

DANIEL PEARL TRIBUTE—HARMONY FOR HUMANITY CONCERT, 10/19/14

Twelve years ago, 38 year old Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, while in Pakistan investigating ties between Al Qaeda and the “shoe bomber”, was kidnapped and brutally murdered, beheaded, by Al Qaeda. This horrific act was videotaped and released, along with his so-called “confession”. Among his last words were, “I am Jewish”. Daniel's wife, Marianne, gave birth to their son, Adam, shortly after Daniel was murdered.

This tragic and heart-wrenching story cries out for a response, not just from Daniel's family, not just from Jews, not just from Americans, but from the world. For it is a story that affects us all. We are witnessing reminders of this episode in recent months, only adding to its importance.

So, I am here today to speak to you, and to deliver a message; a message about our sacred obligation to respond. I am not here to speak about revenge through violence, but rather about reconciliation, through eradicating the hatred that took Daniel Pearl's life and the lives of so many others.

This is the type of “revenge” chosen by Judea Pearl, Daniel's father, and Professor Emeritus of Computer Science at UCLA. Judea chose to enter into ongoing, public dialogue with Akbar Ahmed, chair of Islamic Studies at American University in Washington, DC, former Pakistani Ambassador to Britain, and called “probably the world's best known scholar on contemporary Islam” by the BBC.

Judea Pearl's rightful sense of fury is tempered by this dialogue. “I'm driven by pragmatics”, he said in an interview appearing in The Washington Post magazine. Even if he could retaliate against the murderers, he pointed out, “What do I achieve? There will be one hundred more”. True revenge, he decided and declared, meant taking aim “at the whole ideology that created the madness”.

And so, he created the Daniel Pearl Foundation, acting as President, with this as its goal. The Foundation brings journalists from Muslim countries to work in American newsrooms. And it organizes hundreds of concerts like this one today, around the world, to mark Daniel's October 10th birthday, recall his love of music, and promote tolerance. It sponsors cross-cultural programs for young people. And it supports Muslim-Jewish dialogue.

“It's a drop in the bucket”, says Islamic scholar Rabbi Reuben Firestone, a teacher of Judea Pearl, concerning such dialogue, “But you have to keep dripping”.

May each word that we hear today, each note that is sounded, and each action that is taken, now and always, be like drops of water that form mighty streams and vast oceans of mutual respect and understanding.

As we give thanks for the efforts and talents of the musicians, speakers and organizers of this program today, so too may we always remember Daniel Pearl, and seek to repair our broken world through the values that he and his family stand for.