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Israel Shakes Hands With the Devil

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Most Israelis are anxiously awaiting the release of Gilad Shalit, the young Israeli prisoner of war captured on June 25, 2006 by Hamas in a cross-border raid near the Kerem Shalom crossing (in Israel). Shalit has been held in Gaza as a bargaining chip for five years and for the Hamas leadership, it's finally pay day.

The group effectively ransomed Shalit for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails -- many of them with blood on their hands. For instance, three members of the Hamas cell who in 2005 abducted and murdered Sasson Nuriel -- Ali Mohammed Ali Qadi, Abdullah Nasser Arar and Said Ibrahim Shalaldeh -- are reportedly on the list of prisoners to be freed.

Israeli families who have suffered from the loss of their loved ones are suffering yet again. Arnold and Frimet Roth are begging the Israeli government not to release Ahlam Tamimi, the woman who aided and abetted the Sbaro suicide bomber who killed 15 people including their 15-year-old-daughter Malka.

But nothing is what it seems in the Middle East. Until Shalit is home with his family, a million more things can happen to derail his freedom -- a freedom which he desperately deserves and is long overdue.

Israel's attempt to negotiate his release has been torpedoed on several occasions including in 2008 when, it is believed, the Palestinian Authority lobbied Israel and the U.S. against the move. The PA believed the release of Palestinian prisoners due to Hamas' effort would further degrade popular support for the PA -- and therefore, their ability to negotiate with Israel.

[Al Jazeera reports](#) that on May 20, 2008 a PA delegation led by Hisham Abd el Razek met in Jerusalem with an Israeli delegation headed by Tzipi Livni. El Razek argued against negotiating with Hamas: "What will this bring you? It will strengthen Hamas and not Abu Mazen (Abbas). It will send a message that violence works. There are prisoners that have been sitting in prison for more than 20 years... Hamas will release them and not the peace process?"

Even the PA knows Israel has made a deal with the devil. But as Livni explained to the PA delegation in 2008, "We wanted to talk with Abu Mazen but he cannot release Gilad Shalit." As it turns out, on Aug. 25, 2008 Israel did release 198 Palestinian prisoners to boost the PA -- but Shalit was not freed in return. Perhaps it was Abbas's unpleasant rant at the UN last month that spurred Israel on to negotiate with Hamas.

Negotiate with someone calling for your own demise? If the devil visited you at night and asked you for your soul in return for the life of your child, would you sell your soul to him? You bet you would. Upholding the central Jewish tenet of mutual responsibility, Israel made the only humane choice it could. As one writer put it well from a Jewish perspective, "The mitzva of pidyon shvuim -- the obligation we have to ransom captives - - that was traditionally regarded by Jews as a priority. It reflects the humanity and concern for one another that has personified the Jewish people over years of persecution and isolation."

Even Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah realized this weakness and famously once said, "We have discovered how to hit the Jews where they are most vulnerable. The Jews love life, so that is what we shall take away from them. We are going to win because they love life and we love death."

We have to believe that Nasrallah is wrong. That all people prefer life over death. That no one is born to hate and through education and tolerance, humanity can be lifted to new heights.

Who can forget the over 2,000 innocent Israeli lives lost at the hands of Palestinian suicide bombers who indiscriminately killed Jews in pizzerias, in night clubs, in restaurants, in bus stations and during holiday celebrations. Who could forget the searing images burned into our brains of bodies of people who were on their way to work dangling from buses? And the injured who had ball bearings sprayed into their bodies and limbs blown off, bolts wedged into their head and psychological trauma. Who could forget the orphaned children and the parents who were left childless?

And what about the more than 8,000 rockets launched from Gaza by Hamas and other terrorist groups that have devastated communities and left lasting psychological scars like that of the child who continues to wet his bed at night or the elderly person whose blood pressure races every time the school bell next door rings out.

Many Israelis are asking themselves how they could release so many Palestinians who carried out or were involved in violent terrorist activities. Would they return with a

renewed vengeance? Will the release of one Israeli soldier result in future Israeli civilian and military casualties? Will more Israeli soldiers be kidnapped?

You bet. Ezzedeen Al Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Islamic Resistance Movement -- Hamas -- has already said on the organization's official website that "the Zionist soldier Gilad Shalit would not be the last...." And in another press release on the Hamas website, Nael al-Barghouthi stated, "After 30 years of captivity, we are just soldiers returning to their bases."

Historical evidence suggests that negotiating with terrorists will most certainly bring about more terrorism and less peace. Yet, Israelis have knowingly accepted this reality for the freedom of Gilad Shalit.

Why? Because there is always hope. Maybe everyone will simply agree that peace is always better than war. That tolerance is better than hate. As former Israeli prime minister Golda Meir once said, "Pessimism is a luxury that a Jew can never allow himself." Maybe the two sides can start a new chapter that leads to freedom for everyone from the bondage of hate and despair.

Let's be optimistic.