Keeper reflect the feelings of the Israeli public towards the boys? How does this serve the interests of the Jewish people as a whole?
- How are the relationships different for Jews in Israel and Jews around the world? What can we learn from understanding these differences?
- Is there something uniquely Israeli or uniquely Jewish in the response to the kidnapping?
- What does it mean for Jews to be in a position of power or weakness? How does our history as a nation impact our behavior and expectations when we are forced into one of those positions?
- What is the Jewish perspective on seeking revenge? How does Israel balance the struggle for security with Jewish ethics and morals?
- Do you believe Diaspora Jews and Israelis share a national consciousness? If yes, on what is this based? If not, should we?
- Can we achieve “Jewish unity” when we are not faced with a tragedy such as this?

Objectives:

- Learners/participants will be able to articulate their feelings about the murdered boys and their connections to the boys and their families.
- Learners/participants will be able to explore how the idea of Jewish peoplehood connects Jews around the world and influences both individual and collective Jewish responses to this tragedy.
- Learners/participants will be able to identify coping mechanisms adapted by Israelis
- Learners/participants will be able to create action plans to meaningfully move forward from this tragedy, creating programs or action plans to help their own families, schools, or communities remember the teens.

Protocol:

The program is divided up into discussion topics, with readings and relevant questions to help facilitate dialogue among the learners/participants.

For larger groups, you can break up into smaller groups - allowing participants to select the topic of their choice or dividing them up at random - each of which can discuss a particular discussion topic and then come together at the end to discuss as a whole the concept of Jewish peoplehood and unity.

Tips for the Program Leader:

- Remind your learners that this is a raw, sensitive topic. It is ok to express deep emotions in light of the loss that the Jewish community has sustained. It is also ok to express anger, frustration, or any other form of grief.
- Emphasize that this conversation is a space for safe and open dialogue, and hopefully healing.
- Let teens know that if at any time they want to take a break and collect themselves, they are free to do so.
- Encourage them to feel comfortable asking any questions that they have about the kidnapping and murder of the boys.
- Emphasize that this discussion is about our connections as Jews and our collective healing process, and avoid shifting the focus on the political issues between Israel and the Palestinians.

Introduction:

We are here today to remember Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Sha'ar, and Naftali Fraenkel. These three Israeli yeshiva students were trying to catch a ride home from school on June 12, when they were kidnapped by terrorists and murdered several hours later. During the eighteen days between the kidnapping and the discovery of the bodies of the murdered teenagers, Jews and non-Jews around the world prayed for the boys, helped raise funds for their families, and made sure that their story was spread through use of the social media campaign #BringBackOurBoys. As the worldwide Jewish community comes to terms with this tragedy, we remember that the unity that we showed throughout this time must continue as we work together to deal with the grief that many of us now feel.

Discussion 1: Unity

The plight of the three missing boys and their families captivated the Jewish world for the eighteen days between the kidnapping and the discovery of their bodies. Thousands of Israelis attended vigils and rallies for the boys during the 18 days that they were missing, as did Jews around the world. Hundreds of people showed direct support for the families of the three boys, bringing them food, praying with them, and caring for their other children.

The name that the Israeli army gave the search for the boys was **Operation Brother's Keeper**. The slogan used across social media sites to publicize the story of the boys was #BringBackOurBoys. These two examples demonstrate the bond that each of us felt, and still feel, with the boys and their families.

- "You became a part of all of us, as we hoped and prayed for your return. You will forever be in our memories. We will keep your families in our prayers."
 - Why do we care so much? Why do we, people who have never met any of the boys, or their families, call them ours, and cry over their loss?
 - Do you feel bonded to the boys?
 - How have you expressed this, or how do you want to show this?
- How does the name Operation Brother's Keeper reflect the feelings of the Israeli public towards the boys? How did this serve the interests of the Jewish people as a whole?
- Gil Troy has said, "It is strange to mourn for three kids you never met from families you don't know. But that's what community is all about."
 - Do you believe there is a sense of a global community among Jews?
 - How do you feel connected to the worldwide Jewish community in times of tragedy? What about in good times?

Discussion 2: Prayer

As Jews, we pray three times a day, asking God for things that we want and praying that He hears our words and meditations. Thousands of people around the world prayed for the safe return of Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Sha'ar, and Naftali Fraenkel while their fate remain unknown for 18 days.

"May God protect our sons and daughters from all harm. May Hashem watch over them and protect them and may Shabbat come to us in peace. May God forever grant us the honor of living in this beautiful land, the eternal home to the Jewish people. "

"Prayers for their safe return can be heard around the world. This is not something happening "there". This is an attack on all of who love and care about Israel and her people." Heidi Krizer Daroff

The Chief Rabbi of Israel has asked "All of Israel come together to pray for the boys and for the forces rescuing them." Psalm 121. Rachaeli Fraenkel, mother of Naftali, pleaded to the world: *"We pray that all the soldiers, and our children, will come home without injury. We send our thanks to all everyone participating in this extraordinary effort. During these days, we feel deeply embraced by the entire Jewish nation, which accompanies us throughout the day, which gives us so much support. We ask that the prayers continue... All we want is to hug our children. Eyal, Gil-ad, Naftali, we love you, we miss you, be strong, be strong!"*

Video clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejl4cKumkJs#t=90> Play to 0:54.

- It is a natural instinct to pray for things that you want. How does the call for prayer help?
- The tragic news that they were murdered soon after being kidnapped means that this prayer wasn't answered the way that we wanted it to be, but doesn't invalidate the desire to pray.
- Is it possible that their early death saved them from increased suffering? Does that serve as a possible "response to prayer?"

Discussion 3: Unity

My beloved Israel, I sit with you in your sorrow. Eyal, Gilad, Naftali your precious lives will never be forgotten. You became the sons of us all, as the pain of your families is felt in our hearts more distinctly than anything else in our lives right now.

This tragedy brought together thousands of people all over the world – religious, secular, Jewish, Christian, and Muslims who expressed disdain over the acts of the

terrorists. In Tel Aviv, the night before the boys' bodies were found, nearly 85,000 Israelis "of every stripe and type" came together in prayer, in song, and in hope.

- How did this situation enable people to set aside their religious or political differences and come together as one?

Israel is very familiar with demonstrations of mass unity and solidarity. In times of crisis, this highly fractured nation has an uncanny ability to look beyond its divided neighborhoods, its tensions and its innumerable segmentation of race and origin, and actually unite as one people. Debra Kamin

- Is there something uniquely Jewish about this type of response? Is this something uniquely Israeli?

Discussion 3: National Consciousness

We have no other land, no other place we can or will call home. No one living on this planet has the power to take from us what God has given to the Jewish people. We will forever stand strong and protect ourselves and our children. Never again will we live under the rule and terror of others. This is our land. This is my land. Paula Stern

As a member of the Jewish people, I am part of what is going on. But I don't fool myself- I'm not over there and what the Israelis are going through, for this is an experience that is theirs. Regardless of my sincerity and deep feelings for everyone, well, I'm on the periphery... Rhonda Blender

The Land of Israel is our home, where we stand our ground and stop running, both as individual Jews and as a people. Here and now is where we choose not to live in fear.

Dave Bender

- Israel is the land of our ancestors. We retained a bond for 2000 years in exile. Why did this event in particular awaken a revival of that bond?
- Do you believe Diaspora Jews and Israelis share a national consciousness? If yes, on what is this based? If not, should we?
- Is it possible to share an allegiance to a country you do not live in?

Discussion 4: Revenge or Justice?

When faced with tragedy, there are some who feel sadness, and others who feel anger. Both of these responses are valid, understandable ways to react when confronted with news like our community recently received. As a response, there have been riots, wild accusations against Israel and Israelis, and an unfortunate increase in the expression of hatred toward others.

In Leviticus 19:18, it is written: “You shall not take revenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

- What does this text mean to you in the context of this tragedy?
- How does it make you feel?
- Do you think it’s possible for Israelis to follow this guidance right now?

Ecclesiastes 3:1,8. “There is a time to kill and a time to heal...a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”

- How does this text relate to the first one? Is it a contradictory statement? If so, how can we reconcile between the two?
- Do you connect with one more than the other?
- How does this help us when coping with the modern reality of Israel’s conflict with the Arabs and their ongoing struggle against terrorism?

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proclaimed: “Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Shaar and Naftali Frankel. They were abducted and murdered in cold blood by human animals. On behalf of the entire Jewish People, I would like to tell the dear families – the mothers, fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, and brothers and sisters – we are deeply saddened, the entire nation weeps with you... As Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik once wrote, 'Vengeance for the blood of a child, Satan has not yet created.'; neither has vengeance for the blood of three pure youths, who were on their way home to meet their parents, who will not see them anymore. Hamas is responsible, Hamas will pay. May the memories of these three boys be blessed. “

- What do you think about Bibi’s response to the news of the murder of the boys?
- Does it fall in line with either of the earlier quotes as a reflection of Jewish values?
- Do you think vengeance is the correct response? Can vengeance be exacted in a non-violent manner?
- What does it mean for Jews to be in a position of power or weakness? How does our history as a nation impact our behavior and expectations when we are forced into one of those positions?
- How do you think Israelis feel the government should respond to the murder of the boys? Would any citizen of any nation expect the same? Why, or why not?

Former Chief Rabbi of Israel Shlomo Amar has declared “*Do not take the law into your own hands.*” Israelis have shared various sentiments, such as “*Our expressions of rage are because of our inability and unwillingness to act out in violence. Those who are should be punished. Any acts of revenge that we may call for is in order to get the government of Israel to act with an iron fist. We cannot take any vengeance into our own hands.*” And, “*We don’t take revenge. We deal with things like a civilized country...*”

If we complain about the other and we become the other... we have lost. And we cannot afford to lose.”

Diaspora Jews have shared their own sentiments, such as “*I have so many thoughts and feelings as to how Israel should proceed. But I don’t live there – how dare I have the gall to opine on what they should do? I do know that any action needs to proceed with clear goals and a clear head – no decisions made in anger can have good results.*” HaDassah Sabo Milner

- How might Israelis and Diaspora Jews differ in their expressions of rage or their pursuit of justice?
- How might the role of the Jew in their respective society – ie majority vs. minority, citizen of Israel or one who does not live there – impact their opinion?
- How can we encourage both sides to understand each other better when faced with this difficult scenario, in the face of ongoing terror?

Discussion 5: Moving Forward

“Gil-ad, Naftali, Eyal: You wouldn't believe what happened while we waited for news of you, praying you would come home safe. Pure and beautiful, you made an entire people better. You brought us together. You have made us all grow.”

And it's over. Tragic. Sad. Too short lived. Tragic because it took the murder of 3 innocent boys for us to get to that point. Sad because the sentiment of unity has come to a close. And now, here we are faced with escalating violence; riots and protests. Disgusting displays of behavior. Our debates have reignited and now seem to be more vicious and polarized. Tragic. Sad. Too short lived. Michelle Rojas-Tal

The bond of Jewish peoplehood gives us a sense of shared commitment and connection to one another around the world. The idea that we are all one family feels the strongest when we are confronted with tragedies like this one.

- Victor Frankl wrote, “*When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.*” What can we change about our behavior, our words, our understanding that can foster a continued unity in the aftermath of this tragedy?
- We need to move forward, while always remembering the past, just as the Jewish people have for generations. How can the feelings of solidarity and pride that many have expressed in light of this tragedy don’t fade as time passes?
- What aspects of this connection can we build upon? How can we continue to develop ongoing bonds and relationships?
- What can you do to make a difference for this worthy cause for the sake of Israel and the Jewish People?

Program Conclusion:

Have the group stand together in a circle and pass out copies of *When All That's Left Is Love*, and ask for a volunteer to read aloud. Have everyone take a moment of silence to remember the boys and to prepare to move forward together.

***When All That's Left Is Love* By Rabbi Allen S. Maller**

When I die, If you need to weep
Cry for someone Walking the street beside you.
You can love me most by letting Hands touch hands, and souls touch souls.
You can love me most by Sharing your *simchas* [goodness]
And Multiplying your *mitzvot* [acts of kindness].
You can love me most by Letting me live in your eyes And not on your mind.
And when you say Kaddish for me,
Remember what our Torah teaches,
Love doesn't die. People do.
So when all that's left of me is love
Give me away.

Acheinu: Our Brothers

A common prayer sung in situations where a fellow Jew is in danger, such as those who live under the ongoing barrage of rockets from terrorists, reflects our feeling of peoplehood and unity. We encourage you to teach it to your community/participants.

Acheinu kol beit yisrael, han'nutunim b'tzara uvashivyah, haomdim bein bayam uvein bayabasha. Hamakom Y'racheim Aleihem v'yotziem mitzra lirvacha um'afaila l'orah umishiabud lig'ulah, hashta ba'agala uvizman kariv. V'nomar: Amen

אחינו כל בית ישראל, הנתונים בצרה ובשביה, העומדים בין בים ובין ביבשה, המקום ירחם עליהם, ויוציאם מצרה לרחוקה, ומאפלה לאורה, ומשעבוד לגאולה, השתא בעגלא ובזמן קריב.

As for our brothers, the whole house of Israel, who are given over to trouble or captivity, whether they abide on the sea or on the dry land: May the All-present have mercy upon them, and bring them forth from distress to comfort, from darkness to light, and from subjection to redemption, now speedily and at a near time; and let us say, Amen.

Additional Readings**Because they were Jews: Explaining the outpouring of anguish after the death of three Israeli teenagers**

BY [DANIEL GORDIS](#) NEW YORK DAILY NEWS Wednesday, July 2, 2014, 12:05 PM

To observers across the world, Israelis' reaction to the abduction and murder of three teenagers may seem a bit overwrought. Of course, the deaths of any three children, anywhere, is horrific. And yes, a tightly knit country like Israel will invariably respond with greater emotion than might citizens of other countries.

But still, how does one explain the presence of thousands of weeping people at the funeral, most of whom did not know the families? Why did Israelis across this country light hundreds of candles on sidewalks, hold each other and cry softly? Why were Jews across the world, in France and in Australia, in the U.S. and in South America, so mesmerized for three weeks as thousands upon thousands of Israeli soldiers searched for them? Sad as it undoubtedly is, many people might understandably ask, "What am I missing here?"

It's a fair question, with a tragically simple answer. What has Israelis so shaken is the simple fact that the three boys were hunted, kidnapped and murdered simply because they were Jews. They were not soldiers. They had not strayed into Arab villages. They were but the latest victims in a long, painful history of millions who preceded them — killed because they were Jews.

Had they been Druze Israelis, they would not have been touched. Had they been Muslim Israelis, they would not have been kidnapped. Had they been Christian Israelis, they would not have been shot. A millennium after the Crusades, and almost three quarters of a century after the Holocaust, Jews are still dying simply because they are Jews. The quiet, dignified weeping throughout Israel is a response to our renewed awareness that this horror is simply never going to end.

We didn't always believe that. This would not happen anymore, Jews once told themselves, once we had a state. A century ago, when political Zionism was relatively young, some actually believed that if only the Jews had a country of their own, Jews would be seen as "normal," and anti-Semitism would end. And even if hatred of the Jew didn't end, we believed, we would at least be able to protect ourselves. "Give us a state," Jews said to one another, "and we will stop dying just because we are Jews."

But matters have not worked out that way. As Israeli author Amos Oz has noted, when his father grew up in Europe, the walls were covered with graffiti that said, “‘Yids, go back to Palestine.’ So we came back to Palestine, and now the world shouts at us, ‘Yids, get out of Palestine.’”

Why the outpouring of grief? Because once again, we are reminded — the hatred follows us wherever we go, and Jewish children will continue to die, even in their homeland, simply because they are Jews.

And the agony is overflowing because of our impotence. We have a powerful army and a sophisticated security apparatus, but we simply cannot keep all our kids safe. Every now and then, the evil arrayed against us will succeed, and when it does, our children die. Pure, unmitigated evil really does exist. It is so persistent and so ineradicable that at times, all we can do is shed tears.

Yes, we can assassinate Hamas’ leaders. We can bomb Gaza. We can infiltrate the terror cells on the West Bank. But it will make no substantive difference. We cannot put a stop to this. The evil will persist. So we weep, in agony and in frustration.

Yet let no one confuse grief with weakness, or emotion with fragility. Israelis have no intention of giving up. Unwittingly, the murderers unleashed not only great sadness, but a deep resilience as well. There was grief at the funerals, but also resolve.

We did not come home and build this state from scratch simply to accept defeat. Yes, we know that we are vulnerable, even in this little homeland of ours; but we are not nearly as vulnerable as we would be without it. So we will not budge.

There was a moment during the funerals when the tears that we had struggled to suppress finally flowed. It was when one of the mothers, eulogizing her murdered son, evoked our grief but also our hope, Israel’s anguish but also its determination, and expressed better than any of us could have, the reason we’ll always be here.

“Rest in peace, my child,” she said, “we will learn to sing again without you.”

Prudent vengeance by Haim Shine

The State of Israel was draped in mourning and grief at the site of three bright and innocent young men laid to eternal rest in the land of our forefathers. The land in which they were born, that they loved, and on whose altar of resurrection they gave their lives.

The nation was unified in prayer and in hope around the families of the slain. Men and women shed tears upon hearing the news that we so wanted to avoid. The tragic news finally caught us. Bitter and cruel enemies rose against them to end their lives; it was unreasonable to expect a hint of mercy. In the Middle East where we live, we have been allotted blood, sweat and tears for 120 years already. The desert beasts, scouring the landscape, try crushing the happiness in our lives into a powder of agony and sorrow. We will never give them this gift. The nation of Israel lives and is prepared to pay the price of liberty for as long as it takes. We have left our exile, forever.

Jews were killed in hateful crimes throughout the span of our exile. Following the massacre of Jews during the Crusades the following verse was added to our prayers: "Declare among the nations His doings. ... For He who avenges blood has remembered them; He has not forgotten the cry of the humble. ... God will never forget the needy; the hope of the poor will never perish" (Psalms 9:12-19). In the days of our exile, only God was able to realize our right to vengeance.

Since May 14, 1948, the Jews have been able to avenge themselves. The Jews have a kingdom and they have iron and they no longer answer to a feudal master. The essence of liberty and freedom, among other things, is the ability to hold a weapon, deter evil-wishers and punish those who attack you. The right to vengeance does not fall on the individual, but on the elected government that must make the appropriate and required decisions in light of the heinous murder of the three teenage boys.

Any sensible person understands that the State of Israel should respond forcefully for the harm to its citizens. The right to live in security is the foundation of the social covenant in democratic countries. Elected leadership must spare no effort to ensure the safety of its citizens, whether on the country's roads and in the squares, or whether for citizens who for years now have lived under the horrible yoke of rocket fire from Gaza.

The revenge instinct is a fundamental human construct. As early as the book of Genesis, Simeon and Levi embarked on a campaign of revenge against Shechem, who had defiled their sister Dinah. God is often referred to as a "vengeful God" in the scriptures. With that, it is important to internalize that the desire for vengeance is often inadvisable and deceptive. The leadership's job in times such as these is to channel its energies and the public's expectations into an appropriate response, one that will be based on a wide and

complex range of considerations, without succumbing to tempers and without making hasty and irresponsible decisions.

In recent hours, we have heard numerous calls by politicians for revenge, which express a poor grasp of the complexities tied to the required decisions. A politician sees his constituency, a statesman is supposed to see what is best for the country and the wider implications of a particular response.

Comprehensive collective punishment serves the goals of the terrorists. After all, they want more and more Palestinians to be bitter and join the cycle of violence. It is incumbent upon us to identify the leaders, the inciters and the perpetrators and focus on hitting them. The state of Israel needs to build relentlessly in Judea and Samaria, which stems from our moral and historic rights. Construction, however, should never be seen as a punitive measure.

Most importantly, the response must be able to unify most of the public behind it, because ultimately the Israel Defense Forces' strength is derived from the unity of the Israeli people.

How do you read "r-e-v-e-n-g-e"? Chana Rosenfelder

At the end of the day, when a Jew says, "We want revenge," what he means is, "We want justice." We want this evil kidnapping to be the last attack on Jews for the "crime" of being Jews. We want the army, the Justice Ministry and the police to use every legal means to remove the threat of kidnappings, of suicide bombers, of girls pulling out butcher knives on the light rail or at the Western Wall, or at the doctors treating them in Israeli ambulances, of boulders being dropped from the Temple Mount onto the Jews praying below, of bricks being thrown from pickup trucks through the windshield of passing Jewish cars.

When we say, "We want revenge," we are saying that we want the Knesset to make it illegal to show any form of support for terror -- we want anyone, including MKs, who show support for anti-Jewish terror to be stripped of their citizenship and sent to live in the independent, democratic Islamic state of Syria. We want our government to stop handing money to an Arab leadership that rewards Arabs who kill and maim Israelis. We want the government to close down the Arab media that show anti-Jewish cartoons, to close down the "day camps" in which Arab children are trained to use weapons to kill Jews. And yes, our soldiers are asking for permission to drain the swamps of terror, empty their nests, and even get rid of some of the enemy soldiers. They are asking for permission to fight back in a war that the other side has been fighting for decades.

