

OPINION/EDITORIAL

In Devastated Manhattan, Jews Sharing Grief of All New Yorkers

By Michael J. Jordan

New York (JTA) — In the carnage of Manhattan, some Jews immediately placed September 11's terror attacks in the context of the Middle East conflict, while others felt them first and foremost as New Yorkers.

On Tuesday night, hundreds of New York Jews joined their Christian neighbors to share sadness, rage and disbelief at an interfaith prayer vigil with the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew.

A decade ago, the Methodist church had opened its doors to the 2,000 families of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun when the conservative shul's roof collapsed one night.

The two still share the stone neo-Classical church on the Upper West Side, with BJ, as it is known, holding Friday night and Saturday morning services there.

At the church Tuesday, audience members sobbed or sniffled, parents squeezed their children tightly and spouses stroked each other's arms.

Christian prayers and hymns, such as "Amazing Grace," alternated with Hebrew psalms and songs, separated by long pauses of silence and reflection.

The rabbis and reverends spoke before a large cloth banner that concealed a crucifix. In brown-on-beige lettering, the banner read: "How Good It Is When Brothers and Sisters Dwell Together in Harmony."

As Rabbi Felicia Sol said, "It's also good when brothers and sisters dwell together even when there is no one."

"We are responsible... a faith community, to explain whatever emotions need to be expressed: our prayers and pain and anger," Sol later told JTA. "Sometimes, the best response is only to be together."

Outside the church, New York was eerily quiet.

Streets mostly were empty, shops had closed early, and police officers were stationed on virtually every street corner.

On the corner outside St. Paul and St. Andrew, one middle-aged Jewish woman was crying beside her friend.

Donna Cohen, the one overcome by emotion, focused on U.S.

reaction.

"I say kill the bastards," said Cohen, a native New Yorker visiting from St. Louis, where she now lives. "And I'm the ultra-liberal Democrat, who would never say that."

Her friend, Marlene Altman, said she suspected the terrorist attack was a response to last week's U.N. World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, where the United States had walked out to protest the harsh rhetorical attacks on Israel.

"There was a feeling that the Palestinians or terror groups would not be happy with this administration because of its support for Israel," Altman said.

"It was quick retaliation."

Cohen, though, feared that middle America may question why the United States is standing so strongly beside Israel.

"I'm afraid that someone's going to wake up tomorrow morning and say 'It's the Jews' fault,'" she said.

But Cohen says she was reassured by an Italian American friend, who predicted any backlash would be against the Arab world.

The friend even predicted that Arab Americans might experience the same type of suspicions as were cast on Japanese Americans after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

Much will depend on how President Bush publicly interprets these events, observers say.

Bush could seize the opportunity to emphasize why Washington stands by democratic allies like Israel, some said, or he could tap America's isolationist vein in the past.

Near Cohen and other younger Jewish men debated how they now would explain to Americans Israel's actions in its conflict with the Palestinians.

"Now you know what it feels like. So I don't want to hear anymore criticism about Israel's 'assassinations' of Palestinians," one of the men said rhetorically.

At PK Furriers in midtown Manhattan, two men also compared New York's situation to Israel's.

For those who think this may build sympathy for Israel, Steven

Pochtar said, "It's a terrible way to think, because this is a tragedy. What will hopefully happen is that this will wake up the president, the secretary of state and others that terrorism is a terrible thing and has to be addressed."

Company vice president Larry Kowlowitz, however, was outraged.

"Our country has been brought to its knees by terrorists. It's time for the dog to wag the tail, not for the tail to wag the dog," Kowlowitz said.

"We should use our muscle and make these smaller nations understand that we have the power. Like the Bible says, 'An eye for an eye.' Even if innocent people are killed."

"What will that accomplish?" Pochtar cut in. "Then you'll have more people hating us."

To which Kowlowitz responded, "They're never going to stop hating us."

Perhaps more than others, Israelis in New York can relate to what happened Tuesday.

Three young Israelis, recently finished with army duty and traveling the world, were speaking Hebrew on Tuesday on the Manhattan subway.

They had just arrived last week from Bogota, Colombia, and wondered what effect Tuesday's catastrophe would have on the American psyche.

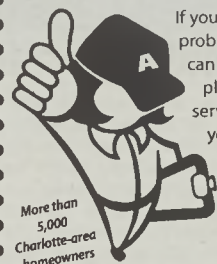
"I think it will shake up the American citizens so that they will see what our life is like," said 25-year-old Alon, from Tel Aviv. "Now you'll understand what it's like when we kill some Arabs and they call us Nazis. What can you do about terrorism?"

But one of his friends, a 23-year-old also named Alon, suggested that terrorism might not impact here as in Israel.

He said he was surprised to see some Americans sunbathing in Central Park on Tuesday afternoon, just hours after the attacks.

"For a short time, it will affect America, but this is American culture and everything passes so quickly," the Eilat native said. "Something else will come along and Americans will go back to their normal lives." ☆

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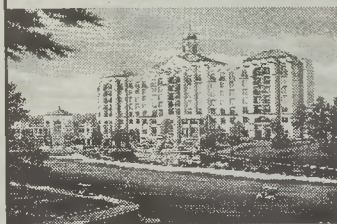


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Oslo

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dignity and security. ..."

Special provisions: The Palestinian people shall hold free and democratic elections, with international observers.

There shall be a five-year transitional period which will begin upon Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area. Permanent status negotiations will commence no later than the third year of the interim period.

Arrangements were to be made for the Palestinian Council to set up certain government bodies, following which Israeli forces would withdraw from the areas specified.

Cooperation was called for between the two sides in matters affecting water, electricity, finance, trade, social welfare, environmental protection, communications and media and other areas.

There are further details regarding establishment of a Palestinian police force and the authority of

the Palestinian Council in the areas vacated by Israel. While not in the text of the agreement, it must be noted that Israel presented the Palestinian Authority with 30,000 weapons for the police force.

All matters of dispute were to be settled by agreement between the responsible authorities of the two sides.

The agreement called for cooperation in regional development in the mutual interests of both sides.

It was understood that subsequent to the Israeli withdrawal (from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area) Israel will continue to be responsible for national security and for internal security and public order of settlements and Israelis.

Following the DOP, several subsequent agreements were reached, as called for in the original document. We cite some of the provisions agreed to:

The Palestinians will act to prevent terror against Israelis in the areas under their control. ... Both Israel and the Palestine Authority

may ask for transfer of suspects that fall under their jurisdiction. ... The jurisdiction of the Palestine Authority does not include Jerusalem, settlements and military locations. ... On further redeployment, the Israel Defense Forces will withdraw from the populated areas of the West Bank, the six cities - Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarem, Kalkilya, Ramallah and Bethlehem - and 450 towns and villages. And so it was done.

Both sides undertook to strengthen understanding and tolerance, prevent incitement and hostile propaganda and to use the legal means at their disposal to prevent incitement on the part of groups or individuals. Both sides pledged that their educational systems will act to advance peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

That was Oslo, together with the subsequent ancillary agreements. But somewhere along the line something went wrong. Why? The answer is another long story. ☆