



ZAKA

YEHUDA MESHI-ZAHAV

ZAKA CHAIRMAN AND FOUNDER

As the terror attacks continue on an almost daily basis in Israel, a new debate about medical ethics has taken centre stage. In mid-December, the Israel Medical Association's Ethics Committee issued a directive that patients are to be prioritized on the basis of medical considerations only. The new guidelines came as a result of a petition brought by Physicians for Human Rights, which claimed that Israel was acting in gross violation of international medical ethics and human rights at terror attack sites.

Until now, Israel's emergency forces had been working on the principle that "charity begins at home" - first we treat the victim and then we treat the terrorist.

While clearly ZAKA volunteers follow this internationally accepted guideline at road accidents and mass casualty incidents, which constitute the largest part of our work, we cannot apply the same directive to terror sites.

Why, you may ask? How does this guideline translate into today's complex reality in Israel?

Quite simply, this means that first responders to a terror attack (such as ZAKA volunteers or MDA paramedics) are required to treat a critically wounded terrorist before treating less-severely injured victims.

Let me give you two examples:

When ZAKA Chief of Operations Haim Weingarten arrived at the site of a car-ramping attack at the entrance to Jerusalem, he was faced with the following scenario: The terrorist, who had been shot in his car, still showed signs of life even though he had gun wounds to his head. It was clear beyond any doubt that the carnage at the site was caused by the terrorist. The meat cleaver on the front seat left little to the imagination - this could have been a much more serious and deadly attack.

On the road, lay a toddler in a stroller who had been run over by the terrorist, with a very serious wound to the leg. As Haim Weingarten said in a radio interview on the matter: "And you are asking me who I treated? The toddler, of course."

About a week later, ZAKA volunteer Haim Foxman arrived at the scene of a stabbing

attack at the Jaffa Gate. Once again, he was faced with a similar scenario. He also treated the severely injured victim at the expense of the critically wounded terrorist. His post on Facebook read: "For those of you are wondering, when I arrived at the scene of the terror attack at Jaffa Gate, I offered assistance to the stabbing victims first. No! I did not treat the terrorist, even though his condition was critical".

Foxman's posting on social media was shared and liked by thousands of people, who all expressed support for his stance.

However, neither Foxman nor Weingarten were acting on their own initiative. They are both volunteers with ZAKA Jerusalem, veterans of countless terror attacks and paramedics who work according to halacha and the directives of the ZAKA Rabbinical Council.

ZAKA follows the moral compass of halacha, dealing with complex issues related to honouring the dead (kavod hamet) in keeping with Jewish law and guided by rabbinical advice.

Even though ZAKA is an integral part of Israel's emergency response service, with 3,000 volunteers working 24/7 throughout Israel, we have taken an unequivocal decision on the matter.

We direct ZAKA volunteers to first treat the victims of a terror attack - without blinking an eye. Only after they have given medical assistance, should they begin treating the murderous terrorist who carried out the

attack. In spite of the ethical code that says one should treat the most severely injured first, one should know that even morality has its boundaries. If we do not make this distinction, we lose our direction. Even in Jewish law it says "He who is merciful to the cruel, will end up being cruel to the merciful".

It was that same moral compass that persuaded ZAKA to reassess its policy regarding the disposal of a terrorist's body. Following numerous requests from citizens who saw it is sacrilegious to wrap the remains in body bags that carry the ZAKA logo, we made the decision in October, 2015 to wrap the remains of terrorists in black bags.

ZAKA is an organization entrusted with honouring the dead. Man is made in the divine image - all men, and therefore ZAKA carries out its mission in Israel and around the world with dignity and sensitivity, irrespective of religion, race or creed. But when it comes to murderous and brutal terrorists, we too must know how to make a separation between victim and murderer.

If you would like more information please go to: info@zakafoundation.org or www.zakafoundation.org

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CALL'EM

LINDA SHAPIRO

The Israel National News recently reported that the desecrated Jewish cemetery in the coastal city of Oran had been demolished. The last fragment of Algeria's once vibrant Jewish community, established during the 14th century and expanded after the Spanish expulsion, had been annihilated.

In the 18th century, Jews began to experience anti-Semitism that peaked during World War II under the pro-Nazi Vichy government. Throughout the 1950s, rioters attacked Jews and looted their property. In the 1960s, stripped of citizenship and protection, Jews fled en masse. In 1975, Oran's magnificent Great Synagogue was converted into a mosque and by the mid-2000s, Algeria was a Jew-free-zone. Mission accomplished.

Reading the report, tears trickled down my cheeks. After so many years, my connection with Oran remained vivid and inspiring.

During the 1970s and 1980s, I worked at the Cannes Film Festival with the Canadian government contingent to promote our cinema to the world. It was an extraordinary experience, a unique opportunity to meet people from around the globe and be part of the glitz'n'glam of the French Riviera.

Along with countless responsibilities, my focus throughout my first three festivals was mastering the politics of the place and navigating the French psyche. By my fourth festival, my antennae were honed and my wow factor had dissipated. Too much pleasure can become no pleasure at all. I craved something substantial with a longer shelf life.

One Friday night, I decided to skip the star-studded gala'n'feast to attend Shabbos services at an Orthodox synagogue in Cannes. My colleagues were shocked - and so was I - because my connection to Yiddishkeit was so vague.

The old shul was small, wooden benches, ornate ceiling, and drenched in the passion and pain of Jewish history. I sat in the women's balcony with a few surprised ladies. After services, the Rabbi introduced himself, extended a gracious welcome, and invited me to his home for the Shabbos meal.

In the balmy May air, walking the cobblestone streets with Rabbi Zini and his sons, I felt airlifted into distant time zone. The family lived on the fifth floor of an old building. In darkness, the men confidently climbed every step as I stumbled behind.

The apartment was small, with a large elegantly appointed dining table laden with stunning flowers and colourful foods. The

walls were covered with Jewish artifacts, exquisite fabrics and rugs, paintings and photographs of elderly rabbis. The air was filled with exotic smells, comforting warmth and an amazing radiance. This was my first Orthodox Shabbos meal.

The Rabbi's wife and daughters greeted me so affectionately, as if I were a newfound relative. Everybody asked about my life and ancestry, and I asked about theirs. For generations, the Zini's and extended family lived in Algeria. Rabbi Zini, the Chief Rabbi of Oran before fleeing to France, told captivating stories about his native country, Jews and Arabs, and Divine intervention.

Overjoyed that I abandoned the Festival for Shabbos, everybody wanted see me again, especially their mischievous youngest son who I lovingly called "my little monkey." When I explained my intense 24/7 workload and devotion to my career, his children were puzzled, unable to grasp the mindset of a non-observant Jew.

Rabbi Zini, a man of the world, smiled knowingly. Gently, without malice, he explained that his adherence to Torah made him a free man, while my rejection of it made me a slave. His profound words pierced my neshama.

Eager to experience Oran and Torah wisdom, I came the next Friday, visited when the Festival ended, and returned

for many more years. Eventually, the Canadian contingent was cancelled and real life took over. I never saw Rabbi Zini again.

After I became Torah observant, I wanted to show him the real me and express my gratitude for planting the seed. Yet another well-meaning action that never actualized itself!

In 2000, about 20 years after my last Festival, I was in London in a boutique in Golders Green where I met a delightful lady from Persia. She invited me for Shabbos lunch. At the table, I discovered that her niece married Rabbi Zini's youngest son, "my little monkey."

Rabbi Zini passed away many years ago. Good that he didn't read about his beloved Oran, extinguished forevermore.

Linda Shapiro is an author, editor and public relations consultant. In addition to her long-running column in Perspectives entitled Frum Now On, she has authored several non-fiction books and written a variety of columns for magazines, newspapers and trade publications. Her broad editorial background includes development editor for a major book publisher and retailer. She has provided public relations and marketing services to a wide range of public, private and not-for-profit corporate clients in Canada, the US and France. A graduate of the University of Toronto and the Faculty of Education, she has taught at the high school and community college levels. In 1991, she became Torah observant. lindashapiro@rogers.com