

Terrible Times



In the last issue of the *Newsletter*, I wrote of the escalating level of violence and mayhem all over the world. I cited columnist Claude Lewis who wrote “When it comes to murder, we live in a terrible time. Nearly every evening’s news program reveals a new killing. . . A day without carnage in America is accidental. It is a rarity, or perhaps more to the point, the saddest of illusions.”

As we sat worshipping on *Yom Kippur*, unbeknownst to us, ten little girls were being bound, terrorized and shot in a one-room, Amish school house in bucolic Lancaster County. As of this writing, five have died, and five are fighting for their lives.

This unspeakable crime was the third school shooting in ten days, and probably the most horrific, if it is possible to place them in a scale of horror. In its wake, there are new calls for gun control and enhanced school security. The level of fear in America has escalated. Some see this as a further indication of the decline of order in American society. Others are focused on the motive of the murderer, who then took his own life. Is it pure evil, mental illness, or society which is ultimately the culprit?

I have been touched by the dignity and resolve of the Amish, especially in the face of the onslaught of reporters, satellite trucks, and the curious of the outside world, from which they try to isolate themselves. Their dignity and faith are awe inspiring. It is humbling to see how they have reached out to comfort the family of the murderer, and how they have expressed, sincerely, their forgiveness of him. They are an example of quiet courage and hope in an era of violence and mayhem. They are an inspiration in the way they are able to accept even the evil that befalls them, without compromising their resolve to live and build for the future. We may not share their faith, but we ought to probe their ways for guidance for how we can meet the seemingly intractable challenges of the world.

At this time, more than ever, it is important to embrace life. Cindy and I went to hear Barbra Streisand in concert at the Wachovia Center in the midst of all this worldly turmoil. During the concert, she quoted from William Saroyan’s play, *The Time of Your Life*. It is a passage well worth reflecting upon as we begin a new year.

“In the time of your life, live — so that in that good time there shall be no ugliness or death for yourself or for any life your life touches. Seek goodness everywhere, and when it is found, bring it out of its hiding place and let it be free and unashamed.

Place in matter and in flesh the least of the values, for these are the things that hold death and must pass away. Discover in all things that which shines and is beyond corruption. Encourage virtue in whatever heart it may have been driven into secrecy and sorrow by the shame and terror of the world. Ignore the obvious, for it is unworthy of the clear eye and the kindly heart.

Be the inferior of no man, or of any men be superior. Remember that every man is a variation of yourself. No man’s guilt is not yours, nor is any man’s innocence a thing apart. Despise evil and ungodliness, but not men of ungodliness or evil.

In the time of your life, live — so that in that wondrous time you shall not add to the misery and sorrow of the world, but shall smile to the infinite delight and mystery of it.”

Life is wondrous. A gift. Let us “not add to the misery or sorrow of the world” but live with “infinite delight” in the ever-present mystery that we are privileged to experience.

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