

Dear haverim,

Alan Gross is free!!! I walked out of minyan this morning and was greeted by the first of many communications on my phone. The end of a horrible five- year ordeal for Alan and his extended family had arrived. What a relief! What a gift! We will never forget the meaning associated with the first day of Hannukah 2014/5775!

Our deepest sense of joy and support is extended to Judy, Bonnie, Neil, and all of the extended family as they begin the process of acknowledging this wonderful news, and welcoming Alan back into their/our extended family. We pray that Alan will regain his strength and return to good health, and with time, have the opportunity to visit us at Anshai Torah so we can welcome him home, appropriately.

Every morning of Hannukah we recite the Hallel service- the collection of Psalms expressing our appreciation for God's blessings. Among the many beautiful expressions is a phrase from Psalm 118:24, "Zeh Hayom asah Adonai nagilah v'nismicha vo- This is the day the Lord has made, let us exalt and rejoice on it!" Indeed, today is a day of tremendous rejoicing as we welcome Alan back home from the throes of imprisonment at the hands of the Castro regime.

This morning, as we lit the first candle at minyan (without blessings) we were compelled to remember the journey of our Jewish people through history. Whether glancing at Titus' Arch of Triumph in Rome with its stolen hannukiah or standing before the impressive hannukiah on the grounds of the Knesset building in Jerusalem the hannukiah has been a symbol of inspiration for our people throughout history. How more appropriate could it be that Alan was released on the first day of Hannukah, a day we regard with special significance associated with the ongoing struggle for religious freedom.

Guided by the phrase taken from the Shabbat Hannukah Haftarah, the Prophet Zechariah proudly proclaimed, "Not by power and not by might but by the spirit of our God." We, Jewish people have learned that we will never again relinquish power- it is essential to our well-being. But, we are compelled to use that power in positive, refined ways- to complete God's unfinished work of creation.

The freeing of Alan on the first day of Hannukah reminds us we cannot afford to rest until every prisoner across this earth has been freed. We will not ease- up until the forces of evil in the world are eradicated and the last political and religious prisoner is set free.

As we anticipate lighting the second candle this evening, may we express our thanks to God for giving Alan the strength to endure five long treacherous years of imprisonment. May we, the Jewish people never lose sight of the message transmitted by those flickering candles- it is incumbent upon us to prepare our world for the Age of Redemption when we will learn to live in peace with one another, accepting our differences and acknowledging the gift of heterogeneity.

I look forward to welcoming everyone this evening to our Hannukah celebration at the shul as we dedicate our new hannukiah and express our joy and thankfulness for the deliverance of Alan Gross.

Hag Hannukah Sameah.