

Torah Tidbits from Rabbi Larry Moldo

When I was in elementary school, I was frequently the target of the class bully. Two events caused me to become human in his eyes, I think - at least after them I was no longer the target of his bullying behavior; a different event came under the category of karma.

It has been a long while, and I do not remember the order in which these events occurred, or the precise circumstance which evoked them. 1) The teacher walked out for a moment, and either I had had one comment or push too many, or another student was subjected to slight verbal or physical torment, so I punched the bully. Probably not all that hard, as when the teacher came back in I do not remember any bad consequences for that act. 2) During recess, it seemed most likely that the bully and I were involved in a physical altercation, as we were both sent to the principal's office. This was my first visit there, but not his. I have no idea if either of us was actually punished further, but the bully helped keep me from imploding in fear, partly by letting me know that he had survived prior visits. 3) It was picture day, and I was really not feeling well at all. This became clear when I threw up in the hallway all over his good suit.

If memory serves me correctly, this was all between Grades 1 and 3.
Why bring this up now?

The culture of the school itself, and the society in which it was a part, helped these experiences become a simple part of growing up. Had this been another time or place, the lessons we learned might have been far different. Today, November 9, is the 77th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

Kristallnacht: (from our friend Wikipedia)

Estimates of the number of fatalities caused by the pogrom have varied. Early reporting estimated that 91 Jewish people were murdered during the attacks. Modern analysis of German scholarly sources by historians such as [Richard J. Evans](#) puts the number much higher. When deaths from post-arrest maltreatment and subsequent suicides are included, the death toll climbs into the hundreds.

Additionally, 30,000 were arrested and incarcerated in [Nazi concentration camps](#). Jewish homes, hospitals, and schools were ransacked, as the attackers demolished buildings with sledgehammers. Over 1,000 synagogues were burned (95 in Vienna alone) and over 7,000 Jewish businesses destroyed or damaged. [Martin Gilbert](#) writes that no event in the history of German Jews between 1933 and 1945 was so widely reported as it was happening, and the accounts from the foreign journalists working in Germany sent shock waves around the world. The Times wrote at the time: "No foreign propagandist bent upon blackening Germany before the world could outdo the tale of burnings and beatings, of blackguardly assaults on defenseless and innocent people, which disgraced that country yesterday."

If I had been bullied in Germany during those years and fought back, I would not have learned the lesson I did in America. In America I learned that I could survive being bullied. In Germany, my bully would have learned that being a bully is the safest thing to be.

There are bullies worldwide even now, many of them with government backing - and sometimes even members of the government itself. What lessons are we enabling them and their victims to learn?