

October 31, 2023



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

Image by Christine Sponchia

EGREGIOUS

By Julie Mussché

“Human suffering anywhere concerns men and women everywhere.”

ELIE WIESEL

Reflection

As shared in a prior reflection, in 2008 a group of us from all over the U.S. traveled to Israel to help celebrate a wedding. The first night, immediate family of the bride gathered at a beachside restaurant on the promenade in Tel Aviv. It was a joyous reunion of several generations, everyone excited to be together and sharing stories. Of note, the apartment my traveling companions were inhabiting was probably a mile or so from the restaurant.

Tel Aviv is a vibrant and contemporary city, a financial and technology hub with shopping districts, multi-storied apartments, an eclectic collection of architecture. The city of roughly one half million residents is diverse, with

many immigrants from all over the globe, has a youthful vigor, is densely settled and is a cultural center for the arts. Tel Aviv has a definite identity with a striking skyline, beautiful coast, and a happening vibe.

In fondly remembering my joyous sojourn in Tel Aviv, my heart is breaking as today, when I write this, is the fourth day of the war in Israel. At least two people I know have been called up to active duty, one to Gaza and the other to Golan. In my mind's eye, I see the missiles striking Tel Aviv, weapons of horrible destruction and death. Having traveled north close to the Lebanon border, toward the occupied Golan in Syria, and overlooking Jordan across the same-named river, it is surprising just how small Israel is compared with the surrounding countries. The bombs are now also falling on Gaza, all a tragedy.

Recognizing that egregious acts are not exclusive to one culture or group, how does one recognize and define evil? There are many definitions depending on the word usage, but perhaps some of the associated synonyms seem to capture it: hateful; destructive; malevolent; harmful; injurious and atrocious. As distant witnesses to evil in its many forms, how are we called to respond? Prayer appears to be a place to start. Imaginably, the small acts of goodness such as kindness and forgiveness in the day-to-day ripple out to others, if for no other reason than being an example of an alternative way of being. God has always taken a stand against evil, and one might wonder where God is in the middle of things such as war.

In an essay, *The Meaning of this War*, during World War II, Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote the following: "For evil is indivisible. It is the same in thought and in speech, in private and social life. The greatest task of our time is to take the souls of men out of the pit. The world has experienced that God is involved. Let us forever remember that the sense for the sacred is as vital to us as the light of the sun." (*Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 211) Borrowing from a hymn that I first heard in Sunday School, "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." (Dixon Loes, author)



Peace Vista - Golan Heights, Israel

Photo by Julie Mussché

For Pondering

- What is your definition of evil?
 - How do you shine your light in the world?
-

For, Prayer

Lord God of peace, hear our prayer!

We have tried so many times and over so many years to resolve our conflicts by our own powers and by the force of our arms. How many moments of hostility and darkness have we experienced; how much blood has been shed; how many lives have been shattered; how many hopes have been buried... But our efforts have been in vain.

Now, Lord, come to our aid! Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace. Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: "Never again war!"; "With war everything is lost." Instill in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace.

Lord, God of Abraham, God of the Prophets, God of Love, you created us and you call us to live as brothers and sisters. Give us the strength daily to be instruments of peace; enable us to see everyone who crosses our path as our

brother or sister. Make us sensitive to the plea of our citizens who entreat us to turn our weapons of war into implements of peace, our trepidation into confident trust, and our quarreling into forgiveness.

Keep alive within us the flame of hope, so that with patience and perseverance we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation. In this way may peace triumph at last, and may the words "division," "hatred" and "war" be banished from the heart of every man and woman. Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the word which always brings us together will be "brother," and our way of life will always be that of: Shalom, Peace, Salaam!

Amen.

POPE FRANCIS, PRAYER FOR PEACE

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