

# Shalom TV **OPINION**

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## A TRANSCENDING REVERENCE FOR LIFE, EVEN FOR THE LIFE OF ONE'S ENEMY

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In the hours following the announcement that American forces had killed Osama Bin Laden, I experienced two emotions. On the one hand, I was very glad that we had finally found the man who had engineered the horror of 9/11, as well as a number of other deadly assaults on American service personnel abroad. I was especially happy for the families of the victims of 9/11 and imagined how they must be feeling a profound sense of relief, or perhaps what President Obama described as "justice being done."



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On the other hand, certain elements surrounding his death made me uncomfortable--and this discomfort has only increased as the days pass.

I was very uncomfortable about the mood of celebration, as if we had just won an international sporting event. The chants of "USA, USA," outside the White House, or at Citizens Bank Park where the Mets were playing the Phillies, were not befitting of the fact that we had just taken a human life. If, at the Mets game, the crowd had risen from their seats and given President Obama a two-minute standing ovation and then had sat down, I would have felt very different.

For me, the level of celebration was unseemly for two reasons.

First, it had taken us ten years to bring Osama Bin Laden to justice. No one had expected the United States would be unable to find him for an entire decade, during which time he further developed Al Qaeda and virtually left the operational side of the organization. We, the US, had killed him in the end. But a sense of proportion begged for a more subdued response.

And more to the point, we Americans are a people and a culture with a reverence for life. Osama Bin Laden was our hated enemy, but he was still a human being.

The Jewish Tradition makes this point in many rabbinic teachings. A Jewish legend describes how at the Red Sea, when the angels in heaven began a victory celebration as the Egyptian soldiers drowned, God commands them to stop their dancing and singing. God reminds them that even though the Egyptians were the hated enemy who had participated in Israelite slavery, they were still human beings--created "in the image of God."

In rabbinic lore, the Egyptians are said to have drowned two hundred newborn Israelite infant boys each day; the Egyptians anticipated the darkness of the Holocaust in their slaughter of Jewish children.

And yet, we are told to refrain from celebration.

When Jewish families celebrate the seder service in their homes on Passover, and tell the story of the Ten Plagues with which God punished Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, Jews are to take ten drops of wine from their cups to symbolize how Jewish joy is diminished by the death and suffering of even their hated enemy who had enslaved them.

And on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish celebration of the New Year, when Jews are to reflect upon their own moral failings in the year just ended, and are called to repentance with the blast of the shofar (the ram's horn), one tradition likens the sound of the shofar to the "wail of Sisera's mother." Sisera was a Canaanite general who fought against the Israelites in the Land of Israel during the days of Deborah, the only female Judge to govern the Israelites. Sisera was defeated in battle and escaped, only to be killed by a woman named Yael who drove a tent pin through his head.

Sisera was an avowed enemy of the Israelites. And yet on Rosh Hashanah, Jews are reminded to feel the pain of Sisera's mother--for whom the pain of the loss of a son was as real as it would be for any parent who loses a child in battle (or in any other manner).

The Jewish Tradition is unapologetic when it comes to self-defense and punishing those who inflict pain and death upon innocent human beings. When Jews speak of "Jewish values," self-defense and fighting back against those who strike out against us are primary Jewish values.

But one is never to forget the sanctity of human life and the tragedy when, in self defense, one must take another life--even the life of one's enemy.

Lyz Glick is the widow of Jeremy Glick. Jeremy was one of the heroes of United Flight 93 who, along with a number of other incredibly courageous Americans, brought down that hijacked plane in the fields of Pennsylvania so that it could not crash into another building (such as the White House or Capitol) and inflict additional death and destruction against innocent Americans. In high school, Jeremy had been a national-caliber wrestler, and an all-state soccer player at the Saddle River, New Jersey Jewish Day School. On September 11, 2001, he was returning home to his wife and three month old baby daughter.



**Lyz Glick**

I spoke to Lyz Glick after Osama Bin Laden's death to see if she wished to share her feelings on Shalom TV. Gracefully, she declined to speak publicly. But she did want to speak to me so that I could relay her thoughts.

Lyz Glick described how upsetting it was for her to see Americans celebrating the death of another human being, even Osama Bin Laden. "We must lead by example," Lyz said simply. For Lyz, the thought of innocent people dying in Iraq, in Afghanistan--and of American servicemen and women who are called upon to make the supreme sacrifice--should be a constant reminder of how sacred every life is. And for Lyz, who told me she had not thought about Bin Laden for years, his death had nothing to do with "closure" or "justice." Rather, for Lyz Glick, who had managed to find peace in her own heart despite a pain that would never leave her, the dominant emotion was the feeling that "God will execute justice."

President Obama decided to send brave Navy Seals into Osama Bin Laden's Pakistani compound because America had a moral right to punish the man responsible for the enormous pain and suffering he had brought in his wanton murder of Americans.

We Americans should applaud the President, US intelligence, and the Navy Seals. Then we simply need to nod to each other in a gesture of silent satisfaction, and then turn the page with an ongoing reverence for all human life.

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