I Spy

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I like spy novels and movies. Last week Tom Clancy's "Sum of All Fears" was released, I've already seen it twice. Next week the 'Bourne Identity', my father's favorite book will hit the big screen with its character Jason Bourne, a spy who can't remember what he does for a living. My dad and I have father's day plans to see it together. He's already bought the tickets.

I love these kinds of movies, the twists and turns, the grand scale and impact of even the smallest bits of information. How a tiny clue, a scrap of paper or shred of evidence can determine the fate of the world.

In reality we know that the work of spies and intelligence agencies is seldom as simple or as glamorous as Hollywood would portray. It is imprecise, and rarely do the pieces come together so neatly as a 2 hour film or a hard back novel. Fiction and reality have blurred the line these last two weeks as the news has been just as filled with tales of espionage and intrigue, secret agents and investigations, the likes of the most daring spy novels, but the far too real. The questioning and finger pointing that were bound to follow September 11th, have made their way to closed hearings on capital hill, and in an address to the nation Wednesday night the president proposed the most sweeping and far reaching reform of our nation's national security and intelligence agencies since Harry Truman led a similar effort in his response to the findings of intelligence lapses in the wake of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. President Truman discovered then as we have learned this week that neither attack should have been any surprise at all, and if not preventable, they were at least detectable. That stark reality in 1947 created the National

Security Agency, the Department of Defense and the CIA. In 2002, that same reality, that for reasons of national defense we need to know what people are thinking and plotting against us may result in the creation of a Department of Homeland Defense whose primary mission will be the gathering of domestic intelligence information. Wire taps, secret files, interrogations, racial profiling, searches of personal property, secret investigations by agencies that are themselves beyond the reach of the law are all part of this grand plan to root out the terrorists among us. As recent surveys by the major news networks shows, most Americans are in favor of the president's plan. All groups support it, at least in principle save one, Muslim-Americans who are opposed to it by overwhelming percentages. Why would this one group raise objection, for the very obvious reason that they are the most immediate target of these investigations.

In the 1930s, Germany facing economic disaster that held a strangle hold on that nation and its people, far greater than the fear of terrorism grips our nation today, sought to find the root of the problem. They too followed common, but not good sense to the seemingly logical conclusion. Who was causing their economic problems, the Jews who controlled directly or indirectly their economy. So they established a secret police, and secret racial laws to curtail the Jewish influence in economic matters. We all know where that curtailing eventually led.

To the non-Jew in Germany the Jews were as logical a place to root out their problems with finances, as the Muslim may seem too many of us to root out the terrorists among us. Racial profiling did not begin in the gang lands of LA and NY and Detroit, it was in the streets of Berlin long before.

As Jews we are commanded by our tradition to never forget our history, every year at Passoevr we read, Avadim Hayinu, we were once slaves in the land ourselves. Never to forget our own persecution, so as never to persecute another, and to be morally and religiously bound to come to the aid of the persecuted.

Wednesday night my Jewish Radar went up, and so should all of yours. Not because I make the leap that next it will be us. Of all the things they will blame the Jews for, they will not mistake us for being sympathizers with Arab extremists, on that we finally get the benefit of the doubt. My radar went up, because we of all people know that the creation of these kinds of organizations, secret investigative agencies, while they have never been good for us, they are not good for anyone. We who have been black listed, we who have been rounded up, we who have been segregated and selected, not because we did something, but because we were of a certain group, we most of all should be screaming caution in the weeks and months of congressional hearings that are to come as our nation's leaders grapple with the president's plan.

In fulfillment of the rabbinic dictum that indeed everything in life is contained within the Torah. This week's Torah portion has spies in it as well. Tomorrow morning on this Bima, our Bat Mitzvah Madeline will read from Parsha Shelach-Lecha, which literally means, "I send you", and contains the story of the 12 spies of Israel who are chosen by Moses, one from each tribe, to scout the land of Cannan and determine the disposition of its inhabitants and how the Israelites might conquer them in the forth coming battle. Tom Clancy and Robert Ludlum, it is not. But there is a compelling lesson in this week's parsha for us in this new reality as well.

Ten of the spies return and report that the land is filled with giants, in whose eyes the Israelites are like grasshoppers. They sound the alarm, and get everyone in a panic. The Israelites get histerical, they think detah is immenent, they want to retrun to Egypt, they cry out, ”it would have been better to die in the desert than to go into the land God promised us. But two among them Joshua and Caleb are much more confident and report that the land can be conquered with God’s help.

Our Rabbis teach that it was only Joshua and Caleb that truly saw the land, they stood on a hill and confidently surveyed the horizon, the others they were so sacred of what they might see that they were too scared to even look, they peaked a quick glance here and there, but never really saw what we evident if they were to only look closely.

As we begin to take a magnifying glass to our neighbors, our school teachers our new immigrants, may we have the bravery and perspective of Joshua and Caleb to do so openly and with full accountability for our actions. Not to sneak around and peek here and glimpse there so as not to expose ourselves to the dangers inherent in the work. No let us look fully upon the matter, openly not secretly. Let us stand in front of our values as a just and righteous nation, not hide behind the veil of national security and need to know secrets. The former will surely lead, as it always has to more hysteria and finger pointing, and ultimately to the labeling of an entire people. Let us be giants, not grasshoppers.