Gilad Shalit Welcome

[DAVID] Shalom and Bruchim HaBaim I am David Schwartz, the President of Temple Sholom and I am joined by Rabbi Dan Moskovitz, our Senior Rabbi. We are honoured to host this event in our sanctuary and to partner with so many in the greater Vancouver Jewish community. Though the premise of tonight is for you Gilad to say Todah Rabbah – thank you to the Jews of Canada and Vancouver in particular for our steadfast support during your years in captivity, we are really all here to say thank you to you for your courage, your heroism and your faith in humanity – a faith that even the greatest darkness could not diminish.

[DAN] In two weeks Jews in synagogues throughout the world will read a Torah portion concerning Abraham's early journeys. The text recounts how invaders conquered the city of Sodom, taking Abraham's nephew

Lot as a captive, and the way Abraham raised an army to rescue him.

The story of Abraham saving Lot represents the earliest of a series of examples of the concept of *"pidyon shvuyim"* — redeeming the captives. From its initial depiction in Genesis, the admonition to redeem captives reappears in the books of Leviticus and Nehemiah, as well as in the Talmud, Shulhan Arukh and writings of Maimonides.

Maimonides wrote (Hilchot Matnot Aniyim 8:12): "The redeeming of captives takes precedence over the feeding and clothing of the poor. Indeed there is no religious duty more important than the redeeming of captives, for not only is the captive included in the generality of the hungry, the thirsty, and the naked, but his very life is in jeopardy."

Judaism brought to the world the idea that every person is created in the image of God and therefore bears inestimable and unassailable value.

Judaism also introduced the idea that there is a God who cares for all God's creatures; and that we are all called to partner with God in the mission of bettering the world we live in. Few causes are more precious than the preservation of human life in freedom and security.

We have grown so accustomed to coming up short in our efforts to save a life, redeem a captive, protect the vulnerable. Good news, cheerful homecomings are so rare. Thus tonight, for Judaism, for humanity and for this Vancouver Jewish community in particular we celebrate the victory of good over evil, life over death, a son coming home to his family, his country, his people.

And still at this of great joy, we must also remember Lt. Hanan Barak and Staff-Sgt. Pavel Slutzker, the two young men who were killed in the same cross-border raid from Gaza into Israel that resulted in the taking of Gilad. May their memories be for blessings. May we continue to honor them and all Hyalay Y'srael – all who serve in defense of Israel. Baruch Habah Gilad, welcome to Temple Sholom and welcome home!