

**“Imprisonment, Interrogation and Torture”**  
**Dr. David Senesh, Clinical Psychologist**  
**Evening in Honor of the UN International Day in**  
**Support of Victims of Torture**  
**Tzavta Theater, Tel Aviv, 26 June 2006**

I would like to begin by offering a heartfelt prayer for the well being of the captured soldier, Gliad Shalit, and wish to convey the deep pain I feel to his parents and family.

Is the soldier undergoing physical and psychological torture at this very minute? Are those persons who were involved in his kidnapping are being tortured in order to extract information that may lead to the soldier's release and in order to end his physical and psychological torture and that of his parents?

I feel a deep inner conflict between the realistic position and the emotional and moral position. At that moment I hear a strong, clear and uncompromising call emanating from deep inside me, as if on its own: “stop torture!” and I remember the letters I sent as a member of Amnesty International against interrogations, torture and death sentences even of those who are guilty of taking the lives of other people.

The slope is indeed slippery regarding interrogation and torture, targeted assassinations and ticking bombs, where evasions or excuses of “no choice” lose their meaning leading us to collective punishment, punishment without due process and

My memories emerge and flood me at this junction where thoughts, feelings and values cross. I see myself, a 19-year-old soldier, taken prisoner by Egypt in the Yom Kippur War over thirty years ago, and it seems like it happened today, and is much like what is portrayed in the film “The Road to Guantanamo”.

I was tortured for 40 days: humiliation, interrogation and terrorization in conditions of want, hunger, isolation and pain. The enemy, the captor, the torturer and the warden exploit you in order to hurt you. They use your pain, fear, desperation and hope in order to control you and bring you to a state of regression: you stop using your powers of criticism and self defense. They put you in positions of discomfort and pain in order to overpower you psychologically and physically. Your body becomes your enemy, your soul a collaborator in their crime and they systematically play you against yourself. All this takes place within reach of a touch and a breath, of the lash of the whip, and the pain of a punch or an open handed blow.

And, when I was left to my own fate on the stone floor of my cell, in a hazy state of “sensory deprivation”, memories and stories emerged and hovered above me of my aunt, Hannah Senesh in the Hungarian prison, undergoing interrogation and horrific torture by the Gestapo, and I wondered how she managed to withstand it and not reveal her secrets nor betray her comrades, how did she succeed in supporting those around her and how she was able to write more poems even when she already knew.

Years have passed, and I am now a psychologist, therapist, teacher and researcher in the field of the suffering experienced by children abused, neglected and exploited on the battlefield of the family, the most dangerous and cruelest of all. I know the post-traumatic symptoms of anxiety and depression – they are similar to mine as they are to those you will see in the film. The reason is clear – they also underwent the trauma of betrayal and lost to a certain extent the basic ability to believe in the goodness of man. This is a betrayal that takes place in the intimacy of a relationship between one person and other, when the other discards his humanity and becomes a monster. It is exactly in these conditions of want and distress that the soldiers, like children, undergo a process of regression which makes them even more dependent on the interrogator, the torturer, as if he is the abusing parent. The process of identification and internalization of evil takes place in what is known as the “identification with the aggressor” or the “Stockholm Syndrome” in which the victim also undergoes a process of defection and corruption of the self and of his identity and which may, in time cause him to transfer his pain and victimize someone else. The fingerprint of evil can mark the individual victim and perhaps society as a whole, particularly a society like ours that has known suffering and victims.

In the movie we are about to see we can see an insolent and arrogant president of the United States making a clear distinction between the “axis of evil” and “our” enlightenment and progress – meaning the Americans and British, leaving the viewer in a confused, in between state where there is no clear good or evil. For me, this is the real arena in which a moral person is forced to make decisions and find his place irregardless of his political or national affiliation. Finding the right position is difficult, particularly on the seam line and in demilitarized zones, in occupied territories and on the battlefield. There a person must decide on which side of humanity he places himself.

When you are lying on the floor of your cell, in your silence, you hear iron doors open and slam one after the other, and the screams of others disturb and madden your soul-sometimes more than the blow you yourself are about to receive at any given moment. Are we also here, now, from the depths of our comfortable chairs able to feel the desperation of the other, to ask ourselves about his pain and to listen to his testimony with empathy and compassion Can we recognize the corrupting potential of the suffering and the injury and summon up all our inner strength to open the fist to a touch of caress and comfort.