

ARE WE LISTENING?

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

It is hard to write. We are still in shock. All of us, collectively, will need some time to recover from this blow. This is not -- cannot be -- an ordinary weekly message from Project Genesis. It is merely my personal reaction.

A "lesson" is almost superfluous, anyway. Words can hardly express or clarify what we have already learned. Is it possible, even remotely imaginable, that we will approach this Rosh HaShanah without contemplating the frailty of human existence, as we have few times before? Who will reach the "Unesaneh Tokef" prayer in the Machzor this Rosh HaShanah, and read "who will live, and who will die," without thinking about 5000 people just like us, whose lives so quickly came to an end?

We have, indeed, learned a great deal. More people -- indeed, more Jews -- lost their lives in New York this week, than perished in Israel because of the last year of Palestinian terror. At least one person, had she not been in Israel on a solidarity mission, would have been at work, at her desk, on the 70th floor of Tower Two when the planes came in. So much for avoiding Israel "to be safe."

Our icons have crumbled. If we believed America was invincible -- no more. These Towers, symbols of America's financial might and strength of its hand, have fallen. We have no one upon whom to rely -- only our Father in Heaven.

Do we hear the message? Who could be deaf to such a loud voice?

Just last week, I wrote that G-d does not want it to be this way. We are supposed to sit securely, and serve G-d with joy. The curses exist because at times we will fail -- success will bring complacency rather than joyous service.

Can we be complacent, now?

At the same time, even in such horror, one sees a silver lining. The American public, and America's leaders, have sudden insight into what terror really means, the merits of "targeted killings," and the incredible restraint with which Israel has responded. They also, unavoidably, appreciate as never before the sheer inhumanity of those who attack us on both continents. The revolting images of Palestinians cheering and dancing at the murder of innocent Americans, contrasted with the immediate declaration of a national day of mourning in Israel, generated an immediate and visceral response. Few are the naysayers who naively believe that if America did not ally itself with Israel, bin Laden would tolerate the American "infidels." The fact that PA officials threatened the lives of

reporters if they released video images of PA policemen joining the party -- this, too, has not been missed. Perhaps, finally, in the year ahead, the PA will no longer feel free to murder Jews with impunity.

On a more personal level, a new widow -- whose husband disappeared into the ashes on Tuesday -- answered the phone to learn that she was not a widow at all. Her husband lay in a New Jersey hospital, with no ID, until he regained consciousness and called her to come.

We, of course, sorely need such signals. We need these signs.

There is another one. Let me not forget it. An email campaign is calling upon Americans nationwide to join a vigil, a moment of rest and reflection, to commemorate the tragedy and signal our solidarity. Tonight, at 7 pm, we are asked to publicly light a candle.

In Maryland, Shabbos candles should be lit at 6:59. In New York, 6:49. In Virginia and San Francisco, 7:01. On a list of common candlelighting times across the USA, on a calendar in our office, only Phoenix (6:18) does not call for lighting between 6:30 and 7:30 this evening. So a national email campaign is asking every Jew to light Shabbos candles -- and the rest of the nation along with us.

Are we listening?

With blessings for a Good Shabbos, and a year of health, success, safety and all good,

Yaakov Menken