Meir

Words to Share

I’d like to share some words at the end of these four days, which affected me greatly. During these four days, we experienced with great intensity the moral costs of the continuation of the present reality and conflict. We explored in depth the heavy moral costs of controlling another people, of the occupation. We came to understand that the way we act in the context of 'conflict management' may meet the legal tests of Israeli law and sometimes even the tests of international law. It may be that evicting a family from their home in Sheikh Jarrah or Silwan will stand the legal test, but this does not in any way reduce the moral burden and injustice involved in these actions.

There is an issue that we hardly raised this week, but I feel the need to mention. From personal experience, I am well aware of the moral aspects of the security operations required to protect the freedom of movement and the lives of Israelis traveling to and from their homes in Judea and Samaria. So that you can understand the complexity of my situation, you should know this includes two of my beloved children and seven of my grandchildren who live in Efrat, my sister who lives in Beit-El Bet, my brother in Ma'ale Adumim, and my niece who moved to the Kfar Hateimanim neighborhood in the Silwan about a month ago. My niece is strongly motivated by the ideological significance of the move. I pray that everyone, they and the members of their communities, will arrive home safely, while also being aware of the moral price involved in ensuring their safety.

As someone who is rooted in the web of meaning of the Jewish tradition, allow me to look at what we have experienced through fundamental categories of this tradition. First, I did not know how painful it would be for me to hear Sam's remarks on social justice as a central element in Judaism. Sam attacked me in my weakest place. I felt like I was suffocating as he spoke about it, and I admit there were tears in my eyes. If I were to respond to him, I would use the words that Rabbi Yehuda Halevi attributed to the Jewish sage in his book *Kuzari*: "You found a disgraceful place."

In Judaism, there are commandments (*mitzvot*) of obligations and commandments of prohibitions. Naturally, all our tours and conversations this week filled my mind with prohibitions. Here is a partial list:

* Do not evict people from their homes
* Do not deprive people of the fabric of their lives
* Do not destroy
* Do not expropriate
* Do no injustice in the courts of law
* Do not shame or humiliate
* Do not deceive strangers
* Do not beat or abuse
* Do not discriminate
* Do no evil

I could go on and on. You are welcome to complete the list.

Is it possible to control another nation, maintain an occupation, and obey these prohibitions? I suggest everyone think about their answer to this question.

As we have come to the end of our program, and given that we are not necessarily at the forefront of daily friction with the Palestinians, I feel that we also need a positive commandment that we can take home with us. Although I wrote these words in the early morning, in some ways this is the same question that Leah posed at the opening meeting this morning and to which Shirley, Elkana and Naomi referred.

I thought of two commandments of obligations that I would like to offer.

The first is the commandment to remember.

In Judaism, it is a commandment to remember. We are commanded to remember the act of Creation through the Sabbath. We are commanded to remember the Exodus. Through the commandments of wearing tzitzit and affixing a mezuzah to our doorposts, we are obligated to remember all the other commandments, and so on.

A word on memory: memory is a central anchor in tradition. Some might say that all of Jewish tradition extends from a remembrance of Day One to a vision of the final day, but that is for a different lesson.

What is this commandment of remembrance that I wish to offer?

I would like to remember Abu Ibrahim from Khallet Sakariya, Zohair from Silwan, the older couple from Sheikh Jarrah (sorry I do not remember their names), Mazen from the Dahisha refugee camp, Lama from Durah, Sam from Ramallah and yes, even Mahmoud, even though his words were annoying sometimes, plus many others we met as well as those who have not.

I want to remember that every day that the conflict continues, is managed, or whatever we call it, every day, no matter what explanations we give ourselves, there such things, like these, that have truth in them. There will be excuses made out of ignorance, every day that we continue to commit injustices. It is worth reviewing Daniel Bartel's book *Living with the Conflict*, which describes the mechanisms that allow us to live a normal life during the conflict and even continue to see ourselves as moral people.

I would like to remember that every day that we do not work to end the occupation, the clock of morality is ticking, the ethical prices are piling up, and the reflection of our morality - the reality of life for the Palestinians - is becoming increasingly unbearable.

In Jewish tradition, memory is not just a matter of consciousness. Anyone who is familiar with the historian Chaim Yosef Yerushalmi's book *Zakhor* knows that memory is realized through action, by designing practices that help preserve it. He is right. Let us contradict the Prime Minister's statement about Israelis who get up in the morning and do not think about the conflict. Let's wake up every morning and take a few minutes to remember this experience we went through. Let's open our eyes every morning, climb out of our seemingly safe shell and be exposed for a while. I strongly identified with Naomi's remarks this morning. For quite a few years, I, too, have been exposed, in the context of the conflict. It is difficult to breathe. But each and every one of us can be exposed for a few minutes. Let's dedicate a few minutes each morning to the people we met here, to remembering and to observing. Each can do this in your own way, whether by reading Amira Hess with the morning coffee or in any other way that evokes memory.

This is the first commandment of what we can do – the mitzvah to remember.

The second commandment of obligation: act to end the conflict.

All the commandments of remembering in the Torah crate an infrastructure for other commandments that involve action. Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it. Wear tzitzit and affix a mezuzah on your doorpost so that you will remember to do all the commandments. Remember the Exodus from Egypt so that you will treat everyone -- stranger, resident, and citizen -- properly. Remember what Amalek did, so that one day we may wipe out his memory. How fortunate that our sages, almost two thousand years ago, removed the call for genocide from the Jewish system of commandments.

The commandment to remember in my proposal should also lead to action. Yes, Shirley, there are some of us who need the process, the transition time, the processing of the experience. But we are in a moral emergency, and must act. It is true, we do not always know what to do, or how to have an impact. I too, am someone who has been involved the commandment of remembering for years. Like Naomi, cannot avoid seeing the injustice, I also sometimes find myself feeling powerless, helpless, not knowing what can be done. But ignorance does not absolve us from the duty to act, each and every one according to his or her ability.

I would like to mention two verses: "Seek peace and pursue it" and "Ask for the peace of Jerusalem." The words "seek" and "ask" are not what I did this morning when I prayed to "Make peace upon us" or when I said the verse that I really like at the end of that blessing "and it will be good in your eyes to bless your people Israel with your peace." This is not the meaning of "Pursue peace" and "Ask for the peace of Jerusalem." The words "pursue" and "ask" in the Bible are a call to action.

I would like to adopt, as a second commandment, the commitment to act to end the conflict. "Seek peace and pursue it" and "Ask for the peace of Jerusalem."

A final word: for quite a few years now I have been immersed in studying issues related to the conflict issues, reviewing previous negotiations, talking to stakeholders and experienced individuals, participating in dialogue groups with Palestinians dealing with concrete issues on the table, hoping one day to sit around a table in a process to resolve the conflict. The more I researched, the more I looked, the more my faith grew, and this seminar added that. If we seek peace, we will find it.