

Dear haverim,

One year ago, coinciding with the first day of Hanukkah 2104 Alan Gross was released from prison! After five years of detention, the Cuban authorities permitted Alan to return to the loving embrace of his family, including his extended family here at Anshai Torah.

Just a few weeks ago--November 20--Jonathon Pollard was released from his prison ordeal in the United States of America. After 30 years of excessive detention for spying on the United States, he was reunited with his dear family.

Today, we Americans have the power of redemption in our grasp when considering the plight of millions of Syrian refugees. It is a moment of courage for many; a moment of debilitating fear for others. We--nearly every member of the American Jewish population--are descendants of immigrants, often refugees from foreign lands who sought freedom from oppression across the globe.

Here, on the plains and in the great cities, on the shores and on mountains of the United States of America, we have created, arguably the greatest civic experiment the world has ever witnessed. The amalgamation of immigrants--all in pursuit of a better life--is the foundation upon which this extraordinary country continues to thrive.

As each of us peers into the flickering candles this evening it is incumbent upon each of us to respond to the question of the moment. Will we stand up in the face of fear and demonstrate the kind of pride, courage and faith that motivated the Macabbees to do what was right in their time? Will we have the courage to be bearers of our great tradition's finest expression of values, acknowledging that we have no right to close our country's borders to needy men, women and children who have passed the same rigorous tests that were overcome by many of our ancestors as they embarked on the holy ports of Ellis Island and Galveston, and a few other locations?

If our rituals are to remain meaningful they must continue to speak to us in every generation. The light of the hanukkiah has always been a symbol of faith, courage, and resolve for the Jewish people. May that message be as clear and resolute for us today as it has been for our people throughout history.

Shabbat Shalom, Rosh Hodesh Tov, and Hag Hanukkah Sameah,

Rabbi Stefan J Weinberg