

A RAY OF HOPE

The visit of Rome's Mayor Veltroni to Los Angeles, held last week; the city of Rome is building a Holocaust Museum, next to Mussolini's residence. The guides at this SHOAH (Holocaust) Museum would be children who went on the City's trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau Death Camp

By Ari Bussel

A select group of the Jewish Federation leadership was invited to participate in an exclusive briefing with the Honorable Walter Veltroni, Mayor of Rome, on Thursday, February 15. Veltroni is now in his second term, sixth year in office, serving as Mayor since 2001.

It was a welcome visit from a representative of a country, which seems somewhat removed from the violence and anti-Semitism engulfing France and elsewhere in Eurabia. The Mayor's words held a clue as to the reasons why.

Some fifty people gathered early morning for this meeting. Holocaust survivors, the older and the younger generation were present. One common denominator: Each of those present is very involved in the community, giving one's money, time, energy and soul to the projects that drive us – giving back to society. Indeed, one would definitely recognize the names of many: major donors and heads of civic and religious programs and organizations.

We are all Jews, which is exactly where the commonality stops and the differences become immediately apparent: political ideologies from the extreme ends of the spectrum. We grew up and live in the United States of America, our mother country, which affords us this luxury: to think for ourselves, to express our thoughts and opinions, not to be afraid, to fight for change, to encourage discourse and, yes, to disagree. Do we all appreciate enough this great coun-

try of ours and the freedoms it affords?

Following are highlights of Veltroni's speech: The City of Rome is building a Holocaust Museum. Funds were already raised for the construction, and a foundation was set up here in the States to raise additional funds for the contents, programming and upkeep – typically the more challenging aspect in raising funds. The Museum will take two years to build and another year to set up.

The Museum is being built next to Mussolini's residence. Almost like opening an encyclopedia via these upper layers of Mother Earth, the Museum sits on top of layers upon layers of history of human civilization, going back via Renaissance, Medieval times and the Roman Empire.

On top of all these layers lies Rome, a city of two million, fueled by the energy of culture and artistic expression, modernized in terms of technology, where taxes (and penalties) can be paid over the internet, parking meters fees via SMS (text messaging), wireless connectivity is abundant, and other modern day miracles are commonplace.

The guides at this SHOAH (Holocaust) Museum would be children who went on the City's trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau Death Camp and have heard first hand accounts from survivors. Knowledge, Memory and Consciousness are the ingredients necessary to ensure we never again entertain the idea of superiority of one human being over another.

continued on page 23

Major Shlomi Bicha – an IDF hero

It was 9AM on Tuesday morning, and events at such time are not always well attended. This was different. It started with the title of the invitation: "The Consulate General of Israel invites you to a special presentation with an IDF hero and a remarkable individual Major Shlomi Bicha."

The presentation started with a short movie, during which time Bicha was sitting next to me. It was very interesting to glance at him as the movie focused on the operation inside Lebanon with an embedded journalist; the fire opened on them by the Hezbollah guerilla terrorists; the injury; the fellow soldiers worrying about getting him out of Lebanon, back to Israel.

Two bullets hit Bicha, one in his left leg, the other higher. At the time he was hit, he did not feel anything. He was concerned about his men he was leading. It was his experience and the fact he was leading physically first, upfront (as Israeli officers always do) that saved the lives of those soldiers.

It is interesting to see the reaction of a person who is now glorified and whose story is being shown, sitting next to you. The anguish, the injury, the recovery and his humble dismissal of treating him like a hero: "You are fighting important fronts right here!"

Major Bicha then addressed the audience, talking about immigrating to Israel in 1984 with his two brothers. He was six, his brothers 8 and 12. Their parents would join them more than six years later, only to return to Ethiopia. They did not assimilate. He grew up in boarding schools. Not only is he fully assimilated, he speaks Hebrew like any other Israeli, he speaks fluent English, and he made the audience feel at ease.

Whenever one speaks about the "Palestinian refugees," one may want to keep in mind that they never wanted to assimilate anywhere. They remain outsiders wherever they are. Look at Israel, on the other hand, and see assimilation in progress of – in this

case – people from Africa, who now are no different than any other Israeli (other than the color of their skin). Full members of society.

At the age of 18, when enlisting to service, he decided he needs to repay the State of Israel for the food and lodging, for his education; for everything he and his brothers have received. He is now in his tenth year of service of the 12 years he decided are his "debt" to the Country.

In addition to active duty, Bicha now volunteers to assist new immigrants to Israel.

Today, at the age of 29, he is married with two daughters, and embodies the glory of Israel.

Bicha does not take credit for himself. In fact, he highlighted one of his soldiers who died. The soldier emigrated from France and volunteered for service. He actually insisted to serve a longer period of time. Bicha remembers a discussion they had on the subject. He promised to assist to shorten the length of service since his soldier's parents constantly pressed on him to return to France. The soldier was hit shortly after Bicha was injured. He did not make it. His parents had to bury their son, who gave his life on defense of Israel.

The audience stood in honor of Major Bicha when he finished talking. It was a touching and moving; and reminded us that there are soldiers and officers in Israel fighting for Israel's survival, and in Iraq, more than a hundred thousand young men and women protecting the freedoms we enjoy here every day.

(Ari Bussel)



Major Shlomi Bicha

Reader's response, Atara Mont, Los Angeles: "I wept as I read it. Israelis are fighting so we can live free and so many Jews don't recognize it."

OPEN LETTER TO AMERICA

By Susanne M Reyto

"A third World War is already underway between Islamic militancy and the West, but most people do not realize it," former Mossad chief and former Israeli ambassador to the European Union, Efraim Halevy told Portuguese weekly newspaper, "Espresso", January 27, 2007. In a recent Fox program on Radical Islam, Mark Ginsberg, former US Ambassador to Morocco, said metaphorically, "Radical Islam is Communism and Nazism with a Fez."

Even before, but particularly after 9/11, fanatic Islamic religious leaders have continuously demonstrated in speeches, sermons and actions, their desire to conquer and rule the world by imposing Islam's strictures on our society. Islam is not only

a religion – it is also a political ideology deeply rooted in its teachings. It advocates violence and enforces its agenda by force. They want to Islamize the world. While

Since Fascism and Communism, the Western World faces its greatest challenge: the threat of Radical Islam. Repeated calls for "Death to America, Death to the West, Death to Jews and Wipe off Israel from the Face of this Earth," are threats we must not ignore

the radical leaders and clerics declare this at every opportunity, most people including many politicians are not willing to believe it.

Since Fascism and Communism, the Western World faces its greatest challenge:

the threat of Radical Islam. Repeated calls for "Death to America, Death to the West, Death to Jews and Wipe off Israel from the Face of this Earth," are not idle words. We

must believe these threats. During World War II, Hitler's plans and actions were said to be inconceivable, but they became reality. Do people need another 9/11 to wake up?

Within the last 65 years, the world has experienced Nazism, Communism, genocide and ethnic cleansing in Europe and Africa, the threat of North Korea and now Muslim extremists.

They are intent on achieving their goal of an Islamic world and their seemingly unlimited funds provide greater opportunities to achieve their goal. While discussions and diplomacy are important, idealism is no longer an option and appeasement "a la Chamberlain" doesn't work with extremists.

I survived the Holocaust and grew up under horrific conditions during Communism in Hungary. In my book, Pursuit of Freedom, the story of my terror filled childhood and ultimate escape, I describe how the Communist tyranny oppressed our

lives and now only 50 years later I see the frightening parallels among Nazism, Communism and Radical Islam. I don't want to relive my past. The Nazis were committed to create a Master Race, the Communists were committed to the destruction of the Free World, while the Islamists are committed to the destruction of the non-Muslim World. Their goal is an Islamic world ruled by Sharia – law which violates the founding principles of the United States.

Nazism's official doctrine was ethnic supremacy, declaring a distinct ethnicity and race superior to others, and sought to establish an ethnically and religiously homogenized homeland. Communism had no ethnic basis. Ethnicity was in the form of 'poor' versus 'bourgeoisie.'

Their motivation was ideological and utopian. But the motivation of the radical Muslims is ethnic, cultural, religious as well as political – to create a Muslim world. They want to impose their outlook and laws on an unwilling mankind, and to adhere to medieval traditions and laws mandating Jihad. Militant Islam is violent. They are not restricted by morality and they value death while we value life.

Their lifestyle, beliefs and teachings are complete opposite of modernity and Western way of life. It is the lifestyle of the Middle Ages versus the 21st Century. We are for human rights, while they violate them at all levels to achieve their goal.

continued on page 27

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Obsessive Obsessions and Delusional Distractions

By Daryl Temkin, Ph.D.

Obsession is a word that now conjures up an association with an "R" rating. The perfume distinctly named "Obsession" reinforced this lust-oriented definition with a multi-million dollar seduction oriented advertising campaign. But "obsessions" have little to do with cardinal thoughts as much as they have to do with a serious psychological disorder.

More clearly defined, obsessions are "incessant thoughts and ideas which dominate the so-afflicted mind, and constantly return to the same few themes, scenarios and questions; its meticulous examination and re-examination of banal minutiae for hidden meanings that simply aren't there; and the thoughts are not fascinating but are maddeningly dull."

One might now have second thoughts about naming a perfume, "Obsession" if it refers to something which is "maddeningly dull". However, the term succeeded to become a "delusional distraction" which could transfer the obsessive image from a serious behavioral dysfunction to a commercially desirable thought pattern.

Then, more recently, the movie, "Obsession" appeared. When first advertised, many thought it would be an "R" rated movie and expected sizzling scenes and tantalizing moments -- only to discover that the movie was an exploration of the horrific violence-oriented vulgarities based in and supported by the religion of Islam. Islamic clerics do boast about "martyred men" being the recipients of 72 awaiting virgins, a type of "R" rated obsession, which is sadly obsessively believed among too many Islamic adherents and obsessively repeated by too many Islamic clerics.

But in this riveting film, the obsession is about a religion which is transfixed on dominating the world at any price. As much as Islam tries to be a religion, it constantly reverts to being a political mechanism for oppression, subjugation, and submission of its adherents as well as non-adherents. Oppression, subjugation, and submission are acts of political tyranny and are not meant to be descriptive of seductive hallucinations and delusions.

Real obsessions occur when a problem cannot be solved by a chosen approach and one continues to come back to retry the wrong path no matter how many times that path is proven wrong. An obsessive psychology client related that when trying to leave his home he had to come back to the front door up to 30 times in order to check and re-check that it was locked before he could finally start his car and leave. His obsession required him to continually think and believe that his front door was unlocked, and every time he checked, the door was locked; yet, he perceived it as unlocked, even when again checked and proven to be locked. The encouraging aspect of this client was that he was able to realize that he was living with an obsession.

It is one thing when the obsessive client is able to identify that the obsessive behavior as obsessive. It is quite another matter when obsessive behavior goes unrecognized and therefore never resolved.

With this in mind, let us view our current political crisis. I must surmise that choosing and re-choosing failed proposed solutions suggest that there is an obsessive behavior pattern which society is prone to accept -- hence the obsession is not only unrecognized but is thereby rendered off-limits to correctives.

How is it that the best scholars and political leaders can create and foster political solutions which are based on past failures and then promoted as the only viable solution? Now, keeping within the obsessive mode, let's try that again: It failed once, it failed again, and it has continued to fail every time it was tried. Perfect! Let's now try it again and call it a "viable solution"

One might think that a degree of refinement might be introduced to make the next experiment more productive. But no, all the givens remain the same on each trial. Why a different result is expected when the tested conditions remain the same is one of the strange dimensions shared and ignored by the leaders, known as the "best and the brightest."

Imagine a person discovers that the two week old carton of milk in the refrigerator is spoiled, and then returns the milk to the refrigerator hoping or expecting that

if more days pass, the milk will become fresh. How does one explain that the refrigeration is not going to improve the condition of the milk? At what point will someone understand that the chosen solution is not related the solution of the presenting problem.

Once upon a time, there was the thought that if the world would just provide an additional Palestinian state, the Arabs would be appeased and the world could live at peace. This thought has become an obsessive policy which an unbelievable number of nations have signed onto. It doesn't seem to matter that multiple past attempts at this solution have repeatedly failed; the obsessive failed solution has to be right no matter how wrong it has always been.

The following is the flow chart of our obsessive political path:

America and others have the belief that they can educate the terrorist enemy and thereby reshape its thinking with logic and Western incentives. Therefore, large sums of money are offered to induce them to want what you want them to want. Then there is the belief that they will come to want what you want once they have more power and more weapons. This false assumption is supposed to increase their self esteem and then they will like you. Then there is the belief that they will become what you want them to become even though they tell you that they will never become what you want them to become, so you offer them more money. Or, you try to get them to become what you want them to become by showing them how wonderful their life will be once they do as you want them to do. But they tell you that they don't want your wonderful life. They don't want your life style, they don't want your technology, they don't want your advancements, they don't even want your money. They only want your submission to their obsession. But your obsession is not to see, understand or comprehend their obsession.

You go as far as to believe that your obsession will win over their obsession. You don't want to believe that their obsession is rooted in hundreds of years of religious training and political beliefs connected to the religious training. You don't

understand that your obsession is not religion based so you can't feel that you really have a right to impose your values on someone else - but they have a religious doctrine which obligates them to impose their doctrines upon all believers and non-believers.

Your obsession is a belief that you know what all people want. Your obsession is that you think that all people want what you have. Your obsession is that you believe that all people want to be free. Your obsession is that you can't believe that certain people don't care about democracy. Certain people don't care about freedom. Certain people don't care about human rights. Certain people have been raised to believe that death is more important than life. As counter-intuitive as that sounds, there is a culture that is preparing its children to strive for death.

Our obsession is that we can't see beyond ourselves. Our obsession is that we think education is the solution to all mankind. Our obsession is that we have blinded ourselves to become invisible in this world and even invisible to ourselves. We can't see ourselves because, if we could, then our obsessions would become blatantly and overwhelmingly apparent.

Perhaps if we would stop and recognize our devastating obsessions, then we would stop thinking only about perfumes and sexuality and start thinking about what is really going on in our world.

It's time that we start being obsessive about the truth, obsessive about real evil, obsessive about real strivings for goodness, obsessive about life and begin to seriously realize that there are those who want our meaningful Western obsessions destroyed.

We also need to be obsessed about the shortness of available remaining time to refocus our obsessions and our recurring thoughts on what really matters and on how we will survive our enemies for generations to come.



A RAY OF HOPE

continued from page 2

Veltroni's vision is a picture of tomorrow, today in the making: A COMMUNITY OF DESTINY, whereby an unfortunate situation of another human being is regarded by each of us as our own and thus requires correction, reminding us that to be a human being means we should not be judgmental -- we can be in that position ourselves.

Veltroni's eyes sparkle. Italian sounds like a melody, an ancient song being sung for us. He rests after every one or two sentences to allow the interpreter to translate. Many in the audience follow him in his native language, all others are hypnotized: He tells us that every time the survivors meet with the kids going to Auschwitz-Birkenau, they recover some of the youth they lost in the concentration camps some 65 years ago.

Veltroni sounds much like a spokesperson of the anti-Defamation League, stating his administration refuses violence and intolerance of any kind and acts upon this premise. His modus operandi is simple: Try to reach both the brain and the heart, he says. Often we fail if we only use one or the other (or neither altogether).

On March 24 every year there is a memorial for 335 Partisans who

were murdered. In their sacrifice, they have written a page of history. Their memory, alongside the vivid memories of the survivors of the death camps who are still alive, are an enormous motivational force.

As we look to the future from the eyes and the mindset of the children, it is important not to divide and discriminate. Veltroni told the story of Jewish, Catholic and Muslim kids all going together on the trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau. They are "talking just like kids [should]: KIDS." A Muslim girl wearing a veil was asked by a Jewish girl: "When do you wear that?" Honest curiosity, exploration into a strange and different world than one's own. The Muslim kids (boys) put on a Kippa (yarmulke) on their heads as they entered the main Synagogue of Krakow. Later, all the kids -- Jewish, Muslim and Catholic visited the Cathedral and were received by the Cardinal who previously served as the Secretary of Pope John Paul II.

Veltroni spoke of the marvelous differences that make us each unique and all the same human beings. The Pope's visit to the main Synagogue in Rome and the Jewish community that exists in Rome, on its buildings, institutions, stores, language and traditions is, as Veltroni put it, "a perfect interpreter

for the Spirit of Rome."

On October 16, 1943, 1,000 Jews were deported from Rome. Only 16 survived. Today, the generation of the Holocaust is slowly disappearing. We, who were born decades after the Holocaust, tend to forget that which we did not really know in the first place. Often times we did not stop to ask, we did not listen when we were told.

My father and my uncle escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto as kids, just before the Uprising. They both survived and later emigrated to Israel. Most of my family was exterminated during the Holocaust. At the end of the war, my grandfather, may he rest in peace, was with the Allied Forces in Italy.

Today's presentation by Veltroni proves that there is still kindness and reason, that history is not completely forgotten, that there is action and there is still hope.

Let us look to Rome, led by Veltroni's vision and actions, to learn how a focus on the future seasoned with remembering the past and taking action at present assure us continued existence as a civilized society. There is much we have to learn from the Mayor's visit here. It should serve as a preface to a long and mutually beneficial discourse, a life of doing.

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