

Jewish World



Ilan Halimi
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Daniel Pearl
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Remembering Ilan Halimi

As Jewish France continues to mourn the brutal death of Ilan Halimi last month, Judea Pearl, father of journalist Daniel murdered by terrorists in Pakistan in 2002, shares his thoughts through a eulogy

Judea Pearl | Published: 03.19.06 , 13:14



"Pour Ilan" - this is what the sign says, held by demonstrators in a quiet march, in Paris, in your memory.
Pour Ilan, Ilan Halimi, my newly fallen son.

When I weep for you, I weep for my son Daniel too - your brother in pain - two treasures crushed in the claws of history.

When I weep for you, I weep with my burned face, with my hands tied behind my back, with my screaming mind -- my sanity that was shattered when the doors of heavens slammed your life.

They rush to your memorial, the politicians, the dignitaries, Jewish leaders too. They talk about joblessness, crime, jealousy and greed. "They believe, and I quote, that 'Jews have money'" said Interior Minister Sarkozy. They always talk about "them" - the criminals, the Barbarians - rarely about THEMSELVES.

How could it be?

They do not talk about the silence and tacit encouragement that have created this climate in France where a gang of youngsters would choose to target Jews over other preys. A climate in which torturing a Jew is considered a lesser form of cruelty than the unimaginable. "We tortured him because he was a Jew" said one of the abductors last week.

How did this climate of inhumanity infiltrate a country that gave the world liberty, equality and brotherhood? Ilan did not ask his captors this question -- he knew the answer.

He understood that empathy emanates from the dignity and respect that society extends to its members. And he knew first hand that, while some members of the French Jewish community have risen to prominence, Jews, as a collective, have not enjoyed standard dignity and respect - they have been villainized and dehumanized in all strata of French society as no other group has.

Israelis, not Jews

Of course, only Israelis are dehumanized today in the French media, not all Jews - France is a modern country, and it knows the rules of post-WW-II discourse.

Likewise, French Jews are no longer accused of killing God's son or Christian boys; they are now villainized for one and only one crime: loving and caring for that "shitty little country," as French Ambassador Bernard called Israel, a country that according to a 2005 survey, a majority of Europeans consider "the greatest threat to world's peace".

Ilan's misfortune was that the gangsters of Bagneux were quick to discover what every child in Europe knew all along - who causes the troubles in the world and who can be bashed with impunity.

It is safe for us to talk about the gangsters of Bagneux, not so safe to talk about the French media. But, if the death of Ilan Halimi is to have a meaningful and permanent mark on our consciousness, it is vital that we examine all sacred pillars of society.

By licensing unrestrained assaults against Israel and Zionism - two cherished symbols of French Jewry - and denying the Jewish community a fair opportunity to make the case for Israel, the media has effectively turned French Jewry into social outcasts.

Classic anti-Semitism

This, coupled with classical anti-semitic broadcasts pouring over from middle east channels, offers some explanation for the barbaric and inexplicable inhumanity of Ilan's abductors.

Indeed, how can the residents of Bagneux be expected to respect the life of Ilan, if he cherishes the Magen David - the most despised symbol in all of Europe, barring the Swastika. A symbol that, for over a decade, French media has refused to associate with any praiseworthy quality. What empathy could Ilan expect from his abductors when the symbol of his identity evoked nothing but revulsion in their Pavlovian brains?

How could they remain deaf, for 20 long days, to his infinite screams, blended with his mother's pleas over the phone?

Video incitement

Unless they convinced themselves that this young man deserved subhuman treatment, either by virtue of belonging to the "despised," or as a cousin to those "monstrous Israeli soldiers" they repeatedly saw on TV, intentionally killing Palestinian children.

Or, perhaps they were reminded of that video (now suspected of being a forgery) of the dying Palestinian child Muhammad Al Dura that France 2 was so eager to air on September 2000. Not one time, but day after day, night after night, with stubbornness and perseverance that only bigotry can sustain.

So eager in fact that it found its way to the hands of Daniel Pearl's murderers in Pakistan, and was used in their gruesome video to justify the murder - a grim reminder of the consequences of irresponsible journalism.

Deeper down

But let us dig a bit deeper.

How can the good citizens of Bagneux be expected to muster the courage to tell their gangster-neighbors: "Stop!" when they see around them a culture of capitulation, deceit and herd pressure? A culture where frightened teachers yield to students refusing Holocaust classes, where police do not see what the government does not want to admit, where politicians vie with each other to proclaim what most Frenchmen know to be false, that is, that the Paris riots were void of religious or cultural undercurrents, and where the one writer who suggests otherwise is harshly rebuked by his peers as racist?

A culture where the darling of European philosophers, Tariq Ramadan, defines sympathy for a beleaguered Israel as betrayal of universal values, and where that same philosopher proclaims the West "morally bankrupt" to the mesmerized admiration of his Western colleagues.

True legacy

Oh, Ilan and Daniel, two beautiful sons of the West, intellectuals and barbarians have gathered again to challenge the vitality of your moral heritage. Remind them who you are.

You, two principled disciples of Abraham, Socrates and Jeremia, two proud emissaries of Aquinas, Rashi and Galileo; two burning torches of Rousseau and Jefferson, Hertzl and Einstein. Tell them what they refuse to see on your charred bodies: That Western civilization ain't ready to surrender, that youngsters like you attest its strength and vitality that "bankruptcy" is not in your vocabulary.

And, finally, that your legacy will witness the downfall of your murderers. It will!

Danny and Ilan, my two fallen sons, it was not the barbarians alone who killed you; twisted intellectuals were there all along, spreading the fuel while watching the barbarians light the fuse. They killed you because you are the soul of Western civilization, a soul they chose to disown.

Let there be no silence on your grave, Ilan, no rest, nor learned discussion, till the racist climate of your murder stands trial in the court of history. Until another Zola rises with a lauder "J'accuse", and this culture of deceit goes down in infamy, as did the Dreyfus Affair and the Munich Treaty.

Yitgadal Ve'Yitkadash Shmai Rabah.

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Judea Pearl is president of the [Daniel Pearl Foundation](#) named after his son, a Wall Street Journal reporter who was murdered by terrorists in Pakistan, in February, 2002.

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