

ON MY MOTHER'S 30TH BIRTHDAY, WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD

When I was four years old my government, on my mother's 30 birthday, dropped atomic bombs on two cities and murdered between a hundred thousand and a quarter of a million people. Thousands upon thousand of survivors were left in agony, severely burned and with radiation sickness. Before that the Allies had already committed a lesser act of retribution against the Axis (of Evil) in the famous "firebombing" of Dresden, Germany where reportedly fifty thousand people died in an old city reduced to rubble. Victory ruled the day, yet I remember none of it, the bombs, the agonies or the victory--nor the murders of my Jewish kin when I was a toddler.

But my earliest recollections of life are associated with fear and pain. At five, my tricycle went out of control twice on steep hills in New York and I crashed face first, once breaking a tooth. Those events I remember. A year or three later my mother took me to the movie theater to see the Legend of Sleepy Hollow, an early animated film. The goblin galloping down the road roaring and pulling off his own head, throwing it, a pumpkin, struck terror into my bones; just a silly animated movie, before Hollywood really learned how to do "terror". I do not remember Hiroshima (my mother's birthday) or holocaust or anti-Semitic violence in the U.S. (as depicted in Arthur Miller's novel turned to a movie last year), nor talk of all this, which must have reverberated in my family household. I only remember the terror of the Legend of Sleepy Hollow and that head torn off and thrown at me, the fear, and the pain of my teeth hitting the gravel.

Over the years I have sat through many films depicting the rise of fascism and World War II and the slaughter of Jews in Auschwitz and elsewhere, the Warsaw ghetto, including the 8 hour documentary Shoah. I see as much as I can about the Holocaust and I visited the Holocaust Museum in D.C. some years ago. Perhaps my interest in the subject is partly motivated by another experience I had one night as a child. I saw a movie on TV just before bed. As I remember, it showed a German machine gun emplacement mowing down a long columns of infantrymen as they rounded a bend on a path (it may have easily been World War I as World War II. I had no way of knowing). The viewer as a witness. The guys kept coming into our open view and falling, coming out, the shooting, and the falling, coming out unaware of what was in store. Life upon young life ended in a moment as the soldiers ran forward. It gripped me, I was terrified and could not sleep.

I have seen the various Ann Frank stories and the play two times. At the age of 39 I visited Treblinka extermination camp in Poland. My wife gave me Art Spiegelman's Maus for my 50th birthday. At 60 after the Trade Center Bombing, I read See Under: Love, David Grossman's attempt to come to terms with three identities in one--Israeli, Jewish and writer---at the end of that brutal 20th century. And now I am reading Michael Chabon's Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay. Stop. The reader will be told this: for now, I flee the center of this essay. May I have your authorization to step back?

In 2002 an ignorant, yet glib President of the United States declared the existence of an axis of evil that had to be rooted out around the world. His team "let slip" a document and some words

out to Congress and then the media suggesting that the U.S. was preparing to wage war preemptively against a vague list of countries and that nuclear weapons could be used as part of the aggression even against those who had no similar weapons. That could all have been disinformation, propaganda, but he also withdrew his nation from the International Kyoto Accord on reducing greenhouse emissions, from the International Criminal Court, undermined the role of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, causing her to refuse to stand for reappointment. He made clear the U.S. would abrogate the ABM and nuclear test ban treaties it had ratified, build a nuclear missile defense shield, and put nuclear weapons in outer space. He and his cronies then succeeded in removing the leaders of two key United Nations Commissions, who were not willing to cower to their every whim. Finally they declared rather explicitly that the United States would soon launch a war against the Government of Iraq, a nation whose infrastructure the U.S. and Britain had already degraded to the fullest extent possible by bombing, causing over a million civilian deaths.

And then, to put an exclamation point on these actions and to make certain that no one, absolutely no one on earth would mistake their intent to ignore any and all norms of human or governmental behavior they guaranteed by threats and force that the world could do nothing but watch helplessly as the Zionist Jewish State of Israel visited, in the broadest of daylight, a withering attack and massacre upon a nearly defenseless occupied Palestinian nation and people in the West Bank conquered territories on the Biblical Jordan River. To be sure that no one on earth was too self-deluded to understand them, George the son of Bush declared, after the third week of the devastation and seizure of thousands upon thousands of Palestinian men and youths that "Ariel Sharon is a man of peace."

From one commentator I gleaned that these recent events reflect a terrifying departure from a U.S. policy on the Middle East, itself terrifying, that had stood in place for at least 35 years. That policy, for lack of a simpler name has been called the policy of "no war, no peace", the building up of Israel's military forces to such a degree that Israel can stand in for the U.S. as an intimidator in any confrontation with the oil producing Arab countries. Israel's historic tension with the indigenous population of Palestine since 1948 is the pretext for continuing to forever build up Israeli military might. Protracted open warfare by Israel, on the other hand, always has the potential to destabilize the region.

As Israel's army invaded in March it appeared that the U.S. might become concerned that Sharon's government, under a man whose history includes organizing civilian massacres of Palestinians in Lebanon and elsewhere, would overplay the hand and damage U.S. credibility in the court of world opinion. But that is not what happened. U.S. policy shifted, first subtly and now more demonstrably with these strange speeches and actions of Mr. Bush junior, the ultimate leader. George Monbiot of the Guardian (England) is the one who drew my attention to this terrifying reality. The current U.S. government believes that it is unconstrained by any force on earth from saying anything, from beginning a world war and using nuclear weapons. To allow Mr. Sharon to be the war criminal with impunity spells out for the first time that the U.S. war on Terrorism returns us to the day after Nagasaki when only the U.S. had, and had used atomic bombs on civilian populations. With regard to the Palestinian people and their national aspirations, the world is being told: go fuck off. If this produces a wider war the U.S. may be

ready to fight down to the last Israeli.

I became an expert on terror when my mother took me to a Hollywood movie, not when I experienced the holocaust, or American anti-semitism, or the World Trade Center bombing. I didn't experience the holocaust. How do I know anything? I lived and slept through it, like the good Germans and Poles, like the Vichy French, like the little boy who refused to grow up in the Tin Drum, like the many Jews who marched off to the slaughter, anxious, terrified, but not resisting. Even though I missed the action then, my government offered the opportunity to re-experience the terror during its actions in Guatemala, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Iran, Indonesia, Cambodia, Chile, El Salvador, Cuba, Iraq, Grenada, Panama, and now Columbia and Afghanistan and Venezuela and the Philippines and over and over Palestine, my biological kinfolk.

Because I crashed my bike and broke a tooth and was battered a bit at 5 years I learned the difference between the outrageous but accidental fortunes of life, pain and death, and the raging hubris of human inflicted terror and brutality. I know terror. I understand terrorism and those who are its purveyors. I live in the nation that works hard to help me recognize its terrorism as the greatest threat ever known to this grand experiment with intelligent life. And so I do pompously declare: The only thing that stands between this imperialist State with the means to make the WTC bombers look like pale excuses for terrorists and the full chain reaction of unrestricted violence and terror is the potential for massive and even violent resistance by the U.S. population. There are choices to be made, but the people need time they may not have.

The media and Zionism's blistering visceral attacks on Palestinian suicide bombers, adults and children, men and women, whether acting on their own determination or encouraged by family, parents and friends, represent enforcing efforts at denial of our own situation. Though targeting of civilians by suicide bombers is a very serious crime, we can not let pass the idea that people ready to kill themselves to make a point are either crazy or sub-human. The Palestinians do this because they are beyond denial of their own suffering and situation. And whether or not they understand it, their acts challenge our own historic denial of the necessities of time's ticking moments.

John Brown galvanized the nation to fight slavery by an act that was desperate and close to suicidal. He was both fanatical and a religious zealot who heard from God, like Osama Bin Laden; these are men I would not choose to follow. But history reveals that John Brown, appalled by the brutality of slavery, saw the truth of an impending war which slavery was leading our nation into. The bell that Palestine's suicide bombers are tolling is more than the bell intended to show that Israel's war of occupation has gone awry for too long. It is also the bell tolling for civilization as we now know it. And we shall either respond to that bell or see our children and grandchildren burned up like so many helpless people the Nazis killed and those whose deaths marked my mother's 30th birthday, when I was four years old.

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