

Night of Infamy

By Joseph Aaron, Chicago Jewish News

Chicago — No, September 11 was not December 7. It was November 9.

Many have compared the Attack on America to that other American day of infamy, the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

It's easy to see why. Like

December 7, September 11 was a sneak attack on American soil, something that killed thousands.

But trying to understand what happened on September 11 should involve more than the first thing that comes to mind. We need to apply the lessons of history as we move into an uncertain future, but we need to be sure to learn the right history.

Which is why the more apt comparison is to say that what happened on September 11, 2001 is what happened on November 9, 1938.

Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, the night the Nazis tore through Germany burning synagogues, smashing the windows of Jewish businesses, beating, arresting and killing Jews.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was a traditional military one. Air and naval forces of the Empire of Japan, flying the Japanese flag, attacked a military base of the United States.

We knew where they came from. We knew who they were. We knew what to do about it. And we knew that, while Japanese culture was different from ours, the war to come would be one we would be familiar with, knew where it would be fought and how.

And so, I don't think we can learn anything from December 7 that will be of use to us in the war that began on September 11.

There is, however, much we can learn from November 9.

Kristallnacht was an act of terror unlike any the world had ever seen. It was directed not at soldiers, but at civilians, not at military installations, but at places of business. It was aimed at every single man, woman and child of one single people, making no distinction between them, making targets of all of them. Its goal was the extermination of a civilization, of a way of life.

Just like September 11.

The more than 6,000 killed in the attacks of September 11 were everyday people going about their everyday lives, people who provided no reason to be so hated, did nothing to be so targeted, except to be who they were. Americans. Just like the Jews of November 9.

Most of those killed in the World Trade Center, like most in the Holocaust, will have no final resting place, for there is literally nothing left of them.

Most of the six million simply vanished, without a trace, burned to death, gassed to death, ashes to the wind, vapor into the air. What were human beings, became puffs of smoke.

My zayde was murdered in the Holocaust. And my bubbe. And yet neither had a funeral, there is nowhere I can go to put flowers on their yahrzeit. They don't even have a yahrzeit, for no one knows when they died, or where.

In that respect, at least, the victims at the World Trade Center are different than those of the Holocaust. There is a date and there is a place and that is something.

But like the Jews of the Holocaust, those 6,000 who died on September 11, also vanished into the air, burned to death.

crushed to a powder, a "puff of pink vapor" as the authorities put it. Ashes. Into the wind.

On November 9, Jews first truly saw the face of evil in the reflection of the broken glass of Jewish shops. On September 11, Americans first truly saw the face of evil in the reflection of the broken glass of collapsed towers.

What November 9 teaches us that we need to remember as we move forward from September 11 is that anything is possible, nothing is beyond the imagination of those driven by the darkness of true evil.

Who could have foreseen that breaking the windows of 800 Jewish businesses on one night would lead to places like Auschwitz and Treblinka and Dachau, would lead to the systematic extermination of six million men, women and children in factories of death?

At the moment, we don't want to accept what the destruction of two towers on one morning might lead to, want to believe that surely the perpetrators couldn't conjure up anything more horrific.

To do that is to not give the devil his due. To do that is to not learn from Kristallnacht. What we must learn is that just as the world would never be safe until the Nazis were completely defeated, so it is with Hitler's heirs, Osama bin Laden and all terrorists.

The second lesson we must learn is that the terrorists, like the Nazis, do not simply want to conquer those they regard as the enemy, don't simply want to take their land or their possessions. They want to kill them, all of them. If Hitler wanted to control the world, there was no reason for him to kill all the Jews, no need, indeed no rationale.

He just wanted to kill the Jews, all of them. We don't want to believe it can be that simple, still look for some better explanation, underlying reason. But some things must be understood for what they are. We need to see evil in order to defeat it.

So it is with Osama bin Laden. He isn't doing this for the Palestinians or because the Saudis are corrupt or because he hates Israel or because he hates America for loving Israel. Osama bin Laden wants to rid the world of all who are not "true" Muslims, kill us all. We need not look for complicated explanations or underlying causes. We dance around that essential truth at our peril.

The third lesson we need to learn is that for all the talk about grand coalitions, for all the grand

statements of support from world governments, the United States must understand that, like the Jews of the Holocaust, this is a fight in which we will be on our own.

Despite Kristallnacht, despite the extermination camps, no one helped the Jews, including the United States. Many worked against us, many more turned away, did nothing.

America will not be as alone as the Jews were and America, unlike the Jews, is very powerful, has weapons with which to fight. But we must not fool ourselves that because of what has been done to us, that others will help us.

Sure, many will sign on, go through some motions, some will even offer some real help. In exchange for some real reward or to avoid some real price.

Japan has changed a lot since Pearl Harbor, but the world hasn't changed very much since Kristallnacht.

And so, we must be ready to make this fight our own, to not wait for others or depend on others or give in to the extortionist demands of fair weather friends like Saudi Arabia, whose price for their support is defamation of Israel.

We must be ready to bear the burdens, do what is right just because it is right, even as most of the nations of the world stay on the sidelines, pay lip service, try to figure out the best advantage for them in all this.

When it comes right down to it, despite the horror of September 11, there will be few truly standing shoulder to shoulder with us, few on whom we can truly count. Just as the Jews found after November 9, found when not one Allied plane dropped one bomb on Auschwitz.

And so America needs to cling tight to those who will truly be with us. In the end, in essence, it will be the job of the United States, the United Kingdom and the State of Israel to fight this war, to win this war. For in the end, most will say this is America's problem, just as it said this is the Jews' problem, after Kristallnacht.

Just as it has been saying about today's manifestation of Hitlerism, the terrorists. As long as they were just blowing up Israeli kids waiting to get into a disco and pregnant Jewish women having lunch in a Jerusalem pizzeria, terrorism was the Jews' problem.

September 11, 2001 showed us that the Jews' problem is now the world's. ☆




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events both on a theological and historical level, especially after the terrorist attack on September 11. "The study sessions have given me a clarity of the issues that are most troubling. I can now articulate my thoughts with confidence and knowledge," said one of the long time participants.

The program was established in order to allow young Jewish professionals to connect with their Jewish heritage. ☆

Hesh Epstein

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Shabbat games and stories. Ohr HaTorah conducts junior congregation every Shabbat morning for children age seven and older.

The November Shabbaton will

Farbman on TK

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adopted a tree, which they observe and draw. Science inside the classroom is ongoing: the children observe vegetable roots grow, measure a carrot top over time, and predict what will happen if grapes are left out for two weeks.

Wanda Huntley speaks lovingly about her class. She has taught at JPS for two years, and in preschools for a total of 14 years. This experience comes after earning a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Education. She has two daughters, one in high school and one at Chapel Hill.

Her students are in for a wonderful year in the Transitional Kindergarten class. ☆

TK or not TK?

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It is not another year of a four-year-old preschool program nor is it a "glorified" four-year-old class with some extra activities thrown in. Rather, the program is based on the premise that it is our obligation to answer and satisfy your child's need for continued intellectual stimulation. It is also our obligation to attend to your child's developmental needs. For example, if the child lacks adequate strength and development of the small muscles in the hands, we will consult, work with, and/or provide the services of an occupational therapist.

We encourage you to be an advocate for your child and for the placement that would allow him/her to truly thrive. Your child's welfare is certainly the most compelling reason for careful consideration.

For further information, please call Fern Sanderson at 704-364-8395. ☆

be held in conjunction with the Jewish Cultural Arts Festival in Charlotte during the month of November. The Shabbaton is open to the community. Reservations are required for the event. Please call Ohr HaTorah at 704-366-3984. ☆