

# Dumb and Dumber

Every time you think religious leaders can't get any more dumb, they get dumber!

So Katrina was punishment for the Gaza withdrawal was it? "Hurricanes hardly happen", but why didn't one turn up off the Gaza coast instead? Sometimes I really wonder what the Almighty thinks about the way some rabbis make our religion into a laughingstock. And it doesn't help that other religions have equally challenged leaders.

A few months ago the clerics of the world were all busy claiming that the tsunami was God's punishment for whichever was their favorite enemy at the time. Now you will have heard that Katrina was punishment for Afghanistan, Iraq and Christian Crusaders. It was punishment for gay marriage, pornography, atheism, slavery, killing Aztecs, Incas and Red Indians, not to mention Monica Lewinsky and Hugh Heffner.

It is one thing to believe that God intervenes in human affairs. It is one thing to claim that we need to learn lessons from every catastrophe. But it is quite another thing to say, "You know, guys, I am privy to Heavenly information, and it was personally revealed to me via the Holy Spirit that God Himself nudged Katrina off its original course with the precise intention of teaching New Orleans a real lesson for all that decadent jazz down there."

Sadly, our religion is made a mockery of by other jokers. Here's a report from The Forward, a Jewish newspaper in the USA:

*The Orthodox Union, representing 1000 congregations in North America, sent an urgent letter to the Israeli Supreme Court urging it to forbid Prime Minister Sharon's government from destroying the synagogues from 21 recently evacuated Jewish settlements in Gaza. In its letter, the OU. . .argued that bulldozing the sanctuaries would violate Jewish Law and put synagogues in the Diaspora in jeopardy. The President of the OU said the organization (which is the world's largest certifier of kosher foods) was supporting the preparation of a report alleging that Sharon's government repeatedly violated the civil rights of disengagement supporters.*

Now, I understand why the Knesset or frustrated Cabinet members should want to make useless gestures in pursuit of political capital. But what sort of stupid gesture was the OU's? Was it the frustrated, futile, angry act of American Modern Orthodoxy that so blindly allied itself with the Gaza settlers and now feels the need to assert itself? Are there no greater issues in life in Israel today to be addressed? Did the OU really think it better to have the synagogues desecrated in the crudest way by howling mobs of Palestinian youth, instead of an efficient, if sad, demolition by Israeli contractors (perhaps with pieces to sell to those who care for buildings more

than people)? And if the argument was that the Israeli Government should reconstruct them elsewhere, who would pay? And wouldn't the money be better spent combating poverty? Priorities, my dear!

And here's another jewel from a different North American journal of Jewish juvenilia, The Jewish Press:

*As the Lijensker Rebbe was deeply pained by the appalling condition of the eternal resting place of Jaroslav, he joined Rabbi Mayer Gabbai, an expert in cemetery rehabilitation, and planned to rebuild the Ohel (Sepulcher) and restore its glory. The cemetery is under the watchful eye of the local authority. A formal application would have been denied without consideration.*

In the darkness of the night, Rabbi Gabbai and the Lijensker Rebbe excavated around the gravesite. After he discovered the foundations, an architect was employed to draw up plans for the rebuilding. In order to avoid detection and eventual interference, all building efforts had to be carried out in the darkness of the night. Supplies had to be brought in under several subterfuges so that an onlooker would not understand what was underway.

A team of experienced roofers had to be covertly recruited, smuggled into the cemetery in the middle of the night and complete the work before sunrise. All night activities had to be scheduled on evenings that had no other local events. Of course, after completion of the Ohel, its detection was only a matter of time. Literally only a few days after the cement dried, the complaint was filed with a notice of impending destruction. The Lijensker Rebbe quickly mobilized all his contacts and brought as much international and diplomatic pressure as possible to avert the second destruction of this saintly Ohel, and at the very last moment the municipal order to demolish the Ohel was rescinded.

So if he had so much influence why not use it BEFOREHAND?!!

Have you noticed that there are sections of the Ultra-Orthodox world that seem more concerned with the dead than the living? Part of it is, of course, traditional reverence for the remains of spiritual giants. Part of it is misplaced nostalgia for the imagined perfection of the ghettos of the past. But why can't half the energy that's put into the dead be applied to alleviating many of the pressures and limitations that too many living Jews suffer from simply through religious inertia that refuses to get off its butt and use tools provided within our constitution to help some people who could benefit from lenient or innovative ruling?

But there's another issue here. It's the paradigm of, "To hell with the Law of the Land, let's see what we can away with. Let's fiddle and hopefully we'll find a way of hanging on to our ill-gotten gains." It may be harmless enough over petty bureaucrats and graves in Belarus or the Ukraine, but it's

less so over fiddling social security, illegal real estate practices and devious business dealings that ought not to be encouraged or praised when ill-gotten gains get allocated to yeshivas and kollels while rebbes turn a blind eye.

There is something sick in the minds of too many outwardly religious people wherever you look. It always amazes me that so much good and wonderful work is done, nevertheless, and that there are so many really good, spiritual souls that have succeeded in rising above the murk that surrounds them.

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