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Israeli Terrorism:
Reasons but no excuses

Despite the historic aversion of Jews and Judaism to violence and war, the worldwide Jewish community was shocked recently by the disclosure that scores of our people were actively engaged in terrorizing Arabs to stimulate their exodus from Israel. The shock came during that season of the year when three national observances were the focus of everyone's attention: The day for remembrance of the Holocaust, the day for the remembrance of the casualties of Israel's wars and the day commemorating Israel's declaration of independence.

No Jew could have failed to ask himself at the time. "Have we learned from our enemies to behave as they did and still do? Are we too developing a casual disregard for the sanctity of life? Are we incapable of prolonged commitment to the 'righteous use of weaponry' which once was the ideal of Israel's army? Can we still see ourselves as a beacon of light, morality and justice for all the nations?"

Perhaps the press exaggerated the number of those engaged in the outrageous planning of unadulterated murder. However, the fact that even a few were involved is enough to depress us. And we must give the matter our most careful consideration.

The reaction of some Israelis is that we ought to understand that in every society, and in every conflict, there will be some whose behavior will be criminal, anti-social, even self-destructive. And Jewish society is like all others: It too has its lunatic fringe. Yet in the past Jews always had a very low rate of crime, and what crime there was, was rarely violent crime. Therefore, one cannot help asking what there is in the modern world that caused this painfully horrifying development.

True, religious zeal was a factor. When a person becomes so committed to one ideal that he forgets that there are others

equally compelling, he is prone to act fanatically for his own goals and flout others, even when those others are more sacred. The Jewish view of the sanctity of life is far greater than the sanctity of land. Yet somehow the misguided youths were ready to sacrifice the more important for the less important.

And who is to blame? Unfortunately, with all our love for Torah education, and all our concern for the establishment and growth of yeshivot, we failed to impart in them what is more important: *Menschlichkeit*. And that is why there is violence between different Hassidic groups, bitter incriminations and recriminations between yeshiva heads, an unprecedented splinterization of the religious parties in Israel so that instead of two or three party lists, they may have five in the next elections.

In the United States there is more concern as to how we can fault each other rather than respect each other, exacerbating the existing hostility among Jews and making for more divisiveness.

Well do I remember the words of the peerless Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik many years ago with regard to what then was, and in many ways still is, the best Zionist youth movement in the world, the Bnai Akiva movement. He expressed concern even as he admired the movement's leaders and members.

His concern was that too much preoccupation with the notion of land, rather than Torah, could produce a new idolatry. I dismissed his words at that time in the belief that such a perversion could not come to pass. Alas, it did in the minds of some of the youths. They may be few, but few are too many.

And in other movements the perversion can be of another kind, such as the love of Torah replacing the love of man or the love of the rebbe replacing the love of Jews. Many of us simply lose our sense of proportion when we seize upon one Torah ideal and ignore the others. And in our religious education we have stressed ritual and not morality, rigid customs and not personal integrity.

But many secularists have been at fault too. They may rejoice that the Orthodox have produced many monstrously misguided fanatics. However, they cannot pretend that they bear no part of the guilt.

First, they did so much to alienate most of Israel's youth from the Jewish tradition that, as a reaction those youths committed

to tradition swung to the opposite pole. As a matter of fact, I often ask myself why the intelligentsia among Israel's secularists have produced many who justly and righteously plead for more compassion for the Arabs but thus far have not produced a spokesman who pleads for the love of religious Jews whose outlook on Judaism is different from theirs? There was one such man - Ephraim Kishon. The secularist intelligentsia made him so uncomfortable in Israel that he moved out and settled in Europe.

Religious Jewry can proudly point to Rav Kook and a host of disciples who always pleaded for the love of all Jews, even those who were sinful. He and they have no counterparts in the secularist community.

Yet the picture would not be complete if, in addition to faulting religionists and secularists for the emergence of Jewish terrorists, we did not take account of the contribution of the Arab world to our shame. For 36 years Jews have patiently waited for them to produce leaders who will try to end hostilities and achieve coexistence for the greater happiness and security of all. But there is virtually no such leader on the horizon, and the patience of some Jews simply ran out.

I smile when some American Jews fault Israeli Jews for not finding Arabs with whom they can engage in dialogue to achieve peace. Are American Jews any more successful in the opening of meaningful dialogue with blacks in the United States to avoid what may yet become bloody confrontations?

The reasonable blacks are terrorized into silence. That happens to reasonable Arabs as well. In the United States the militant blacks run the show; so also the militant Arabs are in control in Israel.

As a matter of fact, in both countries Arab oil funds are financing obstacles to mutual understanding. In such a situation, resorting to terror, alas, appears to many a youth as the only road. Yet dissuade them we must. Little or no good can ever come from evil.