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THEY SAID IT

Interestingly, when we can no longer classify things as vulgar or base for fear of offending some small group or interest, we can no longer logically speak of their opposite as art. If the United States cannot or will not educate, cultivate, and civilize its citizens, then neither will we be makers of history nor will we continue on the road of economic and social progress that has been our hallmark.

Michael J. Tierney, Wachovia Bank Investment Management paper entitled "The Edge of Chaos," October 5, 1993.

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Some Thoughts on Recklessness.

SOME THOUGHTS ON RECKLESSNESS.

What do Bill and Hillary Clinton have in common with the murderous terrorist thugs of Hamas?

A loaded question, you say? Not fair to Bill and Hill? Not fair to Hamas?

Okay. Let's approach this from a different angle. What do the overwhelming majority of the political big shots in the Democratic Party have in common with the author, rabbi, and religio-media gadfly Shmuley Boteach?

There are, we think, many possible answers to this question. But we are looking for one in particular. To be more specific, we are looking for the observation that the Democratic big shots and Shmuley have both recently been betrayed by people whom they were ridiculously foolish to have trusted in the first place. In the case of the Democrats, they trusted Bill and Hillary. And in Shmuley's case, believe it or not, he trusted the Palestinians in general and those in Hamas-controlled Gaza specifically.

The Democrats, for their part, have spent nearly this entire year complaining about how awful the Clintons can be. As it turns out, many of them are upset that Bill and Hillary turned out to be sociopaths who care about nothing so much as enhancing their own power and furthering their own personal agendas.

They were shocked that Bill and Hill would send out their surrogates to remind voters of Barack Obama's admitted cocaine use. They were stunned that Hillary would so unashamedly and transparently play the gender card by forcing herself to cry in public the day before the New Hampshire primary. They were

horrified that Bill would not so subtly remind white voters across the South that Barack Obama just happens to be a black man. They were shaken by the fact that Hillary so crassly campaigned in Florida and Michigan, despite the fact that the national party had asked all candidates not to do so, given the two states' contravention of the primary calendar. And they are utterly amazed that Hillary refuses to drop out of the primary race, despite the fact that she cannot possibly win more delegates than Obama, and that she appears more than willing to fight the nomination all the way to the national convention this September, regardless of the effect that it may have on the party as a whole or on the eventual nominee's chances for success two months later.

In short, then, what we have here are a bunch of Democrats who are surprised to discover that Bill and Hillary Clinton are Bill and Hillary Clinton. Who didn't know?

Have they not been paying attention for the last 15 years? Did they think it was just a fluke when Bill and Hill set out to destroy a woman whom Bill later admitted was telling the truth about their affair? Did they think that the private-investigative team kept on retainer by the Clinton campaign staff was merely right-wing propaganda? Did they really believe that all of the sleepovers, all of the Chinese money, all of the shaking down of Buddhist nuns were simply misunderstandings? Did they think the Oval Office meetings with the 24-year-old intern were really Ken Starr's fault? Did they think that Kathleen Willey's cat killed itself? Honestly, what did they think?

The idea that anyone would be shocked by anything that Bill and Hillary Clinton might do to obtain or hold on to power is absurd. Yet there they've been, making their case, pleading naïveté, claiming to have been blindsided by Bill and Hill's ambition. The sad thing is that these betrayed Democrats actually sort of seem believable. These people may actually be so dense as to have believed that Bill and Hill really were different, that they really were heroes, that they only screwed over people who deserved it.

Of course, for head-smackingly stupid naïveté, the Clinton-trusters have nothing at all on Rabbi Shmuley, who last week penned one of the most amazing op-ed pieces we have seen in a very long time. Shmuley, you see, is "shaken" by the fact that so many Palestinians seemed to enjoy the recent massacre of Israeli yeshiva students. He wrote:

The sight of Gazans rejoicing at the cold-blooded murder of eight yeshiva students who had not hurt anyone was particularly jolting for me. I am a religious man and feel an immediate affinity with all who profess a love for God and strive to live a life of religious devotion. Meeting religious people of different faiths is always a great pleasure for me. I feel an immediate sense of kinship with them.

When I meet religious Muslims in the United States my feelings go beyond kinship, to sympathy. I realize that many Americans are suspicious of religious Muslims, viewing them as a fifth column. I therefore go out of my way to express my brotherhood to them. I want them to know that as a Jew and as an American I stand with them in their desire to live a devout Islamic life.

I want them to know that I admire their love of God and their devotion to their ancestral traditions. I also want them to know that I see in them my brother, a fellow child of Abraham . . .

But what shakes me to my core is when some of my Muslim brothers and sisters rejoice at the deaths of innocent Jews, particularly those who are at prayer in their yeshiva.

This is not, Shmuley notes, the way he or other respectable Jews responded when Baruch Goldstein attacked and killed Muslims in a mosque. He

condemned Goldstein as a murderer and now is both surprised and upset that his Muslim friends will not do the same.

For argument's sake, even if you're right and Israel is a terrible place, does that justify the murder of innocent boys who were studying the Torah? Has your hatred of Israel reached a point where you can no longer see the image of God in a Jew? Have you been so scarred by the conflict that even as innocent families mourn their dead students, you can dance in the streets with joy?

And if you've come to that point, can you not see that your own humanity has been compromised?

This is, indeed, shocking, but not as Shmuley Boteach might imagine. What is actually shocking here is *his* reaction, to which the only response we can think of is “ummmmm.....duh?” He is surprised by the Palestinians' wanton disregard for human life? Shaken even? Seriously?

Did he not see the clips of the very same Palestinians cheering, laughing, throwing candy upon hearing the “great” and “wonderful” news of the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon? If he didn't, we could probably find the Youtube clip for him. Does he not know that anyone who murders Jews is considered by many Palestinians and, indeed, by many Muslims throughout the world a martyr and a hero? Has he not been aware of the slow-motion destruction of Israel and its innocents by Palestinian “martyrs,” who are supported, financed, and lionized by the rest of the Arab world? Has he spent the last 40 years in a cave?

Finally, Shmuley closes with the usual platitudes, “I recognize that those who danced represent a small and extremist minority. The vast majority of Muslims are kind and God-fearing people.” Then he asks, “But why, then, do more Muslims not publicly condemn and repudiate these haters?”

The answer to this question is obvious, though Shmuley seems completely oblivious. To put it bluntly, the guy is just wrong about those with whom he is dealing. Neither he nor the Israelis nor even we Americans are dealing with “a kind and God-fearing people.” They (we) are dealing with a death-cult. It may be, as Shmuley believes, that this death-cult represents a small minority of Muslims. But right now it is the minority that holds the political power and thus also holds the ability to shape perceptions of their religion. And to pretend otherwise, not to understand this, despite all the evidence, is shockingly stupid.

Now, we don't mean here to pick on Shmuley Boteach. Nor for that matter do we mean to pick on the Democrats who have been shocked by the behavior of the Clintons during this primary contest. But their behavior in these circumstances is both relevant and, we believe, telling. Their naiveté, indeed, their appalling foolishness *in the face of overwhelming evidence*, points to a larger, more critical problem, one that is endemic to the archetypal liberal mindset. This problem is all but certain to become painfully obvious during the upcoming general election campaign and, more to the point, will affect the course of American foreign policy and global affairs, should one of the two remaining Democrats win that election.

It is, we believe, incumbent on us to warn readers here that though it might be tempting to dismiss all this as mere naiveté, that would be a mistake. The level of foolishness involved in this particular liberal pathology is so great and the resistance to wisdom and evidence so acute that one must infer that there are other dynamics at work. All of which is to suggest that this problem is not merely endemic to the liberal mindset, but intrinsic, and even an education at the school of hard knocks – such as Shmuley Boteach received last week – will not remedy the problem.

One of the principle forces affecting the liberal mindset is intellectual and foundational; it is an underlying tenet of the leftist ideologies that predetermines a certain naïve foolishness and thus

dictates a deeply flawed approach to human relations. We noted a variation of this tenet a few weeks back, when discussing Barack Obama's apparent predisposition to anti-Americanism. As we wrote, Obama believes the myth of "the Golden Age" or the "idyllic state of nature." This state of nature fable as it pertains to modern Western political ideology is, by and large, an extension of Rousseau's presupposition that "Everything is good in leaving the hands of the Creator of Things; everything degenerates in the hands of man."

Those who believe this myth, those on the political left who believe that men are intrinsically good, are inclined to see the world differently than do those of a more conservative temperament. And they are thus inclined as well to behave differently. As W.H. Auden put it nearly seventy years ago in his "Criticism In A Mass Society":

The statement, "Man is a fallen creature with a natural bias to do evil," and the statement, "Men are good by nature and made bad by society," are both presuppositions, but it is not an academic question to which one we give assent. If, as I do, you assent to the first, your art and politics will be very different from what they will be if you assent, like Rousseau or Whitman, to the second."

Specifically, those who believe Rousseau's formulation are inclined to behave accordingly and expect, at minimum, common decency from others, irrespective of any evidentiary caveats to the contrary.

In our examples, Democratic big shots are inclined to believe that the Clintons are, in fact, concerned about their party, their country, and mankind itself, more than they are about their own petty ambitions. Rabbi Shmuley and others like him are inclined to believe that Palestinians will be repulsed by the slaughter of innocents, just as they have been repulsed by such carnage. And Democratic/liberal politicians are inclined to believe that America's enemies can be reasonable; that diplomacy is the key; and that

a summit of leaders – including Ahmadinejad, Boy Assad, and Hugo Chavez – is all that is necessary to straighten out any problems that might exist in the world and to set the global community back on the proper course.

As experience has shown, this is sheer and utter madness. Maybe the Russians loved their children too, but that's not what prevented a nuclear war. And it won't be the "decency" and reasonableness of the likes of Mad Mahmoud, Osama bin Laden, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, and Hugo Chavez that resolve the world's crises.

The corollary to Rousseau's premise that "Everything is good in leaving the hands of the Creator of Things" is that it is man's institutions that screw things up and that the right institutions or the right management of existing institutions will make everything better. This brings us to the second major force underlying the liberal simple-mindedness, namely the presupposition that the "right man" (or woman) can change everything.

We spent much of the 1990s noting that Hillary Clinton – much more than her husband – was prone to Gnostic egotism, to the presumption that she understood better than anyone the key to utopia, which only she could deliver. Interestingly, in this campaign, Hillary's Gnostic tendencies have been far overshadowed by those of Barack Obama, who repeatedly tells his audiences that he is the "one" they've been waiting for. He is the one who can bring reconciliation. He is the one who can transcend traditional politics and change the country and the world. And he is the one who can sit down with thugs and murderers and convince them to be decent, honorable men.

This mindset requires a scandalous amount of arrogance and self-absorption. It is premised on the idea all can and will be well, if only a proper "savior" can be found. "Prideful" doesn't even begin to cover it. The arrogance involved here presupposes super-human qualities, namely the ability to succeed where all others have failed before.

Throughout this piece and others, we have sort of half-heartedly labeled those who fail to see evidence right in front of their faces “naïve,” for lack of a better term. But it is important to note that they are far worse than just that. “Naïveté” such as theirs is possible only if it is propelled by an all-consuming dedication to ideology and to the self. And as such, it ceases to be simple naïveté and morphs into something different, an overt recklessness.

There are those who argue that Jimmy Carter was a good and decent man who agonized over every decision and, in the end, was little more than a victim of circumstances. Not so. Carter was anything but a victim. He was reckless. He put himself – and the country – in precarious positions because of his pride, because he felt that he had the ability to do one what no other man could do. And it turned out disastrously.

Conversely, there are those who argue that George W. Bush is the very personification of arrogance and that his foreign policy is based on little more than American conceit. Perhaps. But Bush’s arrogance – if that is indeed what it is – is different from the arrogance of the left. Bush may be trying to do the impossible. He is not, however, trying to accomplish it exclusively through his own charm and guile, but rather through the application of time-honored measures of coercion. Unlike Obama or Hillary, Bush does not believe that he is the operative variable in this equation, but rather that the application of force is. The grandeur of Bush’s rhetoric and the massive scope of his democratization schemes almost certainly suggest a lack of prudence. But unlike that of his opponents on the left, Bush’s arrogance is anything but personal.

The Democratic big shots, by contrast, believed that Bill and Hillary would behave decently, because they themselves would behave decently. Rabbi Shmuley believed that the Palestinians would condemn and not cheer slaughter because he himself would condemn and not cheer slaughter. And Barack Obama believes that Ahmadinejad and Chavez will yield to superior arguments and effective cajoling because he himself would yield thusly and, more to the point, because he can argue and cajole more effectively than anyone else.

This is not naïveté. It is recklessness. It is foolish, to be sure, but it is foolishness that the leaders of men should know enough to avoid.

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