

“I Thought He Was Muslim...”

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Crazed subway ‘pusher’ says she did so because she thought victim was Muslim.

The crazed woman who shoved a Queens immigrant to his gruesome death in front of a subway train told cops yesterday that she did so because she thought he was a Muslim, authorities said.



Erika Menendez, 31, was charged with second-degree murder as a hate crime after admitting to investigators that she pushed Sunando Sen, 46 — a Hindu — in front of a 7 train in Sunnyside on Thursday night, officials said.

[Excerpt from The New York Post, December 30, 2012, reported by Jamie Schram, Larry Celona and Dan Macleod]

On Thursday the 27th of December, 2012, a 46-year old man named Sunando Sen was waiting for the train at a New York subway station, when a mad woman – or an otherwise sane person contaminated with religious hatred – named Erika Menendez, 31, apparently of Latino origin, pushed the young Hindu man from his behind to a cruel death under the grinding teeth of a train’s wheels of steel. The man, deprived of the slightest chance to save himself, was torn into pieces, while the murderer disappeared into the 20-million crowd of New York, like a hay in a haystack.

The following day, the NYPD succeeded to identify and to arrest the woman, using the footage obtained from security cameras installed at the scene of the crime. During the first interrogation, the murderer was asked as to why she had committed such an inhumane atrocity. Her reply: **“I thought he was a Muslim!”**

Make no mistake. This incident could have happened by or to the followers of almost any other religion. As we may see in this case, and in millions of other cases similar in essence, what drove the murderer to the crime that she committed was religious hatred; a hatred that didn’t have anything to do with the particular individual, or even with the mistaken identification of some young or adult innocent victim in general. That’s because according to the beliefs inherited by numerous followers of all religions, as long as the target belongs to another religion, they’d be duty-bound to discriminate against them.

Alas, all too often, adherents of religions mistake the flaws of their religions for their virtues, whilst they remain oblivious to the causes behind much regression, stagnation, and absurd suffering, rooted therein. How beautifully a poet said in Persian,

Do you know why your mirror can't reveal the truth?

For the dust and the rust have sat on its face.

Wipe it clean, and thereafter, you may begin

To appreciate the light therein.

I was reminded of the painful events of 1492 Spain, about which a Spaniard Morano wrote long ago in his memoirs. According to the orders of the confounded king of Spain, the Jews and the Muslims were being expelled from Spain – to “nowhere”. A group of exiled, including

children and families, were standing aimlessly, unsure of their future, hungry and thirsty, at a sea-shore, all the while being harassed and persecuted by the Christians who claimed to advocate kindness! A big ship came to the pier, and the captain asked them all to climb onboard. The poor wanderers, imagining the captain as their savior angel, set foot on the ship, and the ship set sail into the sea. A few days later, the ship returned, without any passengers. The Christian captain, educated in the ways of the Church of his day, was asked as to where he had dropped his many passengers. "In a desolate island, at the middle of of the ocean!" They asked him if they had done anything wrong except carrying the inheritance of their religion, or whether he had known them earlier in any capacity. "Had they ever betrayed you," he was asked. His reply: "No." **They were not Christians. Basically, the same as we read in the NY Subway case, "I thought he was a Muslim".** It doesn't matter if it's only one person, or one million people, who are thinking along those lines. Whoever thought that the terrorists throughout history, when it came to targeting their victims, would tell the difference between "friend vs. enemy"?

Indeed, the Spanish catastrophe, along with millions of other similar tragedies, including those which took place at different periods in Ireland, India, and Bosnia, Turkish Armenia, besides the most obvious cases of the Holocaust, and the World Trade Center, New York, on September 11, 2001 – they all had roots in the misery of religious hatred, or even in mere sectarian hatred among the followers of a single religion. The chaotic internal affairs of so many countries afflicted with religious and sectarian divisions, which quite often continue for long to burn in civil war, are living proofs for this claim.

It may be this or that day, this sect or that religion, but **it's everyday against ourselves**, which we may observe on a regular basis. Those who spread religious hatred should be reminded of that Persian proverb, "the one who digs wells is always at the bottom of the well;" or **"those who sow the wind, they would reap the whirlwind."** Thus, they go on making every effort to promote religious hatred, albeit relying on selections from their religious texts and scripture, all in the guise of advocating their religion; and they call it "religious observance". But a written piece of paper is sacred only to the extent that it would serve the unity and the deliverance of humanity; and not as a means to spread hatred and animosity.

What's the solution? To tell the tales and to put forward the criticism without offering a practical solution is no more than repeating some old and tried tear-jerking elegy for the

tragedies of the past. Let's find out the seemingly never-ending source of chronic religious hatred in the world, and let's see how it could be drained and dried out over time. Thence, the day will arrive when no one will harm another, or explain her motives with the likes of, "I thought he was a Muslim," or a Jew, Christian, Bahai, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, or Hindu, or the follower of a given sect. Ignorants might sound strange, but we ought to be surprised even more when a flaw may be seen yet it's not being recognized. Terrible catastrophes all around the world, with roots in religious hatred, have long been the outcome of the repeated words and writings of advocates of religious hatred. How long more could we continue to stand by the side passively and watch the disturbing scene before us with frustrated spirits? The abhorrence of religious hatred, and the indifference of many toward it, have always led to continuing mutual prejudice and hatred; and as the history of religions, and the daily news, would tell us, they continue to bring ruins and demise to the pedigrees of both the oppressor and the oppressed. We may just look at the unfortunate sight of all those countries which are caught up in conflict and war. They all stem from the misery of hatred, especially religious and sectarian hatred, which in turn have roots in religious books, particularly the textbooks and sermons of fanatic religious advocates. **People die, but the books might stay and become examples to be followed.** Even the very adherents of religions who've been harmed by their beliefs continue to protect these books, perhaps with their lives, and to pass them forward to the next generation in the name of preserving their identity. They don't wish to realize that no text is too holy to be discussed and to be adapted to its time of practice. Alas, the word "prejudice" is made up only nine letters but contains thousands of words and concepts, one of which is the Absolutist Mentality. How beautifully said the poet,

*Struggle to become a sage of reason and religion,
So that you too may see the intimate behind the façade,
As the Omniscient always does.*

The Jewish religious books don't generally contain gossiping about other religions, because in the first place, about 3300 years ago, religions did not exist as we know them today so that they could have turned into some examples of hatred. Many centuries have passed since the end of The Crusades, between the Muslims and the Christians, which took hundreds of painful years to run their course. Most conspicuously, no similar large scale war has taken place ever since

between various religions, although some people believe that they do continue to date, albeit in various forms. Meanwhile, however, **once we look at the deep causes behind all kinds of insecurities, and behind small and large international and civil wars, past and present**, we may detect with clarity the shameful footprints of religious and sectarian hatred. Although the cursed warriors of history have disappeared, but their models, i.e. the variety of the religious books which promote mutual hatred among religions and sects, as well as the interests of their greedy speculators, have survived to our time. Every now and then, by making selective references to their content, the flames of religious and sectarian hatred go up into the air, and "the dry and the wet", the good and the bad, the friend and the stranger, the Us and the Others, all burn together. Thus, humankind's wars on one another continues as ever before in the guise of religion. Winston Churchill, a politician, resonated with the hate-mongering, self-proclaimed advocates of religions, when he said, "A nation has no permanent enemies and no permanent friends, only permanent interests."

Indeed, those who promote hatred have constant never-ending interests; and to them, religion is basically an excuse and a means to realize those interests. The problem is that while the rational followers of religions are aware of the weaknesses therein, they don't take any effective steps toward eliminating them. The reason is that the word "religion", having been made into a means to an end, has developed such deep roots in human mind through the millennia that for the time being, we may not fight it before we have first removed the causes of religious hatred. **And we may fight religious hatred. I emphasize again: what has made today's world unsafe and insecure has not been religion, but hatred, i.e. mutual religious and sectarian hatred.**

My friends: we may not single out to accuse one particular religion. The problem is more fundamental. As the Persian proverb goes, "The house is ruined from the foundation." The problem reappears day after day, here and there, based on this or that writing by this or that source. **To remove a collective problem, a shared collective effort is required, especially by the parents.** You and I are no exceptions to this struggle. Each and every member of the human species owns, and is responsible for, his or her own part, i.e. the seven-billionth share of the global village. We could clean the whole city, if everyone sweeps their doorsteps. Each of us, within our means and limits, can wipe away religious hatred from the minds of children, so that

the world may become a safer place for us and for the coming generations; so that the welfare of the future generations would be ensured.

World peace depends on establishing peace between religions; and the latter could never be possibly realized without first removing the harmful legacy of religious hatred. The key to promised happiness is in our hands, although it's useful to remember that no road ever existed without hurdles. Let's begin with helping ourselves today, so that our children won't have to deal with our problems tomorrow.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the father of India's independence, once wrote a letter to his daughter from the inside of a British political prison, a document which could be considered an exemplar guide. An excerpt from the letter reads, and I paraphrase: "Please don't think that I consider our race superior to others. We too have many flaws and dark spots, many of which are ugly and shameful. Otherwise, there could have been no chance for us to fall down so low, to such decadence and misery, as we have."

Let's pass over those who consider the others as "ignorant" and keep playing both sides. Fortunately, there are enough people who walk the metaphoric barefoot with no shoes on to let them carry concealed daggers, no hidden agenda, no skeletons in the closet, those who aren't afraid of expressing their minds freely, those who believe that **the Oud would be no more than a woodstick, if it had no scent.**

Time won't stop to wait for anyone. Let's not keep silent. Let us cry out before we would be awakened by the sharp slap of Time in the face. Religious hatred is the deadliest chronic germ that has infected humankind's legacy. Let's avoid it. Parents are duty-bound to study their children's textbooks, to learn what's contained therein, and to wipe their negative aspects off of their children's minds. Parents ought to make their children understand that we should measure people by their understanding and wisdom, and not based on their religions. As the poet wrote,

Without the curtain of intellect, the eyes can't see things clearly.

Without the sage's wise counsel, there'd be no way to any custom.

Reason is the only guide to any path of goodness, and

One without reason and wisdom would have no religion.

My hopes toward a future world free of religious hatred are not unfounded. On October 1st, 1987, King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia of Spain visited The Sephardic Temple, Westwood, Los Angeles, and he apologized to the Jewish people for the tragic events that had taken place about 495 years earlier – sadly, a much anticipated remedy which came centuries too late to save the “patients”. The congregation appreciated the significance of the Spanish King and Queen’s major reconciliatory step, and they offered them their gratitude and respect.

Still more recently, as of November 2012, the Spanish Minister of Justice, Albert Ruiz-Gallardón, appeared at the Sephardic Jewish center in Madrid to announce that thenceforth, the descendants of an estimated 200,000 or so Sephardi Jews who’d been expelled in 1492 would be offered volutnary Spanish nationality, if they choose so, regardless of their current residence. This welcome news is corroborated by several publications, including www.TheJC.com and World News. Interestingly enough, one related article had also reported on the Muslims’ complaint as to why the new privilege had not been also extended to the expelled Muslim population.

As Omar Khayyam said,

*Last eve, I wandered into the ruins of Tous.
An owl was sitting there, in place of a peacock.
I asked, “What do you know of this ruin?” It said,
“The news is only this: Alas, Alas, Alas...”*

Alas, insidious, incendiary texts, which are the causes of divisions between religions, are still in use and circulation, and all too many people continue to mindlessly imitate others. Things may not change for better, however, unless starting with ourselves, we come to realize, and to help our children see with their eyes deovoid of all religions, that:

*Human beings are members of one body,
All of whom were created of one essence.*

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