MIRACLE OVER MIGHT
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz

Shabbat Shalom and thank you so much for inviting me and my family to spend Shabbat with your congregation. Rabbi Bregman, thank you for sharing your bima and for allowing me, at least up to this point to just sit back and enjoy services a 'Jew in the Pew'. The service has been wonderful, Cantor your voice is inspiring.

Last week – I like most of you was glued to the TV and the internet watching with great concern the unfolding conflict in Gaza and Southern Israel.

The coverage at least in the states was horribly one sided and biased. It seemed on every station all I saw were images of helmet and flack vested reporters on roof tops in Gaza talking about the pounding the city was taking from the IDF and the human tragedy that was unfolding.

And it was tragic, the loss of innocent life on both sides left too many grieving parents and children. The Jewish imperative to see every human being as being created *b'tzelem elohim*, in the image of God is to be reminded that everyone has someone who loves them and will miss them when they're gone.

The difference of course, and it's a distinction that is no comfort to the victim's families on either side but is nonetheless important to make is that one side – Israel - was trying to minimize civilian casualties and the other side - Hamas - was trying to inflict them.

In Judaism we mourn the loss of every life, even when that person was a *rodef* a pursuer who is out to kill you. We pour out wine at seder for the Egyptian armies that drowned in the sea of reeds as the walls of water came crashing down behind us.

And yet – we are not pacifists.

Hanukkah: which our six and four year old boys will tell you starts in exactly 189 hours celebrates a military victory. In broad strokes it's a holiday about taking up arms to take back and defend the Temple and our right to the free exercise of Judaism. It was a war of no choice – *eyn brayrah* we say, a war of self-defense.

The rabbis ever mindful of public opinion and the Jewish penchant for excessiveness even back then emphasized the miracle of the oil rather than the military victory. They chose miracle over might because:

- They were wary of religious zealotry.
- Because its not good for the Jews a minority people to go around celebrating insurgent victories over ruling powers.

- The Talmud established post Hanukah that the only conflict that is truly sanctioned in a post biblical world is a war of self defense, *eyn brayrah* a war where you have no choice but to fight.

And this has been the standard by which the IDF has engaged in combat since the establishment of the state of Israel.

- Fight only when necessary
- Take every care to preserve human life and dignity

HOWEVER in the mixed up moral equivalencies of the Middle East Israel's acts of self-defense are seen as aggression and the terrorists that attack it are cast in the role of freedom fighters.

It's a horrible misrepresentation of the truth in the conflict in Gaza. And was everywhere on the news last week.

Then Anderson Cooper on CNN - no great friend of Israel held up this leaflet.
He reported incredulously – in flak vest and helmet that 24 hours ago the IDF started dropping these leaflets throughout Gaza. They were translated, this is what they said:

Read WHITE LEAFLET

"Important announcement for the residents of the Gaza Strip:

For your own safety, take responsibility for yourselves and avoid being present in the vicinity of Hamas operatives and facilities and those of other terror organizations that pose a risk to your safety. Hamas is once again dragging the region to violence and bloodshed.

The IDF is determined to defend the residents of the State of Israel. This announcement is valid until quiet is restored to the region. Israel Defense Forces Command."

Then Cooper held up another leaflet – this one YELLOW and explained that 12 hours ago the IDF dropped these leaflets on the neighborhood he was reporting from at that very moment. It read:

Read YELLOW LEAFLET

To the residents of the outskirts of Shati, Al-Atatra, Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun: for your safety, you are required to evacuate your residences immediately and move towards central Gaza city via Al-Falujah, Al-Udda and Salah A-din. In the central Gaza city, you are required to stay between the roads of Salah A-din from the west, Amar Al-Muchtar from the north, Al-Nasser from the east and Al-Quds St. from the south.

AND IT GAVE THEM A MAP for the exit route

Then an hour before the bombing was to begin text messages went to every cell phone in the targeted area that said get out the bomb is coming in an hour. There is a missile launcher in this courtyard of this building on this street.

Tragically, criminally Hamas responded to these text messages on Al Quds Radio in Gaza urging listeners to ignore the IDF warnings. Here is the transcript:

> *Hamas Interior Ministry Spokesperson: This is all part of the psychological warfare held by the Zionist enemy… So by using this way of communication, our public radio, I address all our Palestinian brothers by saying: Please do not listen to the orders noted on these text messages, their only purpose is spreading fear and panic within our people. Stay in your homes*

Then Israel dropped non-lethal percussion bombs on the rooftops of surrounding buildings. A practice they invented called Roof Knocking – designed to convince civilians that the bombs are coming get out. Because they know Hamas tells them otherwise.

Then at the appointed hour, in the appointed area with intended pinpoint accuracy they attempted to destroy the launcher or the munitions depot or the command and control facility located in a schoolyard, apartment building our hospital parking lot.

Who fights a war like this? Who tells the terrorists when and where they will be targeted and struck?

ISRAEL

Not because its more efficient, they could carpet bomb Gaza, the IDF has the technology. They could have sent in ground troops – they were on standby

But they didn't – why?

- Because their war was with the missiles and the terrorists not the people of Gaza.
- Because they are Jews and for the first time since the Maccabees of Hanukkah we have an army and when conflict is necessary, when we have to take up arms to defend our homeland and our people from thousands of rockets that rain down with only 15 seconds warning even then we try to fight like *menschen*.
- Because of this week's parsha: *Vayishlach Yaakov malachim* – "And Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to parlay with his estranged brother Esau. And hearing he was coming with an army, Jacob divided his camp and placed the women and children a safe distance AWAY.

This is the Torah of conflict. Try to protect human life on both sides. Limit collateral damage

I am proud to be a Jew for many reasons AND last week one more.

I am proud of this leaflet, and those text messages and those discerning commanders and those brave pilots. Not because of the destruction they brought on the terrorists, but because of the destruction they tried not to bring. The lives they tried to spare.

Next week is Hanukkah – tradition instructs us to place the menorah in the window of our home as an act of Jewish pride and perseverance; to show the world that we are still here. That in spite of those who designed to destroy us we survive, we thrive and Judaism endures.

This year it shines even more brightly because even when rockets rained down, even when we had no choice but to respond. When once again we had to take up arms, *Vayishlach Yaakov malachim,* we sent flyers and text messages and warning shots before bombs, we did everything in our power, everything possible, took strides no other army in the history of conflict has taken to preserve life on both sides.

- I'm proud of this menorah.
- I am proud of this leaflet.
- I am proud of our tradition.
- I am proud that for three thousand years and counting we continue to demonstrate the importance of the difference between MIGHT and MIRACLE. That even when you have no choice but to fight, you can still choose how.