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Are YOU Brainwashed?

IT'S FRIGHTENING. Unprincipled psychologists, in the service of a malignant regime, use sophisticated techniques in order to control the mind of a person from afar.

The term "brainwashing" was born in 1950. It is a Chinese word ("xinao", literally wash brain). Originally it served to describe a technique used – so it was claimed - by Chinese masterminds to manipulate the minds of American prisoners in the Korean War. They changed their unconscious mental processes and turned them into agents of sinister forces.

Many books and movies purported to show how this works. For example, the classic film "The Manchurian Candidate" shows how the communists take an American prisoner-of-war in the Korean war, an officer, manipulate his mind and give him an order to kill the US presidential candidate. The American officer does not know that he has been turned unconsciously into a communist agent. He does not remember the order given him under hypnosis and does not know that he acts accordingly.

THIS PLOT is ridiculous, like most of the pseudo-scientific descriptions. In practice, it is much easier to manipulate the minds of people, individuals and collectives.

For example, the Nazi "propaganda". It was invented by Adolf Hitler himself. In his book, "Mein Kampf", he describes how, as a soldier on the Western front in WWI, he witnessed the extremely successful British propaganda. The British dropped leaflets over the German trenches and shattered the soldiers' confidence in their leadership.

When Hitler came to power in Germany, he entrusted one of his faithful henchmen, Joseph Goebbels, with the creation of a Ministry of Propaganda. Goebbels turned propaganda into an art form. Among other means he turned all the German media – newspapers and the radio – into government agencies. In German that was called "Gleichschaltung" – connecting all components to one electric line. Thanks to this, Nazi Germany continued fighting long after it was clear that it had lost WWII.

One of the means was the disconnection of the German public from any other source of information. The official propaganda was blared from every medium. Listening to a foreign broadcast was a major crime, punished severely.

Thus it happened that the Germans still believed in their final victory – the Endsieg - even after the Soviets in the East and the Anglo-Saxons in the West had already crossed the borders into Germany.

DOES IT take a dictatorial regime – Nazi or Communist – to turn the media into a brainwashing machine? Common sense says that this is impossible in a democracy. Common sense is wrong.

It will be remembered that Hitler attained power by democratic means. Even now, fanatical nationalists are winning democratic elections in many countries. All their leaders are busy destroying the courts, stuffing the parliaments with useful idiots and – especially – turning the media into brainwashing instruments. In our country, too.

How is this done? It's quite simple, really: one has to suppress all other voices. One has to make sure that the citizen hears only one voice. One that repeats a few messages over and over, endlessly. This way the lie becomes truth.

In such a situation, the ordinary citizen becomes convinced that the official line is really their own personal opinion. This is an unconscious process. When one tells a citizen that they are brainwashed, they are deeply insulted.

This has been happening in Israel over the last few years. The citizen is not conscious that it is happening. He or she absorbs diverse newspapers, TV programs and radio broadcasts, and sees that all these media are freely arguing with each other and even quarreling with each other. The citizen is not conscious of the fact that on the one critical subject of our life – war and peace – all the media are "connected" to one singular line of brainwashing.

DURING THE last few weeks we have been seeing a perfect example of this mechanism. The events on the Gaza Strip border have activated a mechanism of brainwashing that dictatorial regimes in the world can only envy.

Let's examine ourselves: what have we heard over the radio? What have we seen on TV? What did we read in the papers?

Within a few weeks more than a hundred human beings were shot dead, and many thousands were wounded by live fire. Why?

"We were forced to fire at them because they were storming the border fence". And indeed, did the Gazans themselves not proclaim their will to "return home" – meaning, to return to Israeli territory?

But on May 14, "Black Monday", 63 unarmed demonstrators were shot dead and over 1500 wounded by live fire. Every Israeli knows that this was necessary because the demonstrators stormed the fence and were about to swarm into Israel. Nobody paid attention to the simple fact that there was not a single photo showing such an occurrence. Not even one. In spite of the fact that on both sides of the fence there were hundreds of photographers, including Israeli army photographers, who filmed every single detail. Tens of thousands stormed, and not a single picture?

One should notice the use of the word "terror". It has turned into an adjective attached to everything. There are not just tunnels – they are all always "terror-tunnels". There are "terror-activists". There is "the Hamas terror-regime" and there are "terror-bases". Now there are "terror-kites".

Notice: not just "incendiary kites", or "destruction-kites", only "terror-kites". The same every day in all media. Someone has made the terminology decision. Of course, everyone who has the word "terror" attached to his name is "a son of death", as you say in biblical Hebrew. Another proud term of the brainwashing.

The inhabitants of the Gaza Strip are "terrorists". (In Hebrew, a special term has been invented: "Mekhablīm"). All of them? Of course, No [No no] question. Especially Hamas members. But Hamas is a political party, which has won democratic elections in all of Palestine. A civilian party which has indeed a military wing. But in our media all party members and supporters are "terrorists", sons of death. Of course.

The use of these terms, hundreds of times every day, clearly constitute brainwashing, without the citizens noticing it. They are getting used to the fact that all Gazans are terrorists, mekhablīm. This is a process of dehumanization, the creation of *Untermenschen* in the Nazi lexicon. Their killing is allowed, even desirable.

In such an atmosphere, even abominable sentences pass unnoticed. For example, this week I heard on one of the TV news programs this sentence from the mouth of a military correspondent, speaking about the coming Gaza demonstration: "Iran wants dead demonstrators, and it seems that they will get them." One has to read this sentence twice to realize what it says: that the Israeli sharpshooters serve Iranian interests.

Or a sentence that is repeated again and again, even by respected commentators: "Iran wants to destroy the State of Israel". I don't know what 80 million Iranians want, nor does the writer. But the sentence itself is ridiculous. Israel is a nuclear power. How does one annihilate a nuclear power (with submarines that can launch nuclear devices in the hour of need). Are the Iranians ready to turn their country – one of the cradles of human civilization – into a graveyard and a desert?

Or a forecast "Friday another violent demonstration will take place". "Violent"? "Another"? There is no argument about the fact that all the demonstrations along the Gaza fence were completely non-violent. The demonstrators did not shoot one single shot, when thousands of them were wounded by live fire, and more than a hundred killed. Yet the lie passes without comment.

Not a single one of the hundreds of TV news program presenters ever corrects such statements by correspondents. Because the directors, presenters, commentators and correspondents are themselves thoroughly brainwashed. The army spokesman knows the truth, of course, but he is a central cog in the brainwashing machine.

EVENTS REACHED a climax with the murder of the 21-year old female paramedic Razan Ashraf al-Najjar, when she was trying to save the life of a wounded demonstrator. The sharpshooter who shot her in the chest saw that she was a medic treating a wounded person. It was a clear war crime.

Was there a public outcry? Did the media demand an investigation? Did the media report this event in their page one headline? Did the Knesset observe a minute of silence? Nothing of the sort. A minor news item in some papers (by no means all). An excellent article by the admirable Amira Hass in Haaretz. And that's that.

A few days passed, and abroad there were outcries. The Argentine soccer team, with the admired Messi, canceled a friendly game against the Israeli team in Jerusalem.

The brainwashers realized that it was impossible not to react. So the army spokesman published a statement saying that an investigation had taken place. What did it discover? Ah, well. It was clearly established that nobody had shot Razan. She was hit by the ricochet of a bullet that had hit the ground far from her. That is such a blatant lie that even the army liar should be ashamed of producing it. It was accepted by the brainwashed public.

One of the hallmarks of brainwashing is a phenomenon that everyone can notice: the total absence of a second opinion. When a commentator voices the official line on an event, does anyone express an alternative version? Is there a debate between the official spokesman and a contrary commentator? In the democratic media, that would be commonplace. Here it is very, very rare.

WHAT CAN be done to counter such brainwashing?

Not much.

First of all: there is a vital need for a second voice. Brainwashing can be efficient only when the official voice enjoys a complete monopoly. That was one of the aims of Haolam Hazeh, the weekly which I edited for 40 years. It met every untrue government version with a contrary version. Although our voice was weak, compared to the powerful government machine (even in those days), the very fact that there are two voices, however unequal, prevents a total brainwashing. The citizen hears two versions and wonders "who is right?"

If all the peace and human rights groups in Israel set up a joint center for information, which will be heard, perhaps the monopoly of official propaganda can be broken. Perhaps.

There is in the country a tiny band of commentators who are not afraid to tell the truth, even when this is considered treason. Gideon Levy, Amira Hass and a few others. We must ensure that their voice is heard. They must be encouraged.

All the media must be pressured to present a variation of views on matters of war and peace, to let the "internal enemy" be heard, so that the citizen is able to form an opinion of their own.

The foreign media must be allowed free access to the sources of information, even when the foreign media are critical, "hostile" and "anti-Semitic". Friends of Israeli-Palestinian peace abroad must be encouraged to pressure the media in their homelands to publish the truth about what is happening here.

I don't like the word "must". But in this context, no other will do.

THE POWER of the truth against a brainwashing machine is always limited. But in the end, even if it takes time, truth will prevail. It needs courage.

The movie "The Manchurian Candidate" has a surprise ending: in the last minute, instead of killing the presidential candidate, the brainwashed man shoots the communist agent who was supposed to take his place.

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