

PROTECT US FROM EVIL

By Paul Abels

such puzzling occurrences. Perhaps we have our own explanations, mystical, spiritual, scientific, or others that explain why such things occur. Some

difficult to blame the person or ourselves as the Kobe woman might have done in the natural disaster. The evil is not in the person, it is in nature.



One narrative in this issue deals with extraordinary research and subsequent help given a group of "blind" Cambodian women living in the United States. They were witness to the atrocities of their country's internal war. No "reason" for the blindness could be found... See no evil.

A few months ago, following the Kobe earthquake, a woman seeking to help neighbors whose houses had fallen, heard her friend, a veterinarian, calling for help. He told her he was alright. She told him she would return after she went to help others whose condition was more threatening. She soon returned with a rescue team to the site where the man was trapped. His house was in flames, and she heard his screaming as he burned to death. She immediately became deaf... Hear no evil.

Those of us in the helping professions are familiar with

evils are too much to bear: to see, hear or speak of. For some people, shutting off the experience with evil is a way out. To some degree, it is a universal phenomena which "protects" most of us.

To shield us from the pain in the streets we have developed a form of selective blindness. Most of us have already become blind to the homeless standing on the street with handmade signs "work for Food", asking for money, scooping out garbage pails; making bed on park benches, using the toilets in McDonald's and the libraries. We see, we can not bear. We turn our heads and avoid looking. In major catastrophes the calls for help are answered by many, "natural disasters" are acceptable. It is

There is an old Japanese folk carving which shows three monkeys, you remember, hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. Cover your ears, your eyes, and hold your tongue. While this may be one way to avoid evil, it may also be a way to foster the continuation of evil. (Rozee's & Van Boemel's article shows the importance of examining the phenomena (seeing the evil), exploring it, gathering information (hearing about the evil) and then writing about it (speaking the evil). It is through this three stage process that the public learns about and perhaps can deal with the evils of the world.

If the helping professions follow the dictates of the three "wise" monkeys, the problems of the poor, the abused,

the abandoned, those suffering discrimination will be ignored, the oppressed increasingly isolated, abused, neglected and the evils tolerated. Thus, while the fable of the monkeys carries a message thought to be a guide to tranquil living, it has a more ominous moral—there is danger in ignoring evil, isolating oneself and cutting off communication with others. It destroys community and mutual aid.

The figures were carved in the 17th century on the doorway to the royal stables of the Toshogu Shrine at Nikko, Japan. The message was for the common people. It was a threat, "keep what you hear and see the nobility do to yourself, or else", during that era, in Japan and in most countries it was dangerous to challenge the power structure. The injunction was "...give up fighting the system" (Ohnuki-Tierny, p. 69).

As this editorial is being written, Congress talks of ending school lunch programs and food stamps, preventing teen-age mothers from receiving welfare, cutting prenatal programs, and eliminating services to legal "aliens". These programs are labeled as evil, and a new day is to be proclaimed in which such evils are wiped off our country's face. While their avowed goals of welfare reform and eliminating dependency may be worthy, the consequences will be catastrophic, physically and emotionally for those directly impacted by the programs' dismemberment; and spiritually and morally corruptive of our society.

We could recast the

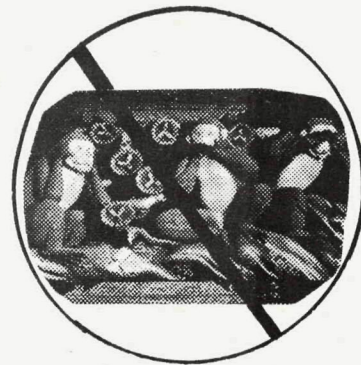
three wise monkeys - and introduce our own "three wise reflectors", See evil, Hear evil and Speak out against evil. We add a fourth: Act against the evil. People, unlike monkeys, have a sense of the future, a desire for social justice. While there may never be a world without evil, we must do our best to expose it.

A story is told of a student who asked of a rabbi who was always marching for worthy, but often lost causes... "Rabbi, you are always marching, nothing seems to change, you don't accomplish anything, why do you keep doing it?" The rabbi responded. "So I don't become like those I am protesting against."

Those of us that have worked with people who are in need know the consequences of evil, we know the stories of sorrow and hopelessness. Often we present the statistics, x thousands abused; x numbers homeless; x millions hungry each day. We have become immune to the statistics, tired. But we still respond to the stories, of the hurt child, the physically battered wife, the mentally disturbed parent that drowns her children. These public stories break through the armor. We recently heard of a school which sent hundreds of paper dolls to the Congress, each with the story of a child who would be hurt by the welfare cuts. These are the stories that we need to send by the hundreds of thousands along with the petitions we send our legislators.

Hear no evil, see no evil.
Say no to evil. □

Ohnuki-Tierny, Emiko.
(1989) *The monkey as mirror*.
Princeton, Princeton University
Press



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