

The Corner of Hollywood and Sinai

Inglourious B*sterds:
True to Their Name – No Glory Here
I Dream of Heroes, Glorious and Godly

Dodi-Lee Hecht

[NOTE: SPOILER ALERT – I REFERENCE PLOT POINTS OF THE MOVIE – INCLUDING THE ENDING]

I don't tend to review films once they exit the hallowed halls of the theatre and are reformatted to fit a television screen. However, it is not every day that a film rewrites history and lets a Jew kill Hitler. For that, I will make an exception. That being said, I have very little that is positive to say about the B*sterds or the movie that tells their fictitious story. Because, in my opinion, the fantastical should be the realm of the highest possible dream, not the basest of delusions. The more fictional a film is, the more it skips away from the travesties and mundanities of real life, the more it has the potential to give us a glimpse of the ideal.

And, in my opinion, there is nothing of *Inglourious B*sterds* that even remotely touches the realm of the ideal. Which, I think, makes it a movie unworthy of viewing and a truly sad missed opportunity.

Some may disagree with me. Some Jews may feel quite strongly that the violence visited upon the Nazis by the B*sterds is warranted and almost fittingly pleasant to behold. I do not doubt that Tarantino's desire to create a world in which American Jews kill and mutilate Nazis was, in no small part, to offer some sort of gift to the grandchildren of survivors, those who are just far enough from the Holocaust to feel the guilt that comes from not suffering alongside one's brethren and, yet, still close enough to feel an almost-personal anger. And, after all, aren't we supposed to emulate God? And isn't He a "God of

vengeance” (Psalms 94:1)? Furthermore, the stories of the Nazis who, after the war was over, quietly slipped back into daily life to grow old and die in their beds, does make the notion of Swastika tattoos on the forehead a purely genius level act.

Genius? Yes. Inglorious? Yes. But, Good? No. Godly? No. For, in that verse in Psalms, King David calls God a “God of vengeance” but right afterwards he also calls Him the “Judge of the earth”. God’s vengeance is not human vengeance; our thoughts of revenge are predicated on emotion, on hurt and pain, on feelings of betrayal or anger. God’s vengeance is not driven by similar emotions; His vengeance is driven by balance – He seeks justice. That is what we should emulate. Through Judaism, God has given us a system that pushes us beyond our simplest drives and wishes, that shows us the potential for a more perfect world. And, in that more perfect world, one does not take revenge; one pursues justice.

Don’t get me wrong, I, too, like most Jews, fantasize over the endless possibilities of what could have been done to change the outcome of the war. And I, too, have asked myself what I would do if I could somehow encounter a young Adolph Hitler in 1928 or 1929 – before the world had ever heard of the Nuremberg Laws or the Final Solution. I have asked myself that question many times over the course of my lifetime and I have entertained many answers. However, I always return to one simple answer – it is, in my opinion, the only right answer.

If I could somehow go back in time and encounter a young Adolph Hitler, I would put a bullet in his head. One bullet. Close range. A certain death. If he felt no pain or all the agony in the world – it would not matter to me. I would choose the most efficient and sure-fire way to kill him; I would do it as quickly as possible; and then I would high-tail it back to the 21st century where, hopefully, I’d be just in time for a nice big family reunion with my now-never-murdered relatives and their descendents.

I would not torture him. I would not try to make him feel the pain he inflicted on so many millions of other human beings. I would not brand him with a swastika or beat his head in

with a baseball bat. I would kill him – of that, there is not doubt. But not to exact revenge. I would kill him for one reason only – to prevent genocide.

So what, you might ask, would I do if I encountered an older Adolph Hitler, in 1946 or 1947 – pretending, for a moment, that the man was less of a coward than he proved to be? I would put him on trial and execute him for crimes against humanity. Because punishment is not revenge – it is protective, it is retributive, it is justice. Once again, it would be a quick death. I would never torture him.

It may sound to you that I am overly kind to the point of stupidity. But that is not so. I would not torture either hypothetical Hitler – the young one or the old one – because I would not sully my hands with such acts. Not for revenge. Not out of anger. The anger I feel towards that man is of a potency that is unmatched but, much stronger than my hatred of Hitler is my love of God and desire to follow His laws and emulate His example as best I, as a human being, can.

We are told many times in both Biblical and Rabbinic law that crimes are to be punished and future crimes are to be prevented. Judaism is not a pacifist religion – wars are fought and are praised in certain cases. But, we are not a people of unnecessary bloodshed, of unwarranted cruelty. We are not a people of vengeance; we are a people of justice.

The acts of the Inglorious B*sterds were made, in the film, to seem useful from a strategic perspective but think, for a moment if they really were. Let me tell you, as succinctly as I can, my fantasy.

First, I would never send American Jews behind enemy lines. If they were to be caught they would not have been treated as prisoners of war; they would have been treated as Jews. As a Jew, I understand how cool it would be to fight the Nazis myself and score some retaliation points for the team. However, I'm fine with asking for some help from the Righteous Gentiles if they are better equipped to succeed. And in Nazi occupied Europe during WWII – they were better equipped.

Second, I would not waste my time mutilating enlisted men in the Nazi army. I don't care how much every Nazi soldier knew or didn't know about what was going on in the Concentration Camps – I refuse to believe that a war is best fought terrifying, torturing and killing those lowest down on the totem pole. No, if I could get American soldiers behind enemy lines and have them move like the B*sterds did – I would have one mission and one mission only: liberate the Concentration Camps. I have no interest in permanently scarring a German eighteen year old if I can save ten Jewish eight year olds.

Finally, killing Hitler is a good idea. But one bullet will do the job. So why allow your soul to be darkened by the use of excessive force?

That's my fantasy. Show me that possible world. Because that is a world where the very best is possible. That is a world where the Voice of God is heard. That is a world where the spark of the Divine in humanity is manifested. And, that is a world where the heroes are Glorious.

That may not be the world we live in but when we enter the realm of dreams – that should be the world we imagine.

© Nishma, 2010