Yes to Schadenfreude

written by David M. Weinberg | 23.09.2024

Everybody who wants to see the West triumph over the radical Islamo-fascist camp led by Iran smirked and smiled just a bit this week when thousands of beepers simultaneously exploded in the pockets of Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon and Syria.

Such "schadenfreude," German for satisfaction felt at someone else's misfortune, is more than reasonable.

In this case, it is, in fact, quite healthy and splendidly justified, especially after so many months of seeming Israeli helplessness in the face of thousands of Hezbollah attacks on Israel.

The crafty technological hit on some of Israel's worst enemies – an intelligence-driven caper straight out of the finest and wildest spy novels – gave Israelis and Jews, supporters of Israel everywhere, and all reasonable analysts a glimmer of hope that Israel is getting back its moxie, its verve, its vigor, its ability to win over enemies.

The ingenious strike that targeted and humiliated Hezbollah's operational ranks gave supporters of this country renewed confidence that Israel is determined to prevail over the Shi'ite hegemonic juggernaut and that Israel has plenty of effective surprises planned.

This feeling of triumph is healthy. That alone is a strategic victory.

MORALISTS have long despised schadenfreude as a guilty and cheap pleasure, a low emotion unbefitting of mature adults. But the emotions we are talking about in this case are neither cheap nor crude.

There is no glee here, just a sense of justified comeuppance, of vindication, and relief.

This is why I don't like the Hebrew term simcha la-ed that is closest in meaning to schadenfreude. It translates as joy or happiness at the misfortune of others – and that smacks of primitivism.

That also is why the English term epicaracy, drawn from Greek and meaning the derivation of pleasure from, or finding fun in, the suffering of others is inappropriate too.

Again, these are not the core emotions at work here. Nobody is enjoying the pain of Hezbollah or having fun in warfare, but rather celebrating a cunning and necessary Israeli military success that comes after a long period of setbacks.

Israel needed this win

THE TRUTH is that Israel truly needed this win. Many Israelis have grown disillusioned with the Israeli military and the associated intelligence establishment, for failing to discern and warn of enemy intentions, for failing to find and target Hamas leadership, and for failing thus far to decisively win the wars against Hamas and Hezbollah.

The beeper bang-up is only a tactical win, but it suggests that Israel has turned the page – shall we say with a grin, turned the page(r)! – and is now embarking on a more offensive path to crushing Hezbollah, or at least significantly deterring it from further escalation.

Some Israelis also are disenchanted with the Netanyahu government, wildly accusing it of being a heartless government focused only on its electoral base, concerned mainly about just getting through another day in power – not securing hostage release or resolutely winning the wars.

The beeper bang-up suggests that, on the contrary, the government has been smartly planning for a long time for an assault on Hezbollah, and that more intelligent military strikes and diplomatic moves are possible.

Wouldn’t it be good if Israel could disable Hezbollah’s massive missile force with a similar cyber strike? Imagine an electromagnetic attack, a burst of energy that short-circuits the 150,000 Hezbollah warheads aimed at Israel.

Yes, I would celebrate that with profound schadenfreude (even if it wrought enormous destruction in Lebanon)!

Many Israelis also have been crushed by the ongoing pressures of long-term war: the grief over fallen soldiers, the suffering of the wounded, the torment of hostage

families, the dislocations of displaced Israeli families from the North and the South – refugees in their own homeland, the anguish of young families whose fathers have been away from home on military reserve duty for most of the past year, and so much more.

The beeper bang-up does not solve their problems nor does it alone revolutionize Israel's overall strategic situation.

But the ingenuity, muscle, and grit evidenced by the strike on Hezbollah does wonders for the Israeli national psyche and especially for those who are in despair.

It suggests that the many sacrifices being made by Israelis will yet carry the day and help overcome the enemy.

There is some relief if not consolation in knowing that Israeli political and military intelligence leaders have a few more tricks up their sleeve and that the enemy is vulnerable.

Many Israelis and Jews around the world also have grown furious with that world.

There is great rage at cynical, even malevolent Western thought leaders and politicians who have abandoned Israel by denying it weapons, falsely accusing it of war crimes, and voting to hand the enemy more land.

(See, for example, this week's reprehensible United Nations General Assembly resolution passed by an overwhelming majority which essentially strips Israel of the right to self-defense and self-determination in Judea, Samaria, and Jerusalem. To its disgrace, France voted in favor, while Britain, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Australia shamefully abstained.)

The beeper bang-up doesn't quell anger at the world but it does suggest some pushback. After all, the world (especially the US) has wrongly been pushing Israel to settle for yet another flimsy diplomatic agreement with Hezbollah that essentially would change nothing.

Israel will continue to shake Hezbollah

So no, leaders of the world, Israel is not going to agree to “de-escalation” or to an agreement not worth the paper it is printed on that would leave the terrorist army’s arsenal intact and let it go scot-free after devastating the Galilee and Golan over 11 months of warfare. Israel is going to beeper-bomb Hezbollah and further rout it out, too.

In summation, by striking at Hezbollah so cleverly, Israel seems to have started back on the path to victories. Therefore, the resultant feelings of triumph as described above are justified, healthy, and very moral.

The self-satisfaction and derision of the enemy as expressed in so many memes and jokes (“If you have Motorola stock, sell short.”) plays a crucial role in binding our society together, especially since the pyrotechnical beating suffered by Hezbollah is not the end of the story.

Israeli society will yet have to endure more painful levels of conflict with Hezbollah.

Schadenfreude over even temporary and partial subjugation of Hezbollah to Israel’s technological wizardry is a wonderful and worthy thing.

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