

## Attack in Mumbai December 6, 2008

Many of us are still stinging after the well planned, well coordinated attack in Mumbai, India. We seek answers as we cope and try to understand the depth of hatred and what can propel people to carry out such terrible acts, especially when committed in the name of God.

For those of us who are serious about religion and who see faith as a means of drawing closer to God, an event like this shatters our basic assumptions about religion and God. To those of us think that religion is supposed to embrace and promote virtue, morality and selfless righteous acts, we question how religion can be so misused. To those of us who equate the religious path with love and compassion we must confront the uncomfortable truth that in the name of religion, there are those who seek to slaughter people who do not conform to their religious beliefs.

Jews have lived peacefully and have enjoyed good relations with their Muslim and Hindu neighbors for centuries. There are a number of legends explaining the roots of the Jewish community in India. It is believed that the Jewish presence in the region began about 2,000 years ago when, legend has it, a ship from ancient Israel escaping the persecution of King Antiochus crashed and the survivors came ashore. Some claim they are descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes from 722 BCE, while others date the origins to the time of the exiles from the Destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 C.E. Nearly 300 years ago, Jews from the Middle East and central Asia, Iraqi Jewish traders came to Mumbai as well. They were well received, which is why the targets in Mumbai were not random.

Coexistence and tolerance were targets of the murderers. The whole operation was well planned and coordinated. Months earlier some of the perpetrators had stayed in the Chabad House posing as Malaysian tourists so they would become familiar with the layout of the building. The terrorists had no interest in taking hostages to negotiate but sought to murder as many non Muslims as possible.

Not surprisingly many in the media, such as Christian Amnapour of CNN and others sought to downplay the true nature of what happened, saying that the terrorists were shooting indiscriminately. I reject this analysis, which de-emphasizes the nature of the attacks, typified by the BBC, which called the besieged Chabad House "an office building." The New York Times report on the last day of the siege said, "It is not known if the Jewish center was strategically chosen, or if it was an accidental hostage scene."

If their goal was only to exasperate the already existing tensions between India and Pakistan, to attack foreigners and to instill fear among them and because of their grievances over Kashmir, the question that still must be asked is how did the Chabad House fit into that plan? In a city of 18 million people, Jews number only 5,000. Given the depth of the enmity towards all infidels, it is curious that no Hindu Temple was the target of the violence. The targets and victims were carefully selected

Could it have anything to do with the uncomfortable realization that perhaps the goal of the radical Islamists is no different than that of the Nazis? Dennis Prager reminds us that just as Hitler diverted money, troops and resources that could have gone to fighting the Allies to send Jews to death camps because of his incessant irrational anti-Semitism, so too did these fascist Islamic terrorists pursue the same goal with similar narrowly focused determination.

How ironic that the very same week the murders in Mumbai were taking place, the United Nations General Assembly passed six more anti-Israel resolutions.

A priest from Nicaragua, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmannin denounced Israel last week saying, "that the world must unite against them, demanding an "end to this massive abuse of human rights" and isolating the offending nation as it once isolated South Africa: with a punishing "campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions."

This is no ordinary priest. In the 1980's he was Nicaragua's foreign minister. What is he doing today? Today he is the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and the speech gave was at the annual UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, an occasion devoted to lamenting the rebirth of Jewish sovereignty in the 20th century.

He did not condemn Saudi Arabia, where non Muslims are severely discriminated against. Nor did he speak out against discriminatory practices in Jordan, where Jews are barred from citizenship and where the sale of land to a Jew was for decades not only illegal, but punishable by death. He did not single out Iran, where homosexuality is a capital crime and 200 Iranian gays were executed last year. He ignored Sudan, where tens of thousands of African Christians have been abducted and sold into slavery by Arab militias backed by the Islamist regime in Khartoum. It was Israel that he spoke against.

We must rise up and call anti-Semitism what it is, and not allow it to somehow be excused as opposition to the policies of the government of Israel. Once again we find ourselves in the solitary position of being that lonely voice that tells the world that when Jews and Israelis are the first targets of hatred, they are never the last. This is not a Jewish problem. This kind of senseless hatred is a problem for the entire world.

Fortunately we are not alone. Thank God for the courage of Sandra Samuel, the nanny who risked her life to save the life of the 2 year old child of Chabad rabbi Gavriel and Rivka Holtzberg. Her only regret is that she did not do more to save the rabbi and his wife. Author Naomi Ragen wrote that the child will most likely be raised by family members who will attempt to counter the horror with a cocoon of warmth and love. And she realized that in twenty years, he might be walking down the street as a bearded young yeshiva bachur. Since she will not be able to know who he is, she has decided she will look at every yeshiva student as if he was Moishe, carrying on the work of his parents.

Sherri Mandel whose 13-year-old son Koby was murdered by terrorists in 2001 wrote a book called, "The Blessing of A Broken Heart", about how she coped with her loss.

With her husband Seth she created the Koby Mandell Foundation which offers healing programs for families struck by terror. In an article she wrote for the Jerusalem Post she offered advice to the victims of the terrorist attacks.

"To the families of those killed in the Mumbai terrorist attacks, It will take many years before you accept that you are the person whom tragedy has visited... This tragedy will affect you for the rest of your life. You will long for the person who was murdered. You will long for the person you used to be.

People will ask you: Do you hate the killers. And when you answer no, they will think that something is wrong with you.

But hate is not something you have the energy for; you are too sad to hate. Besides you are a person who loves. To turn to hate would make you like the killers, and you refuse to let that happen to you. You will never have the happiness that you had, something will always be missing. The person you loved, as well as your belief that life was good.

Now you have experienced true evil. Your loved one was deliberately targeted. That evil does not go away from your eyes. When you close them, you see your loved one in his last minutes - you see yourself the moment you got the news.

When people tell you to be strong, don't feel that you have to be. If you don't allow yourself to mourn, you will never again be happy. Mourning is the active process of transforming grief... You will find gifts in your pain, new people, faith, things you didn't know. Embrace whatever blessings come to you.

People will be around you at first, but then eventually it's you and your family and your grief. Let yourself cry now; otherwise you will be crying in the years to come. Don't let others tell you that your loved ones died for nothing. They died because they were innocent victims of radical Islamic hatred. They died because radical Islam is vicious and evil and worships destruction and stands against everything you hold dear.

When you refuse to be bowed by hatred and savagery, you honor your loved one by sanctifying life. For this reason it is paramount that you seek justice - but do not seek revenge. Revenge embitters you while justice elevates you. Justice is motivated by love; revenge is motivated by hatred. Revenge is the *modus operandi* of the terrorists, and their hatred for others will in the end be defeated.

Keep speaking about the evil that was perpetrated against your loved one. Don't allow the media or others to call the murderers militants or freedom fighters. Insist that your loved one's murder be remembered."

Last week I suggested that the reaction to the torture-murders of the Chabad rabbi and his wife and the killing of 180 others places an extra responsibility upon us to respond to the horror with acts of kindness, with *mitzvot* and with determination not to give in to evil, not to let it prevail. The truth is evil hates goodness. Even more, it is repulsed by it. That is why the terrorists choose their targets as they did. Let us choose our targets and

actions as well. The Chabad web site has asked people to take on a mitzvah as a response, and this is an appropriate antidote. Israel's first chief rabbi, the beloved Rav Kook said, "If you find yourself surrounded by darkness, try to the best of your abilities to create light."

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