

# Burbank Leader

## Closure and the death of bin Laden

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*Q Osama bin Laden, the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks that killed almost 3,000 people, was killed last week by U.S. Special Forces at a compound in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad. He was shot to death in the raid and then buried at sea.*

*President Barack Obama has hailed the death of the al-Qaeda leader as a “good day for America,” saying the world is now “a safer and a better place,” although almost every U.S. embassy around the world has been put on high alert in case of reprisals. When news of bin Laden’s death broke, crowds flooded the streets of New York and Washington, D.C. to celebrate the terrorist’s death.*

*Now that bin Laden is dead, will his death bring some kind of closure to America?*

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The recent announcement that Osama bin Laden had been killed in a compound in Pakistan after an encounter with a U.S. Special Forces unit was an outcome that had been anticipated with hope for almost 10 years. And the reactions by many in our country were reasonably predictable. People joined in exuberant celebrations, and many opined that his death would bring an end to the reign of terror by al-Qaeda.

Then cooler minds began to analyze the situation. They recognized that such an act might well bring some sort of horrific retaliation by bin Laden supporters, since he was the iconic leader of al-Qaeda but not its only champion or devoted architect of terror. And then there were the conspiracy theorists who believed that the whole affair was a hoax, their notions fueled by his burial at sea and the fact that no pictures of the dead bin Laden were published. How do such ideas gain traction in otherwise rational people?

My reaction is not that I am sorry bin Laden is dead. But I don’t believe the murder of any person, however seemingly justifiable, is something to celebrate. What that reaction supports is the old “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” philosophy that has led to so many terrible wars and other destructive actions.

Bin Laden’s death in no way makes up for the deaths of the thousands of people who were lost on 9/11 or those whose lives have been sacrificed — American, Iraqi, and others — in our wars of retaliation in the Gulf. Actions carried out in revenge do not solve the problems that incite them. I believe we must be careful, when wolfing down a meal of our enemies, that the meal is not ourselves.

Let us hope that as people of faith, we can encourage ways of engagement that bring out the best in us and others, and that our children will learn to communicate, rather than retaliate, when faced with potentially destructive situations. I am not naïve enough to believe that we can solve everything by simply being nice. But I think we can do much better than we have done in this case.

**The Rev. Dr. Betty Stapleford**  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
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Let's hope for closure — closure, that is, as opposed to a further slide down the ethical slope, from viewing assassination as a necessary evil to accepting, and even prizing it, as a righteous act.

Before the news reports wrapped on the night of bin Laden's death, there was already talk of his No. 2 right-hand man — talk which felt a lot like we were asking, “Who's next on our hit parade of people it's OK to assassinate?”

And where does that slope end?

Every once in a while there is someone so thoroughly evil and murderous that it's necessary to kill them, intent as they are on the mass destruction of others. But this necessity is no cause for boasting or jubilation. It is a choice to take sin upon ourselves, and that choice should never be a happy one. Sin for the cause of a higher good is still sin; and we must be especially sober in the face of our deliberate choice to commit it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was executed for his part in plots to assassinate Adolf Hitler, wrote that “when a man [sic] takes guilt upon himself in responsibility, he imputes his guilt to himself and no one else. He answers for it.... Before other men he is justified by dire necessity; before himself he is acquitted by his conscience, but before God he hopes only for grace” (Ethics, p. 244).

I was as quietly relieved as anyone to hear of bin Laden's death, and grateful for the President's gravitas in delivering the news. But the drunken crowds that took to the streets on May 1 waving fists and flags weren't celebrating “closure.” They were in fact the visual bookend to those horrible, jubilant street scenes that were reported throughout the Middle East on 9/11; and certainly they removed all question of America's moral high ground in comparison.

Let's hope for closure — not boasting, not bravado, but sober satisfaction that a grim necessity of good against evil has been acted upon. And let us pray, with Bonhoeffer, for grace.

**The Rev. Amy Pringle**

St. George's Episcopal Church  
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Well, certainly there is closure, as the mastermind behind the worst terror organization and its worst act of terrorism is finished. Closure to his hideous existence is closure for us. Of course it hardly changes the fact that what inspired bin Laden still looms ominously out there.

As the wise King Solomon put it, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9, NIV). Al-Qaeda and its ilk will still plot evil, and newsworthy tragedies will continue until Earth's end.

But we feel better knowing this one devil has joined the everlasting ranks of hell, and if there is to be even more closure, then perhaps it'll be the 9/11 Memorial dedication this year, and again when the rest of Ground Zero is finished with reconstruction.

There is an element of faith involved in this closure, though; and perhaps it helps people to better grasp the biblical concept of faith. Faith is trust; belief in something with good reason, in trustworthy sources and surrounding evidence and eyewitness accounts.

That said, how many have seen bin Laden's corpse? None of us? Somebody says they have. I wondered why they didn't just tie his body to a board like they did in the old west and put him on display when the president addressed the nation. But they didn't, and they say they had good reasons.

Do they have photos? They say they do, but I haven't seen them. Have you? How do we know bin Laden isn't now living in Argentina with Hitler?

I jest, but if we can put our faith in what we are being told about this incident, sight unseen, and we can reasonably assess the presented facts, then we should be able to point people to Jesus and expect them to put their faith in him as well. They are the same sort of proofs, and God will hold every person accountable to them come judgment day. Without Christ's salvation, even the least of sinners will join bin Laden. Get closure on that.

**The Rev. Bryan Griem**  
Montrose Community Church  
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How do you bring closure to the hurt, pain, and suffering of the survivors of those murdered on the ghastly day of September 11, 2011? I lost a good friend at the Pentagon on that fateful day, and I know how acute the pain still feels. I can only imagine how much greater that pain must be for those who lost close family members during the attacks. Can we truly expect a boy who grew up without the loving, warm embrace of his mother, or a woman who raised her children alone and without the caring support of her husband, to find closure now that Osama bin Laden is dead?

I do not believe that is possible. This development may bring some measure of healing, but the wound remains.

However, whether or not Osama bin Laden's death brings final closure to this national trauma, it is still a monumental event. His killing sends a clear message to all those who intend to harm innocent Americans that we will destroy their diabolic organizations and make their lives miserable; the terrorists will be forced to be on the run 24/7, and eventually we will find them and bring them to justice.

I believe that this milestone in the arduous war on terror ultimately does make America safer. It sends a strong signal to our enemies — and to the citizens of this country — that we will remain ever vigilant as long as evil degenerates like bin Laden prowl this world.

To Osama bin Laden I gladly say, farewell and good riddance! Whenever he arrives at his final destination and takes his place in the rogue's gallery of history's most wicked men, he is welcome to say hello to Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot and Saddam. He can let them know that despite their best efforts to sow violent hatred and obliterate the human spirit, we are alive and well. He can inform these human monsters that the ideals of freedom, democracy and the pursuit of happiness are growing ever stronger in America and around the globe.

There can be no doubt that our world is a better place when mass murderers such as these are gone.

**Rabbi Simcha Backman**  
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The horrific crime against humanity that occurred on 9/11 jolted our nation to its core and will never be forgotten. The death of Osama Bin Laden, however, will bring partial closure to America in that it has finally brought justice to the families of the victims, as well as to our nation as a whole. This limited closure is hugely important for all. Now that this immediate evil has been eliminated, how we progress as a nation and human family remains in the balance.

Our national reaction to the trauma of the 9/11 tragedy can progress in a negative/unhealthy way or a positive/affirming way. OBL's death emphasizes forks on the road ahead. One leads to an unhealthy post-9/11 traumatic stress condition. The other leads toward a positive post-9/11 traumatic growth opportunity for world peace and for the advancement of relations between the West and the Muslim world. Our global village is way too small and technologically interconnected to view this tragedy only as an American issue, when terrorism is an international issue without borders.

To prevent the negative, we must not confuse the friend and the foe. "We must also reaffirm that the United States is not, and never will be, at war with Islam," President Obama said during his historic address on May 1. "I have made clear, just as President Bush did shortly after 9/11, that our war is not against Islam. Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader. He was a mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed, al Qaeda slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries, including our own. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity."

On the heels of the 10th anniversary of 9/11 and with the rising wave of Islamophobia used by some media pundits and certain Tea Party-aligned politicians, these words take on a greater significance. Islam and Muslims are not the enemy because terrorism knows no religion.

The healing will come about when the ugly cancer of Islamophobia starts to wane. This effort first relies on understanding the true nature of Islam from mainstream Muslim scholars on Islam in the USA and from your average Muslim neighbor, who is a productive and contributing American citizen.

The opportunity for growth is tremendous in the U.S. and the world at large. Peace and mutual understanding through interfaith relations is a productive way to accelerate human relations.

In his June 2009 speech at Cairo University, President Obama emphasized the common themes of peaceful human relations found within the three major Abrahamic religions. He said, "The holy Koran tells us, 'O mankind! We have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.' ....The Talmud tells us: 'The whole of the Torah is for the purpose of promoting peace.'" Finally, he said, "The holy Bible tells us, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.' .... The people of the world can live together in peace. We know that is God's vision. Now, that must be our work here on Earth."

Closure regarding OBL's death is not through rejoicing in his death, for vengeance is not part of the religious traditions of Muslims, Christians or Jews. Real closure is brought about through our shared religious and American civic values of justice, pluralism, interfaith understanding and peace.

### **Levent Akbarut**

Islamic Congregation of La Cañada Flintridge  
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My guess about Americans feeling closure with the news of Osama bin Laden's death is that we may not feel as much as we thought we would. In death-penalty cases, relatives of the victims often hope to feel better than they do when the convicted killer is put to death. We may have similar emotions as time goes by. We may have felt jubilation at the news of the terrorist's demise, but as the truth sinks in that our loved ones he killed are not

coming back, no matter how many bad guys we catch and kill, closure may elude us.

Also, as time goes by, we may remember the many-headed Hydra of Greek mythology. What that particular myth says is that if you cut off one head, another grows in its place. I suspect that's what will happen with al-Qaeda. Osama won't hurt us anymore, but there are plenty of Hydra heads just waiting to step in and be the next revered terrorist.

Since this column is “in theory” about religion, now would be a good time for a commercial about what my religion says about forgiveness. I think we need to forgive. Vengeance and pay-back are short-lived, as far as their benefits to us are concerned — but being able to forgive lets us move on with our lives.

Jesus said to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5: 44), but boy, is that hard! Osama and the rest of the terrorists infuriate me no end — but if I truly am a follower of the man from Nazareth, I need to forgive Osama bin Laden and all those of his ilk. This being a Christian isn't so easy, is it?

**The Rev. Skip Lindeman**

La Cañada Congregational Church  
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Closure doesn't leap to my mind as an outcome of OBL's death. It is a big relief, certainly, that he is gone and that collateral damage wasn't any worse. I feel no particular joy in his death, while accepting that in this case, the ends justified the means.

Trying to do the impossible of putting myself in the shoes of someone who lost a loved one in 9/11, I can't imagine having a “sense of satisfying finality” because he is dead.

As far as closure for America, I hope that the intense re-focus on the Afghanistan war, our feckless partners in the war, and the nature of the terrorist threat itself will help get us as a nation to a genuinely safer and better — a more satisfying — place in the world.

I hope that the success of the concentrated police action, conducted by a group small in number, huge in skills, backed and fronted by superb intelligence and deep planning, makes us stop and seriously question our reliance on an occupying army of 100,000 in Afghanistan.

Al-Qaeda comprises no more than 100 members, of which 50 to 75 are actively engaged in the field at any one time. These are official U.S. intelligence figures. And they are in Pakistan or elsewhere, not Afghanistan. Again, these facts are not in dispute.

I hope the attention makes people realize that by our endless-war approach to terrorism, we have accomplished some of the enemy's aims for them. Laws like the Patriot Act degrade our own civil liberties, and the permanent-war economy lowers our standard of living (for most people; not the richer-than-rich, I'll grant).

Not to make light, but hearing that captured al-Qaeda documents said U.S. railroads were a potential target, and having just traveled cross-country by train, I doubt that al-Qaeda can do more systemic harm to Amtrak than has our refusal to provide adequate government support, which has allowed the rest of the developed (and even some of the less-developed) world to have good passenger trains.

I hope we seriously reexamine how much the Taliban (who themselves have no foreign agenda) really enables al-Qaeda, and whether waging endless war among, meaning inevitably on, the civilians of Afghanistan, most of whom of course aren't Taliban (yet), is smart even if there is a connection.

It seems a given to many Middle East experts that to the youthful protesters in the “Arab Spring,” OBL and al-Qaeda were already irrelevant. Too bad we armed the dictators who are now using those weapons against their own people demanding democracy.

Closure doesn't trickle down or fall like manna from heaven. We have to seek it.

**Roberta Medford**

Atheist  
Montrose

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Bin Laden's death has indeed brought some degree of closure to all Americans. A mass-murderer's career and plotting have been decisively terminated and his atrocities have been repaid with much-deserved justice. Some object that Bin Laden should have been taken to trial. He deserved none. He died on a self-initiated, self-imposed battlefield as an active combatant against our country. An anonymous burial at sea was more than he deserved. Proverbs 10:7 can justly be applied to him: “The name of the wicked will rot.”

Even so, the gloating and celebrating we saw, though we understand it very well, was inappropriate. The entire saga of bin Laden's destructive choices is a tragedy. Here is a man who rejected Jesus Christ our savior. He spent a life separated from God's goodness, both experienced and expressed. He brought grief to millions of people. He has left a legacy and a functioning organization dedicated to carrying out his wicked intentions. And now he is spending an eternity apart from God and everything that is good.

“As I live!” declares the lord God, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways!” (Ezekiel 33:11). We should be glad that an agent of wickedness has been stopped. We should grieve that a fellow human being, created in God's image, spent his life the way Osama bin Laden did.

**Pastor Jon Barta**

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For some Americans, especially those individuals who lost loved ones during 9/11, the death of Osama bin Laden may bring closure. However, for America as a whole, I don't think the claim can be made that this death brings closure to 9/11 or terrorism. Nor should it.

Last week an article appeared in the Wall Street Journal's opinion pages about whether killing the leader of a terrorist organization provides a long-lasting and permanent solution. The article recounted a number of killings attributed to Israel's Mossad. The point was made that such killings tend to paralyze the terrorist group in the short term, but in the long run they can result, in some instances, in the rise of an even more dangerous successor.

Was it appropriate for the United States to go after and eliminate Osama bin Laden? Personally, my answer is yes. Should we continue to eliminate terrorists who threaten the safety of the United States or its citizens, whether here or abroad? Again, my answer is yes.

My concern now is how do we handle terrorism going forward? More specifically, how will the United States use its military might, financial resources and moral conscience to deal with terrorism, now that bin Laden is

dead? For the past week, the airwaves have been filled with commentary and opinion about the killing and what to do. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer or path, and there is considerable diversity of opinion, much of which is divisive. As I write this article, a headline is appearing in a well-known news website that reads: “USA Freak Out: Terror Fears; False Alarms.”

As a nation, we have an enormous challenge ahead to deal with and overcome terrorism. The optimist in me believes in America. America has risen to difficult challenges in the past; I believe we will do so again. As a nation, we should seek guidance from God, remember our heritage and values, and use our resources and might to do good in the world and seek, and bring about, peace.

**Rick Callister**

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