



Cowardice of the Crowd

Further Thoughts on the Shoah

Yom HaShoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, was established a national holiday by the Israeli Knesset in 1953. Shoah is the Hebrew word for “disaster” and was the term chosen to refer to the European Holocaust, when six million Jews - including over a million children - were systematically murdered by the Nazis during World War II. May God help us “never forget...”



Yom HaShoah, or “Holocaust Remembrance Day,” marks Israel’s day of commemoration for the approximately six million Jews, including over a million children, who perished as a result of the actions carried out by Nazi Germany and its accomplices. It was inaugurated in 1953 and is annually observed on the 27th day of the month of Nisan, just a few days after Passover Week in the spring. In stark contrast to the celebration of freedom commemorated during Passover, Yom HaShoah marks a very difficult time when we revisit specters of absolute evil and again ask haunting questions about the power and presence of malevolence in our world. Often we are left speechless over the cruelty and depravity of human beings. It all seems so inexplicable, so needlessly horrible, so senseless and so vile... We may feel powerless, despondent, or full of indignation, but still we ask ourselves, how *could* this have happened?

In this short article, I want to make the case that the Holocaust was made possible because of human *cowardice and self-deception*... The systematic, institutionalized, and “politically correct” murder of the Jewish people was made possible solely because people *forfeited* their God-given responsibility to live as authentic *individuals* by surrendering their will to “the crowd.” Giving up your identity to join a gang inevitably leads to fragmentation of the soul, potentially inviting in a “legion of demons.” Regardless of whether it’s a gang of thugs running an inner city neighborhood, or the pressure to keep quiet over ethical misconduct at your place of work, or the desire to feel “approved” as a good citizen of the state, or even the pressure to conform to a particular religious group, in either case, “losing yourself” in the midst of the crowd is an *evasion*, a cop-out, and a desecration of the image of God within you. Indeed following the crowd is a form of slavery where you surrender your freedom for the sake of a supposed sense of security... You become self-deceived because you no longer “own” yourself but became the ward of “another.” Becoming a member of a crowd makes you into a copy or similitude, a *shadow* rather than a person of substance.



Popular leaders know how to work and bribe the crowd - whether they are big business leaders, professional politicians, or leaders of large religious organizations. Often they have the charisma that appeals to human vanity and oratory to “tickle the ears” of those who hear them speak. Politicians and “community organizers” understand how the crowd marginalizes the individual, how the voice of reason and conscience are suppressed, thereby eradicating the conviction and character of the solitary individual. Therefore the true prophet is always “a voice crying in the wilderness,” an *outsider* to the crowd, always in collision with the world and its devices.

The crowd-pleaser, on the other hand, carefully crafts his words for the applause of the mob. The crowd-pleaser is a *flatterer* and therefore the very antithesis of the prophet. Politicians and demagogues are masters at appealing to the gut instincts and lusts of a crowd, and therefore they are inveterate liars. They entice subgroups to follow their directives, to form self-regulating gangs, and to reward those who unquestioningly accept their “group-think.” Leaders of the crowd invariably “see past” the individual and regard only numbers, general popularity, special interests, and the abstract role of “the people” in general.

The crowd mentality also occurs in various church settings, too, where the leadership esteems the approval of the crowd as more important than the needs of individual people. Indeed, it is often the case that the larger the church group, the more *bureaucratic* its portrayal of a *personal* Savior; likewise, the more the church becomes like a bureaucracy, the more it obscures the ability of the individual to be touched by the Spirit of God. Many churches today follow their pastors for the same reasons the world follows its leaders. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Every cult of personality that emphasizes the distinguished qualities, virtues, and talents of another person, even though these be of an altogether spiritual nature, is *worldly* and has no place in the Christian community; indeed, it poisons the Christian community... Where there is a crowd there is a hunger for a crowd identity and the lust to have a worldly king over them who will give them that identity” (Life Together).

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide
and the way is easy that leads to destruction,
and those who enter by it are many.
Again, the gate is narrow and the way is hard
that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

- Matt. 7:14-15



Notice that Yeshua said the path to heaven is *narrow*. It is not “the great highway” that crowds of people tread. Few go there, and even those few individuals who tread the way do so in solitude, misunderstood and often rejected by others. Ultimately the “strait gate” (στενῆς πύλης) is Yeshua Himself, who is *ha'sha'ar* (הַשַּׁעַר), the gateway to the Kingdom (John 10:7). The narrow gate is small, humble, and therefore *inconspicuous* to the adulterous crowd that seeks only “signs and wonders.” The gate is narrow, and *few* there be that find it. “If any man will open the door, I will come into him...” The sages ask, “Why is the world to come created with the letter Yod? (the least of the alphabet)? Because “the righteous which are in it are few.” The gate is narrow because we are laden with pride and need to divest ourselves of our self-will to enter through... We must come to the end of our own agenda to enter the way of God’s salvation.

Likewise the Apostle Paul wrote, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only *one* receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it” (1 Cor. 9:24). This is not a race in competition with others as much as it is a race for you to become an *individual* before God, since only “one” receives the prize. The prize is for all who run the race, but only those who run as individuals before God may obtain it... Just as an earthly race indicates perseverance and individual stamina, so each of us must be earnest in our race to God.

It is the *fear* of man that drives many of us to say and think in ways that are self-deceptive and sinful. By assigning for ourselves labels, by aligning ourselves with certain doctrines or ideologies, by engaging in certain formulaic rituals, etc., we hope to rid ourselves of the dread that we are eternally responsible for our own *personal* decisions. “Group-think” and accepting the propaganda of mass media are tools used by social engineers to enslave you. The devil’s logic is always that of mediation, compromise, *consensus*, synthesis. How many of us are willing to sell our very souls for the creature comforts vainly promised by this world and its princes? How many of us have the resolute faith to turn away from the will of the crowd to genuinely face ourselves?

The Holy Spirit speaks to *individuals*, as if your singular soul was the chief end of God’s creation. God’s words are never directed to the crowd. As Kierkegaard notes: “The truth can neither be communicated nor be received without being before the eyes of God, nor without God’s help, nor without God being involved as the middle term (mediator), since God is the truth. It can therefore only be communicated by and received by “the single individual” in contrast to the abstract, the fantastic, impersonal, “the crowd” - “the public,” which *excludes* God as the middle term - since the personal God *cannot* be the middle term in an impersonal relation. Honoring every individual human is the fear of God and the love of “the neighbor...” Yet never have I read in the Holy Scriptures this command: “You shall love the crowd;” even less: “You shall recognize in the crowd the court of last resort in relation to the “truth.” It is clear that to love the crowd is the way to all sorts of temporal and worldly advantage, yet it is *untruth*; for the crowd *is* untruth” (That Solitary Individual).



We must *never forget* what happened to the Jewish people under Hitler. The Holocaust was made possible because people timidly *refused to stand apart* from the group to serve as bold witnesses of the truth. We must ask God for courage. The great risk of our present age is the revival of political fascism that once again attempts to again control, disarm, and violate people's freedom all for the supposed greater good of the "state." We must remember that silence in the face of evil is itself evil: "First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me" (Martin Niemöller).

"The greatest evil is not now done ... in concentration camps and labour camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried, and minuted) in clean, carpeted, warmed and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices. Hence, naturally enough, my symbol for Hell is something like the bureaucracy of a police state or the office of a thoroughly nasty business concern." — C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

There are instances when we must be willing to sacrifice our lives rather than to violate a commandment of Torah, such as being forced to murder someone upon pain of death. In other words, it is better to undergo *kiddush Hashem* (die as a martyr) than to commit certain sins, such as murder, incest, or being forced to renounce our faith. In these cases the sages say *yehareg ve'al ya'avur* (יִהְיֶה נָא לִי יָעֹבֵד), "be killed rather than transgress." May the LORD God of Israel help each of us to "remember and never forget" that we must personally stand for the truth - even should that mean *kiddush Hashem* for us. Amen.

