

Remembering Atrocities—But Only If We're Armed to the Teeth

By Phyllis Chesler

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Last night, I watched a very moving moment in Israel's Holocaust Day program. There she was, a tiny woman who'd survived Hitler, accompanied by her blessedly large family. Everyone was asked to rise for the singing of Hatikva, Israel's national anthem—and so [Mogadi \(Esther\) Unger](#) rose, slowly, out of her wheelchair, and sang each word clearly and out loudly.

I was unexpectedly moved to tears. Watch and listen for yourselves.

For years now, I have struggled with the Jewish remembrance of our martyrs, including the six million who were murdered by Nazis in the Shoah.

Haven't we been commanded to "remember to forget" Amalek—and yet, here we are, remembering the evil Amalek-like hatred that led to the mass murder of our people when we were at our most vulnerable.

Is honoring our dead excessively a way of distracting us from the grim realities we continue to face in our lifetimes as Jews continue to be defamed, attacked, kidnapped, and murdered everywhere, anywhere, including in our own Homeland? Perhaps we are honor-bound to do so, just not excessively?



To some extent, as dangerous as Holocaust denial is, Holocaust memorialization may also function as a form of denial.

How can remembering the Holocaust be a form of denial? Because in this instance it may also allow us the luxury – and the consolation – of assuming that the “worst” has already happened. Alas, this may not be true.

With Holocaust denial rampant among Islamists and Western intellectuals, the celebration of Holocaust Memorial Day becomes more than an affirmation of the truth of the tragedy. It is also an act of defiance and moral clarity.

In the Arab and Islamic media, Israel and Jews are labeled and portrayed as vermin and child-eating monsters. Islamists see no contradiction between caricaturing Jews in the vilest way and yet protesting, often violently, the fairly innocuous Danish cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed. Appeasers in the Western intelligentsia are quick to sympathize with Islam’s injured “honor” in this matter.

Western leftists have used the Holocaust to suit their own political purposes. Some have said that the Jews are exploiting the Holocaust in order to collect reparations money and that they have used the Holocaust to justify the creation of an “apartheid” state.

They have also put forward their own version of Holocaust denial. Jews, they claim, are worse than Nazis, and Israel is perpetrating a "Holocaust" upon the Palestinians – the same Palestinians who send human bombs on foot, now on gliders, to murder Israeli civilians. The attacks on Israel are constant, its list of alleged crimes routinely expanded to include "ethnic cleansing," "forced transfers," and supposed "human rights violations."

In 2006, I published the following:

"Jew-haters are creating a situation in which another Holocaust-like mass murder of Jews may be possible. Indeed, in my view, it has already begun, certainly not in America and not yet in Europe – but in Israel. Today, Jews who live in the Jewish state – a nation that was initially envisioned as the solution to the ceaseless persecution of the Jews – are far more endangered than those who live in the Diaspora.

"Israel endured the equivalent of 9/11 every month for four years during the intifada that erupted in 2000. In 2005, seven Palestinian homicide bombers killed and wounded Israeli civilians; an additional 15 such terrorist attacks were thwarted. True, Israel is well-armed and has nuclear capacity. However, the military superiority of the Jewish state is now being used to diabolize Israel on university campuses throughout the Western world.

"In addition, certain intellectuals, Jews among them, attempt to hide their rabid Jew-hatred by focusing overly much on the European Holocaust – on all the dead Jews – as a way of diverting attention from the impending Holocaust against living Jews. Because they oppose what was done to the Jews in World War Two, they feel justified, credentialed, to say that today's attacks on Israel are 'justified,' that the Palestinian Arabs are now the true victims, (the 'new Jews' in a sense), and the Israeli Jews are their 'Nazi' persecutors.

“In my view, all that we are currently witnessing is worse and more widespread than the propaganda against the Jews that was disseminated before the European Holocaust.

“Of course, we cannot let this stand. We must expose and oppose all such lies. They are an affront not just to Jews but to Western civilization and constitute a real threat to its survival.

“Jew-haters are creating a situation in which – dare I say it? I am sorry but, yes, I must say it – another mass murder, perhaps even a Holocaust-like mass murder, of Jews might be possible. In my view, it has already begun, not in America and not yet in Europe where antisemitic incidents abound, but in Israel. (I do think that the horrific torture and murder of Ilan Halimi in Paris is as momentous a turning point as the Dreyfus case was in its day.)

“How does a Holocaust happen? You tell the demonized scapegoats that they are imagining and exaggerating their victimization. You demand that the scapegoats apologize, bow and scrape a bit more. And then you commit the unthinkable: You wipe out a large number of civilians, either in Israel, Europe or America.”

And verily, and rather wearily, I say unto us all:

What’s different since 2006, and even since 10/7, is that Jews everywhere are under siege in one way or the other.

Thus, what matters is not just what evil people do. They are evil, they do evil things. What matters is what the good people do – or fail to do. Victims of horrific, even genocidal violence are haunted by what the good people failed to do. The time to act is upon us. May we act wisely and decisively before it is too late.

In the merit and the memory of the six million-plus who have been murdered by Jew-haters, we must not rest on our

illusions. Heroism is now our only alternative.

For all those who think that Jew-hatred is primarily a white supremacist, European-based ideology, let me quote from the divine Hebrew poet Nathan Alterman. He fled Warsaw and made aliya in 1925; he lived through the never-ending Arab attacks upon peaceful Jewish farmers, pedestrians, bus-riders, and shopkeepers all throughout the 1930s, before Hitler's demonic minions struck in Europe. His poem "The Killers of the Fields" is a tragic and mystical meditation on Jewish history, Jewish destiny, and the fragility of the hoped-for Jewish state.

Then out of the far-off villages,
On the hills, like massive-jawed raptors –
At a desert crawl, more primal than any law,
They descend,
The killers of the fields...

For destiny of old has not let go, no he hasn't,
For amid her quietude and the songs of her tents
He's been holding her neck in a lock since Vespasian
And brandishing his whip.

Brave little Israel, mighty military might though it may be,
finds itself living in an exceptionally dangerous
neighborhood. How it conquers endemic barbarism matters not
only to the Jews, but to all who are watching.