

The Terror in Our Hearts

Sid Schwartz

Being asked to offer some words of wisdom regarding America's 21st century "day of infamy" makes me appreciate Elie Wiesel's oft-repeated warning that silence is the most appropriate response to the Shoah.

Far more poignant than the millions of words shared in the electronic and print media analyzing every aspect of the act of terror and its consequences were the communal moments of silence in which I participated a few weeks ago. Several days after the attacks, the entire European community engaged in three minutes of silence in solidarity with America — one of the most moving images I have ever seen. I have been privileged to be part of this same custom in Israel on both Yom ha-Shoah and Yom ha-Zikaron.

The Israelis have practice with the act of mourning. As a rabbi I have tried to help people with good

intentions realize that they do not need to make small talk when they visit a house of *shiva*. Silent presence is the most profound form of support for the bereaved.

We live in a world that moves faster every day. Technology has condemned us to far fewer places and times of quiet. We are desperately in need of time to sit quietly, reflect, and listen to our hearts.

At the present time, all I can discern in my heart is terror. I pray that, with time, it will give way, once again, to hope.

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Understanding the Power of Words of War

Dawn Rose

"The evil ones have declared war on us and our way of life. They hate freedom and democracy. We're going to smoke 'em out of their caves." The White House's verbal portrait of the events of September 11 has been frightfully effective, resulting in a quick and positive response from Congress and the American people.

Judaism has long understood the potency of the spoken word. With words, we construct meaning; we make sense of the universe — from passive permission to active enablement.

Because the U. S. requires public support for what it is doing both here and in Afghanistan, any inquiry into the ethics of a global manhunt from a Jewish perspective must begin by understanding the impact of these words of war and the near-universal acclaim they have garnered.

Politics, even or especially the politics of war, is very much about selling images and ideas. A fundamental principle guides Jewish ethics in this area: *Lifnei ha-iver, lo titeyn mikshol* — "Put no stumbling block before the blind." (Leviticus 19:14) Interpreted as a sweeping prohibition against using the public's

ignorance against itself, this tenet forbids the use of misleading advertising or sales techniques that prey upon people's desires, fears, insecurities, and most significantly, lack of knowledge or information.

It is here that the Bush administration has been so bold — in the language with which it has sold this war. The first selling point is that it is in fact a war. Within the *weltanschauung* introduced with this word, it is logical and appropriate that: the full weight of the military be engaged; "peripheral" issues — social and economic — be tabled; and global alliances be demanded. With war there is always an enemy who must be evil even as we are good. War, however complicated, demands this simplicity, without which we cannot kill with impunity. More, this is a "new" war, the likes of which we have never seen before. Right away the message is that peacetime rules, of necessity, must be suspended. And, with the adjective "new" we learn that the rules developed through painful past history about human rights during wartime might not apply.

President Bush has declared that freedom and democracy are under attack by those who "hate our



way of life." The emotional associations those words elicit obfuscate the impossibly abstract nature of the assertion. Millions of Americans stand, flag in hand, never thinking to ask the most basic and obvious questions: Which freedoms? For whom? What about our way of life could possibly affect distant cultures and economies so adversely?

With these Presidential words — these simplified concepts of hatred — every American feels attacked. With these words, no one is offered appropriate information about the roots of the conflict or the nature of the struggle. Yet Americans are supporting this war, sending our sons and daughters, and promising billions of dollars in funds. Tirelessly, the Administration and the media inundate Americans with visual images that proclaim: to do less is to sully the muddy graves of the World Trade Center victims; to do less is to cowardly ignore this danger to our homeland.

Perhaps the most shameful line the Administration has generated is "this is not a war against the Afghan people." We know that civilian Afghans will bear the brunt of the war. We are patiently told to learn the difference between *intended* loss of civilian life (the WTC), and *unintended* (though anticipated) loss of civilian life (Afghanistan).

The Future Looks Bright

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population transfers, otherwise needed to quell terror. b) Reducing legal loopholes and using controlled force (but not torture) to procure needed information on imminent attacks from detained terrorists is acceptable. c) Responsible censorship and voluntary limits on the flow of information for security purposes should not cripple a free press/media or override the functioning of multiple (opposition) political parties. d) Avoid generic stereotyping of Arabs and acknowledge distinctions between Islamic followers while using legitimate profiling as one tool to prevent terrorist attacks.

The September 11 attacks ended the period when U.S. Jews could imagine that they would live in peace, safely with their children, while Israel twisted in the wind of terror and violent Intifada alone. Recognizing that danger is universal, the correct response is to intensify travel and social/educational links to Israel —

Certainly Judaism has long recognized distinctions between accidental and intentional injury and death. However, these distinctions apply to legal responsibility *after the fact*. *Before the act*, the Administration announced its decision to precede on a course that, of practical necessity, incurs 'unintended' loss of innocent life.

We have been told that we are "at war," and the implication is made that innocent lives are thus expendable — especially of those people who are not American, not Jewish or Christian, and not the family down the block. We must demand that President Bush call death, death — whether it occurs at home or abroad. We must educate ourselves against the inundating media spin. Only then do we have a chance to discover what our rock-bottom ethical questions in this crisis are and begin to address them appropriately.

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Words on Words

Next month *Sh'ma* inaugurates a new column — *Words on Words*. With simple words, God created the world. All words, however, are not so easily understood. Dr. Joel Hoffman will explore the origins and meanings of simple and complex words.

to share fate, comfort, and learn from each other.

Similarly, American Jews must explain why the need to form a coalition should not lead to pressuring Israel to make concessions without cessation of the Intifada/violence. Such a reward for terrorism would rebound to hurt America. It will take inner courage and identification with Jewish destiny for American Jews not to be tempted into silence or distance themselves from Israel when Bin Laden's false claims that America is being attacked because it is allied with Israel are voiced. Standing up will be the expression of the unity of Jewish people and its shared fate. Ironically, I believe that it might ultimately reopen a serious possibility of a negotiated peace for Israel.

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