



Photo courtesy of Herb London

HERB LONDON

words to live by

BY ALIZA DAVIDOVIT

When Herb London was 15 years old his teacher taught him a trick that would ultimately help him change the world. Yet, neither he nor she could have known then that her advice would rear a mind and a man who would be listed among the “Outstanding Intellectuals of the 21st Century,” who would counsel presidents, influence domestic and foreign policy, author dozens of books, run for public office, take on the United Nations, and boldly challenge jihadists across the globe. All this he has done with the gumption of a white knight trying to prevent darkness from overtaking the world, armed not with a sword, but with a more cutting blade, his way with words.

When his talent for writing was unsheathed early on, his teacher advised the teen to whet his skill by writing one page every day. He has not stopped for 52 years. Today this eloquent warrior for mankind savvily brandishes his most powerful tool—his words—a sagacious unlimited artillery which he uses ever persuasively as weapons of mass instruction.

Herb London, whose class and comportment are nothing less than regal, is president of the Hudson Institute, a world renowned nonpartisan think tank in Washington, D.C. that seeks to guide global leaders in government and business. Since its founding in 1961 the institute has been future-oriented. Herman Kahn, its late founder, said that it was set up to do interdisciplinary research on “important issues” and “not just urgent ones.” To this day, it is that insightful ability of the institute to foretell, analyze, and advise on burgeoning issues as opposed to only focusing on “urgent ones” that continues to keep the Institute highly relevant and influential in domestic and world affairs.

The expertise of the institute’s highly intellectual team falls evenly down the political aisle. They are known to challenge conventional thinking and are hardly shy to speak out against it. With London at the helm of the think tank, it continues to forge forward and make major inroads on policy makers’ thinking and decisions. Henry Kissinger regards it as one of America’s foremost policy research centers and a leader in innovative thinking and creative solutions to the challenges of the present and the future.

And since London always keeps a discerning eye on the future, he can’t help but question what place the United Nations has in it. Keeping close tabs on the UN’s activities is among the institute’s many important undertakings. London recently organized a high-powered conference in New York City that included senators, congressmen, and scholars, to evaluate the relevancy

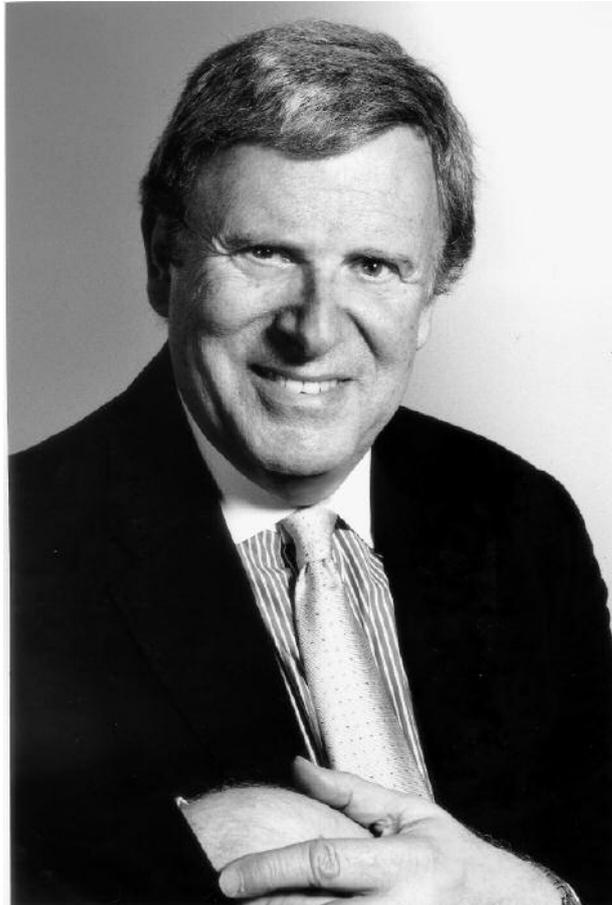


Photo by Gideon Lewin

“grotesque financial situation,” and by the fact that it serves as an impediment to American foreign policy ambitions.

“Twenty-two percent of the UN’s bills are paid by the U.S.,” London points out. “Yet, they come here to challenge America and hurl diatribes against the U.S. on our nickel. It’s a scam of major proportions.” London suggests moving the UN from the alluring Manhattan to Mogadishu to prove how quickly it would dissolve. “No one would want to go there. Diplomats want to come here.”

He also seriously questions how such an organization can be the arbiter of global well-being when it itself has been under fire for a \$65 billion Oil-for-Food scandal and other corruption as well as allegations of rampant sexual exploitation and rape of young girls and women in the Congo by its “peacekeepers.”

Peace is genuinely something London is concerned about. That is why he feels America must remain focused on its war on terrorism, something he equates with radical Islam. “The biggest threat to world peace and stability to the United States is terrorism,” London says emphatically.

“We have to win the war against radical Islam or our children will live in a world of chaos and despair.” And the UN, which really should be at the forefront of the fight, has divorced itself from that responsibility. “The UN is involved in the war on terror,” London explains, “but its members are on the wrong side.”

In this era of quick fixes and immediate gratification, even those on the right side may find London’s words daunting when he says that the war

of the self-serving international body that has mastered the art of sanctioning resolutions against Israel. “The United Nations has to be reformed dramatically,” London says, “or eliminated.” He maintains that if countries such as Iran are allowed to obtain nuclear weapons, then the UN will cease to be pertinent. He finds it objectionable that its leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was allowed to enter America to address the General Assembly. London is also appalled by the UN’s antisemitic activities, its

against radical Islam and terrorism is a 50-year war, with Iraq as only one front. The war is aimed not only at disarming foes, but of reindoctrinating their hearts and minds.

The think tank president says that despite 9/11 even Americans don't understand the importance of fighting such a war. "The U.S. has engaged in a philosophically misguided view of the world," he says. "It starts with cultural relativism and political correctness that I view, as political impediments in developing the emotional resources to combat that threat."

London views that as a major problem. "The Muslim world declared war on America." In 1993 there was the first attack against the World Trade Towers. In 1996, the Khobar Towers were bombed and then, in

should challenge them." He also suggests that the current administration should set up a war information office as was done in WWII in order to properly sell the current war in Iraq to the public as well the overall war on terror.

For London it's always about a fight for right. And it is those impassioned convictions, more than his tow-

sity educated but, nonetheless, had a sense of survival and rectitude as well as worldly insight and wisdom beyond that of most scholars. "They were more sensible than academics I came across in university life," he tells. "They had a better grip of what the world was really like and how to make changes." As such London himself could never be a

mere bystander. "Injustice has always disturbed me a great deal." Thus, today, he is not merely a man of eloquent words, but of action.

In London's early years, much of that action took place on a basketball court, where his competitive nature became very apparent. "Competition leads to excellence," London says. It must be true because he became so good at the game that he tried out for the Syracuse Nationals of the National



Photo courtesy of Herb London

London with Nancy and President Ronald Reagan.

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1998, devastating blasts ripped through the American embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2000 the USS Cole was bombed, and in 2001 the World Trade towers were struck again in the greatest attack on U.S. soil in history. Americans were shocked initially but proceeded with an apathy that exposed their cultural naiveté and one that is certain to invite disaster. "Pearl Harbor woke us up, but 9/11 did not," London says.

London's job is not only to find the problems but also the answers. "We need leadership in the White House to mobilize the public will," he says. "We shouldn't hesitate to challenge Muslim extremism; if they do things that are wrong we

ering height at 6'4", that makes him stand out among other men.

Herb London did not just wake up one morning and decide to save the world. His sensibilities were nurtured by a family which stood up for the things it believed in. London remembers as a child that his father would collect weapons and at great personal risk ship them off to the Promised Land in support of Israel. His family chose not to be mere witnesses of history but always got involved and fought on various fronts. And what impressed him most about his own parents, who are now deceased, is that they were not univer-

Basketball Association. Unfortunately, he did not end up playing for them because of injuries. But perhaps the biggest injury London incurred playing ball was to his ego in an episode that inspired him to write a play called *My Most Embarrassing Moment*. In 1958, while playing for Columbia, London's mother, dressed to the nines, attended one of his games for the first time. Mid-game, London was knocked down and his mother in sheer horror ran onto the court. After that London became known as "mama's boy." For years his mother could not understand why he was so upset with her, though he did forgive her after a while.

And as if being an athlete and

strikingly handsome was not gift enough for the 20-year-old London, he also became quite the heartthrob as a singer cutting a demo of “Unchained Melody,” as well as recording a popular rock record in 1959 called “Were Not Going Steady.” London, pretending to be from Philadelphia, became part of the Philadelphia set, which included Frankie Avalon, Fabian, Bobby Rydell and others, and traveled the country trying to sell his record while appearing on such shows emceed by Dick Clark and Alan Freed. London sang all the way to the bank and used the money he made toward his education. It was funds his hardworking parents couldn’t provide.

It’s hard to believe that the elegantly dressed London of today, whose noble bearing commands attention, was raised in a housing project in Queens. His humble home, one always filled with music and song, taught him

atically. That prized glove, playing basketball, and his singing career all took a back seat when he took a front seat at Columbia University. “My Columbia experience had a profound effect on me,” he shares. He studied there under Dr. Jacques Barzun, a leading American historian of ideas and culture, and was greatly inspired by him. He learned there was much more to life than playing basketball. “I came to the realization that



London and President George Bush.

it began, the now famous Gallatin school—organized to promote the study of “great books” and classic texts—had a half dozen students. Today it has 3,000. London has since built it from a \$25,000 program to a \$15 million one. And though there were many great minds that sharpened London’s own thinking, such as Irving Kristol, the father of neo-conservatism, journalist William F. Buckley, as well as

Herman Kahn, he says he has learned a lot from his students, too. “Students ask questions that you never think about.” Indeed some of those students were quite beautiful and famous, too, such as Isabella Rossellini, Frankie Kazan, Clarissa Bronfman, and the ex-Mrs. Rupert Murdoch, Anna.

But never one to get lost in literature alone, London joined an arena where sticks and stones can break bones and words can really hurt—politics. In 1989, London was one of the

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that you don’t have to be wealthy to have great joy in life and it also taught him to appreciate all that he has. The one thing in particular he remembers appreciating was a baseball glove his father gave him as a gift. London was so enamored of the glove that he would shine it daily with olive oil and take it with him everywhere he went, including school. His teachers would often remark that there was an odd odor in the classroom. But neither he nor the mitt were ever caught.

But as London got older the things he appreciated began to change dra-

there is so much I wanted to know,” he says. “I wanted to go to the library and learn everything from A-Z—know as much as I could.” Reading was his new passion but he had never stopped writing that one page a day. He graduated from Columbia in 1960 and in 1966 from New York University with a Ph.D. in history.

By 1972 London was responsible for creating the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at NYU and was its dean until 1992. He is also a professor emeritus and the former John M. Olin Professor of Humanities at NYU. When

Republican candidates for mayor of New York City. In 1990 he ran as the Conservative candidate for governor of New York getting more votes than any third-party candidate in the state’s history. In 1994 he was the Republican Party candidate for New York State Comptroller, losing in a close election.

Today, with no air of sour grapes syndrome, he says he is glad he lost because he finds politics a dirty game. “Politics is very corrupt and I’m very earnest” London tells. “I really had no recognition of how unseemly some of these people are.” But still caring very

much about the citizens the elected officials represent, London and his team at the Hudson Institute do continually influence and prevail upon the politicians and the public policies they represent. Regarding his stint at politics London jokingly says, "It was a midlife crisis thing. It was either run for office or get a convertible and a blonde." Kudos to London, most politicians usually do both.

But Herb London already has four beautiful women in his life. His wife, Vicki, is a published author of steamy romance novels. He likes to say he is the hero of those novels. But to the other three women in his life, London is a real-life hero. His three gorgeous,

Yet it doesn't appear that he will have to wait for post-mortem appreciation. London is today a noted social critic who has been a guest lecturer on many major radio and television news programs, including the popular *CNN Crossfire*, which he co-hosted for one year. His work has appeared in every major newspaper and journal in the country, including such diverse publications as *Commentary*, *National Review*, *American Spectator*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, *Washington Times*, *New York Magazine*, *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Modern Age*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Orbis*, *Encounter*, *Forbes*, and *The New Criterion*.

How does London have time to do it all? He only sleeps three hours a night. As famed Columbia journalism professor, Sam Freedman says, "You'll sleep when your dead." And though London himself says that he doesn't fear death, he does say that he finds himself praying a lot more than he used to, especially for his kids. He recalls Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Nobel Prize winning writer, telling him that he didn't pray until he got older and then he prayed for his children because he no longer had control over their lives.

Although London has never been an observant Jew, being Jewish means a lot to him and has become increas-

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grown daughters deeply admire their father and speak with him on a daily basis no matter how busy their schedules. His daughter, Stacy, who hosts the Discovery TV show *What Not to Wear*, was asked in a TV interview what was her most inspirational moment. She replied, "Getting a phone call from my father every day," although as a fashion critic she often tries to be inspirational to him and jazz up his conservative wardrobe. His middle daughter is an executive director at Westin Hotels and his youngest a student at Northwestern. With such a life, who needs a convertible?

And if London could teach his girls one thing in life it would be to follow their dreams. He, too, continues to pursue his own dream of fixing the world. He already has written 21 books and says that he has 10 more books inside his soul. He doesn't care if they are best sellers or not. "Maybe after I die people will see the brilliance in my work," he says jokingly. "Van Gogh didn't make money when he was alive."

In addition to London's television program, *Myths That Rule America*, he created a 47-part C.B.S. series entitled *The American Character*. He is listed in the *Outstanding People of the 21st Century*, *Directory of Distinguished Americans*, *Who's Who in Education*, *Who's Who in the East*, *Men of Distinction*, *Who's Who in America*, *Kingston's National Registry of Who's Who*, and *2000 Outstanding Intellectuals of the 21st Century*.

He is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards, such as the Martin Luther King Award from the Congress of Racial Equality for Citizenship Achievement and the Peter Shaw Award for exemplary writing on higher education and American intellectual culture. In 2000, he received the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, in 2001 the American Jewish Congress Award, and in 2002 the Liberty and Media Award, just to list a few. He also sits on the board of directors for over two dozen important organizations that concern themselves with the betterment of this country.

ingly important. "At 25 I was an agnostic, at 35 I started to believe, and at 45 I thought I should become a rabbi," he jokes. But even if he wasn't destined to be a rabbi, that didn't stop him from doing the rabbi's job. London often found that when he went to temple the rabbis had insinuated politics into their speeches. It drove him crazy. He soon began writing sermons for the rabbis to tell them what they should be saying.

In the biblical book of Genesis it says that God created the world through words. "And God said let there be light and there was light." Herb London, too, has created and affected many worlds through the use of words. But in less divine terms, he says, "I have a lot of demons in me and I feel very passionate, thus I write with great fervor."

From A to Z the gallant Herb London, at the helm of Hudson Institute, ventures forth to change the world—even one page at a time.

lifestyles