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Opinion

Letter to Jason Alexander: OneVoice Off Key

by Frimet Roth

Today is my daughter, Malki's, 18th birthday. I won't be buying her a cake or a present. Friends will not be coming over, nor will we be singing her any birthday songs.

Instead, I am writing to you to commemorate the day her life began — because that life ended two years ago.

My beautiful, gentle, kind child was murdered by a Palestinian terrorist. She was standing in line with her best friend, Michal, waiting for a pizza. It was the middle of the summer school break, and the Sbarro pizzeria was packed with children and entire families.

Death came immediately for Malki, or so the coroners told my sons who identified her body at the morgue. Her friend, Michal, hung on for a few hours before dying in a local hospital.

I feel you ought to know about their murders and my pain. Ever since you chose to involve yourself in the OneVoice organization and to advise us on how to achieve peace, you obligated yourself to hear about my Malki.

OneVoice's sound-bite version of this conflict is misleading. Enticing, no doubt, but grossly inaccurate. Crucial facts have been omitted, and it's easy to see why. They punch holes in the attractive solution your minders have sold you — the solution you are peddling to us.

First, contrary to your claims in a local press interview Mr. Alexander, most Palestinians do not favor a peaceful solution over a continuation of the fighting. In a poll conducted in October, 77 percent of Palestinians supported the current intifada, and 68 percent would like to see attacks against Israelis resumed.

Sixty-one percent of respondents backed the use of suicide bomb attacks against Israeli civilians. A full 83 percent said that either terrorism and negotiations should go hand in hand, or that the Palestinian Authority should stop negotiating and fully support the terrorist campaign.

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And how many of them want the Palestinian Authority to honor the Oslo accord obligations and abandon violence? How many want to see the conflict resolved solely through bilateral talks? Thirteen percent. Is that the "silent majority" OneVoice is referring to?

These findings are the results of a poll conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, a Palestinian organization. If you were, in fact, aware of these statistics, you may have heard the popular rationalization for them: The Palestinians, so it goes, are desperate. They have been compelled to resort to violent means by the conditions of their existence.

Let me tell you a bit about desperation. It's something with which I am intimately familiar. At times, it is triggered in me by a recurrent dream where my Malki somehow returns to me safe and sound. In my dream, I am baffled, but I caress and kiss her ecstatically. Then I wake up — desperate.

Then there are the photographs of my Malki cuddling her retarded 8-year-old sister, whom she helped me feed, bathe, dress and exercise. I have one in my wallet. Sometimes when hunting for my driver's license, I see it — and become desperate.

At those moments, I wonder how much longer I can bear the intense longing for her. But somehow, I never consider packing a guitar case with explosives, the way my daughter's murderer did. I never contemplate heading for a crowded Palestinian market to snuff out innocent lives — ever. And I'm no saint. I'm just human. Moral human beings do not commit such acts.

Would you have us make one-sided concessions to people who flout that morality? Perhaps the Palestinians you've had contact with have convinced you that they will cease all acts of terror if we Israelis relinquish the land captured in '67 — in a war launched by our four invading Arab neighbors.

They haven't convinced me. At Camp David in August 2000, Israel's then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered them 90 percent of the land they are now clamoring for — minus the fighting and bloodshed. But they rejected it flat out.

A few weeks later in October 2000, they unveiled their alternative: this intifada. Then, in January 2001 at Taba, Israel offered 96 percent of that land. Once again, they rejected the offer and resumed their intifada.

OneVoice insists that the overwhelming majority of people on both sides espouse moderate views. That an "extremist minority on both sides has drowned out the voice of that majority of people."

We have a pithy Hebrew response to such wishful thinking: halevai. Roughly translated that's: if only it were so.

With 75 percent of Palestinians supporting the suicide bombing at the Maxim restaurant in Haifa, does it seem that way to you? That was the attack in October 2003 that snuffed out 20 lives — Israeli Arabs and Jews eating lunch on a Saturday afternoon.



Do you think there is anyone around who craves peace more than I do — an Israeli mother who has buried one precious daughter?

It is noble of you to want to harness your celebrity for the betterment of others. But joining OneVoice is no way to improve our lives.

The fact is, you have, perhaps unwittingly, helped us enormously. There have been many days during these past two years when "Seinfeld" was my only source of laughter. My entire family, Malki included, turned to your show for relief, even if only temporary, from the grief and stress that engulf us.

Be proud of that contribution and continue making it. But please reassess your support for OneVoice.

Frimet Roth lives in Jerusalem.

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