

THE TIME IS NOW

BY PESACH LERNER

For me, the story began about 17 years ago. I sincerely hope and pray that it ends soon.

I joined the National Council of Young Israel's (NCYI) professional staff in October 1991. One of the first things I began doing was visiting the many Young Israel branches. During the first few years of my employment at NCYI, I visited almost all of the more than 150 Young Israel branches throughout the United States and Canada.

During that time, I heard about an event which was scheduled to take place at the Young Israel of Manhattan in the Lower East Side of New York City, which was to focus on sharing information and raising awareness about Jonathan Pollard. I thought that attending the event would be a great way to meet the members of the shul and to learn something about Jonathan Pollard, a name that I recognized but did not really know much about. I attended the event, where not only did I meet members of the shul, but I also heard a startling story about Jonathan Pollard, who spied for Israel and received a life sentence. The Pollard story bothered me, as I had too many questions and not enough answers. I started researching the Pollard story, asking questions, and inquiring into the activities of the Jewish community on his behalf.

When I reported my findings to the Executive Board of the National Council of Young Israel, they encouraged me to continue my research and to keep them informed. Young Israel has always prided itself on doing what was right, not necessarily what was politically popular. I continued my research, met with Jonathan Pollard in prison soon thereafter, and NCYI and the Pollard cause have been intertwined ever since.

My involvement in the Pollard case has taken me to the halls of the Knesset, to the offices of the Israel Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv, to the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, and to the waiting rooms and offices of current and former Israeli government ministers and officials. I have met with current and former members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives and other U.S. government officials. I have sought advice and direction from Torah sages throughout Israel and the United States. I have visited numerous leaders of both Jewish and non-Jewish national organizations.

I have met countless caring and concerned individuals from countries and cities throughout the world, in person, over the telephone, and via e-mail. I have been interviewed about the Pollard case for newspapers, magazines, television and radio. I have addressed synagogue and school groups, and spoken at numerous rallies.

My understanding of the Pollard case has deepened over the years, and my commitment to help a fellow Jew has only intensified. My personal relationship with Jonathan, to whom I have written, spoken to, and visited so many times, has been deeply enhanced.

Jonathan committed a crime, and he admits to that. He has expressed remorse for his activities, in writing and personally, to many American and Israeli government officials. Jonathan understands and accepts that he was to be punished for his crime. But as he begins his 24th year in the American federal correctional system, the time is overdue for Jonathan Pollard to go home, to Israel, to his family.

After completing 23 long and hard years in prison, it is time for our leaders to view this case with a sense of compassion and to make an honest and fair request to free Jonathan Pollard, at least, on humanitarian grounds. There are so many who agree that Jonathan's 23 years in prison are more than enough. James Woolsey, former director of the CIA, agrees. Senator Charles Schumer and former Mayor Rudy Giuliani of New York agree. Former Senator Dennis DeConcini of Arizona, who was Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee when Pollard was arrested, agrees. Members of the United States Senate and

House of Representatives agree. Vice President-Elect Joe Biden agrees. The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations agrees.

The Israeli Knesset and all living past and present Chief Rabbis of Israel agree. Elie Wiesel and Natan Sharansky, agree. Hundreds of Jewish and non-Jewish national organizations agree. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Jews (and non-Jews) in the USA and in Israel agree.

Now is the time for us to do all that we can to help ensure that President Bush also agrees that Jonathan Pollard's 23 years in prison are more than enough.

The National Council of Young Israel is working hard to obtain clemency for Jonathan Pollard, as are many other organizations and numerous individuals. We are requesting that President Bush release Jonathan for time already served - 23 years - which is considerably longer than many others who have been convicted of spying for not just allied nations, but enemy nations as well. We encourage everyone to call, write or fax the White House daily. We urge you to ask President Bush to let Jonathan Pollard go.

This past week, I accompanied Rabbi Yonah Metzger, Chief Rabbi of Israel, and Shlomo Mostofsky, the President of the National Council of Young Israel, to Butner, North Carolina, to visit Jonathan in prison. We spent several intense hours together. We discussed his case, the situation in Israel, and the upcoming holiday of Chanukah. We experienced Jonathan's unbelievable Emunah, his faith in G-d, and his daily sacrifices to keep kosher and do Mitzvos. We experienced his love for the Jewish people and for the land of Israel. We shared in his hope that he be reunited soon with his wife Esther in Jerusalem.

There are only a few weeks before the President completes his term in office. During these next few weeks, the White House will be considering the numerous requests for pardons and clemencies that they have received. Please call the White House daily at 202-456-1111 or 202-456-1414, Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm EST, and ask the President to commute Jonathan Pollard's prison sentence. Please add a daily prayer for Yehonatan ben Malka, Jonathan the son of Malka. It is time for Jonathan to go free, to go to Israel, to live the life still before him.

My involvement began 17 years ago, and my hope is that this chapter will soon come to a close. I pray that my next visit to Jonathan will take place in Jerusalem very soon.

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(For additional information about the Pollard case, please visit www.jonathanpollard.org. For more information about the current grass roots campaign, please visit www.freepollardnow.com.)

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