

Massacre in a Synagogue in Jerusalem

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On Shabbat when I reflect on the previous week, I sometimes wonder and think -- How has our world changed, and what do we know that we did not know a week ago? Our world is different this Shabbat because, among other things, our family, the family of the Jewish people lost four tzadikim, four righteous precious lives. Four families as well as one Druze family in Israel have lost their fathers.

Once again we have seen the depths of the depravity, banality and brutality that humans driven by hatred are capable of committing. A synagogue filled with men who came to recite morning prayers, who would have begun with the same words we said as we began our prayers this morning, "*Mah tovu ohelecha Yaakov, mishkentocha Yisrael*, How goodly are your tents (i.e., synagogues) O Jacob, your dwelling places Israel" were butchered, hacked, and shot by two Arab Muslims armed with axes, meat cleavers and guns and shouting "Allah Akbar" as they sought to murder any Jew in their sight, and as many as they could.

This was more than a terrorist act. An act of Islamic Jihad, the graphic pictures of blood stained prayer shawls and prayer books looks more like a pogrom.

But let us be clear on what it is not.

It is not a response to this or that action taken by the government of Israel. Such butchery should never be justified or dignified or excused as prompted by grievances about stalled peace talks, or as part of some grand political or economic issues.

Nor is it part of a "cycle of violence" which equates this act with others and minimizes its uniqueness. It is a singularly horrific act which, if anything is part of a larger, ongoing decades-long campaign against Jews and Jewish presence in the land of Israel.

If it is to be linked to anything, it should be linked to the fundamental cause which motivates men to go into a synagogue to commit murder, which is the same force that propels Arabs to use cars, tractors and other vehicles to commit homicide by slamming into crowded buses, or other similar acts of violence against Jews.

It is the result of a value system which embraces and celebrates death, and shows those values for all the world to see by naming schools after suicide bombers and passing out candy to celebrate acts of murder. It is the result of a society which views as heroes and martyrs those who murder Jews. It is the product of a people whose mothers proudly say when a child is killed for these acts, that she gets *nachas* from her *kinder* (A Yiddish expression for "joy from her children") for what they have done – that as well as a generous stipend and pension from the Palestinian Authority.

It is the result of a system that feeds their people a steady diet of hatred and incitement in their schools, mosques, homes, and media and tells them that Jews are descendants of pigs and monkeys. It is fueled by a rumor hungry society that devours lies and conspiracy theories as dangerous and on a par with the accusations of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and Nazi propaganda.

Nineteen times in a span of 72 hours Palestinian television broadcast the messages of two-faced Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas calling for Arabs to do whatever it took, by all means necessary to prevent Jews from visiting and thereby "contaminating" the Temple Mount.

It is the result of a world which shows how distorted its values are by rushing to condemn Israel for building homes while ignoring that Palestinians do nothing to improve the lots of their citizens.

It is the result of all this, and a world sadly indifferent to the killing of Jews. In the words of Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations Ron Prosor last month, when imploring the UN to pay attention to Abbas' campaign to vilify Israel, encouraged hundreds of Arabs to riot in Jerusalem, including a Palestinian terrorist deliberately driving a car into a crowd at a Jerusalem light rail station killing two people, including a three-month-old baby girl, "It says a great deal that the international community is outraged when Jews build homes in Jerusalem, but doesn't say a word when Jews are murdered for living in Jerusalem. The hypocrisy is appalling."

It is the product of a world and a media which simplistically looks at the conflict and falls for the Palestinian lies and naively accepts their storyline while deliberately not telling of the humanity and decency of Israel and of the restraint it displays in its struggle each and every day against those intent upon its destruction.

Ironically, the attack could occur precisely because the unfounded allegations that Israel practices apartheid are not true. Jerusalem is open and seamless, without any walls or checkpoints separating the Arab and Jewish neighborhoods. So the truth is – if it were an apartheid state, not something I or any Israeli official advocates, but the truth is that were that the case, it might not have been able to occur.

And did anyone hear that earlier this week Egypt, concerned about the ability of Hamas to build tunnels longer than they expected once again for the second time, forcibly removed, evicted and evacuated thousands of Palestinians from their homes along the border. Was there a word of condemnation anywhere? Can you imagine the response and demonstrations had Israel done such a thing?

The inane comment made by some Jews and others – that we have our extremists, and they have theirs is so lame and inaccurate, as to almost not be deserving of a response. But it is harmful and therefore must be answered. There are critical differences. No one had to tell Israel's Prime Minister to publicly condemn the murder of a Palestinian child earlier this summer by Israeli hooligans. No outside force had to demand that the perpetrators be arrested. I was in Israel at the time, and can testify to the universal disgust and condemnation by all of Israeli society. There is a significant difference between acts which are aberrations and roundly condemned and those which are celebrated and almost the norm. A society should be judged not by its extremist elements, but by the way it reacts to those on the fringe.

How dare anyone fault Israel or its leaders or accuse them of contributing to the problem. After the mayor of Ashkelon said he would prevent Arabs from working in his city, he was roundly condemned by Israelis. PM Netanyahu unequivocally and publicly said: "There's no place for discrimination against Israeli Arabs. We mustn't generalize about an entire population because of a small minority of violent and belligerent [individuals]." No one had to apply pressure to the Prime Minister of Israel to express these thoughts.

If anything I am constantly amazed by the restraint and the decency of Israel and Israelis in light of these attacks and the isolation.

In contrast, Abbas issued a tepid statement after the massacre in the synagogue, and only after US Secretary of State John Kerry exerted considerable pressure on him and had to make threats about cutting off economic aid did he do so. His true feelings were revealed by his Fatah associates who called the operation heroic and gleefully posted photos on Facebook of the massacre. He was more closely

aligned to the sympathies reflected by the Jordanian Parliament which rose and held a moment of silence and recited prayers – not for the four rabbis and Druze soldier, but for the two Arab killers.

His true feelings are revealed in a letter to the family of Mu'taz Hijazi, the Palestinian suspected of attempting, on October 29, to assassinate Yehuda Glick, a proponent of Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount. Palestinian President Abbas wrote, "Hijazi died as a martyr while he was defending the rights of our people and our holy places."

After the letter, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said, "As we attempt to calm down the situation, [Abbas] sends condolences over the death of a man who attempted a vile murder. It is time for the international community to condemn these acts."

And let us not overlook the role of those who are enablers of such violence, for it is also the result of those who aid, abet, enable and thereby encourage Palestinian acts of violence by misplaced expressions of sympathy and support. This includes Jews who put the emphasis on the wrong syllable, as well as an administration that calls for an end to the cycle of violence without recognizing the difference, thereby displaying that they truly do not understand the nature of the conflict, and which side glorifies violence and who are the ones defending themselves against such gruesome assaults on its citizens.

While it is true that you make peace with your enemies, your enemies have to be willing to make peace with you. This means being willing to accept your existence and forgoing efforts to eradicate you. This is not expecting too much as a prerequisite for peace.

I don't recall any calls after the beheading of westerners by Isis that we should return to the negotiating table with these savage barbarians. I don't recall hearing any calls for restraint. It would have been insulting and demeaning to those who had just been killed and their families. And yet, after even the anti-Semitic President of Turkey condemned the attacks, that is what our president called for in his condolence statement.

Unfortunately a passage we studied in our Talmud class this week is all too true. "Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai says, 'The Holy One Blessed be He gave Israel three precious gifts, all of which were given only by means of suffering: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the World to Come.'"

But we also know that the rabbinic comments from the midrash on this week's Torah reading, explain the verse, "the voice is the voice of Jacob and the hand is the hand of Esau" to mean that while wicked Esau wields power with the physical force of his hands, he can only effect those he can actually reach. Jacob's power, however, is in his words and ideas, which can extend and reach anywhere on earth, and which live on throughout the ages. Therefore, so long as the voice of Jacob is heard in prayer and study, the hands of Esau are powerless against him. Let us resolve to honor and strengthen the voice of Jacob, in prayer, study, and by advocating for the people of Israel against the assaults against it.

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