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Burbank Leader

In Theory: Reflections on 9/11

September 9, 2011

Question:

Today marks the 10th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. What are your thoughts on this day?

Answer:

Analyzing my feelings about September 11, 2001 is not as simple as it might seem. It would be easy to imagine that all the brilliant solutions I have now, after so many years have passed, are the same ideas that came to me then. But we were all in a state of shock and fear; it seemed impossible to believe the events of that day had actually happened.

So what do I think now? I continue to be dreadfully sorry that so many innocent people died in the World Trade Center buildings and the Pentagon, and that their families and friends are still suffering. The attack was an atrocity of the highest order.

But the deaths of many more than that in the wars that we have fought since then is yet another atrocity. How could we believe that sending our young men and women to fight in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other locations could somehow settle the score, particularly when the perpetrators of the attacks were from neither of those countries? War, no matter how well-intentioned, cannot bring back the dead and injured.

Although I do not believe that we simply should have ignored the attacks, I wish that we could have found another way to protect ourselves from further terrorist plots, perhaps by using our intelligence personnel, causing many fewer deaths. And gaining more positive regard from the international community when we were being viewed with great sympathy could also have gained greater support for us from our friends. Instead, it seems our lengthy and invasive wars have brought us more enemies and fewer friends.

So, on this 10-year anniversary of the 9/11 tragedies, I am sad that we have accomplished so little to make the world a better place for ourselves and others. As people of faith, I hope that we will find ways to reach out to all those who suffer, whether they are Jews, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, or those of other faiths, or of none. If we can do that, the experience of September 11 may not have been in vain.

Rev. Dr. Betty Stapleford
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Verdugo Hills
La Crescenta, CA

I am yearning for the goodness of humanity.

I long to stand soft together in silence with people of many nations, our hats in our hands and the same breeze ruffling our bowed heads, not looking alike nor believing alike but the same in our depths, in our love of life and the way our spirits want joy.

I want to sit watch in a starlit field, among the sheeps' quiet bells, and hear the sky begin to sing of peace on earth and good will among all people, a song of new beginnings; a song not of competing messiahs, but of new human beginnings.

(I would need, in that moment, to have someone show me how properly to kneel and touch my forehead to the ground, humble under that sky's announcement.)

I am weary of the trumpets of division, the child's game of who can stand on top of which hill the longest.

I do not want to dwell on the worst we have to offer.

Today I yearn for the holiness of starry skies and all of us bowed down beneath them, washed by their song.

The Rev. Amy Pringle
St. George's Episcopal Church
La Cañada Flintridge

A few thoughts come to mind on this poignant and emotional day:

Regardless of our current state, we still need God. We did not realize how vulnerable we were as the day dawned on September 11, 2001. Are we really any less vulnerable to tragedy today? When the attacks came, we were shocked and humbled by how susceptible we had been. In Psalm 4:8, David expressed his confidence in God alone: "In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety." The best of man's defenses and securities may fail us, but God never will.

Even after the worst tragedies, God provides healing and strength to persevere. "[God] heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). We will never forget the days of confusion and fear after the 9/11 attacks, and how even the sound of a plane flying overhead caused us to look twice. But by the grace of God we're still here, the families of victims are growing, and as a nation we have stood strong. God has been good to us and by his grace, we have not suffered another such attack. He is giving our nation new day after new day to turn back to him.

Though we may always remember life's tragedies and learn from their painful lessons, we aren't doomed to languish in the pain they caused. It's difficult to relive those moments of terror watching all the 9/11 retrospectives this week. Remember how God our good shepherd has brought you forward from that time, and look forward to the days of his son's kingdom, when "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Pastor Jon Barta
Valley Baptist Church
Burbank

Mixed emotions are what I have, 10 years after being attacked on 9/11/2001.

We are rebuilding something on the site of Ground Zero in New York, and I think that rebuilding is a good thing. The rebuilding represents a renewal of the American spirit, of the human spirit. In religious terms, it could represent a resurrection of sorts.

But the news isn't all good; we've been fighting a war for almost 10 years, and there appears to be no satisfactory conclusion in sight.

Also, the mighty United States of America, this so-called "Christian" nation, engaged in torture (and I hope that's past tense). The fact that we did such a thing bothered me then and it bothers me now.

True, innocent persons of all faiths died on that September morning, but such a cowardly attack on the innocent doesn't give us carte blanche to do anything we want to do, such as rendering suspects to other countries where torture is an everyday way of doing business. I am proud of the fact that our country is so strong that no force on earth can keep us down for long. But I am bummed out that our leaders were so arrogant as to suspend the ideas of the Geneva Convention as if they didn't pertain to us.

One of the Proverbs (14:34) says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." No question that sin or evil hit us 10 years ago, but our response to that sneak attack has been troubling, at best. We were innocent victims then, but we are innocent no longer.

The Rev. Skip Lindeman

La Cañada Congregational Church

La Cañada

As I think back to that fateful day a decade ago, I recall sitting in my home here in Glendale and watching with sheer horror as the ghastly terror attacks transpired. The devastation and destruction brought upon my hometown of New York City and on our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., was truly staggering. I remember the shock and pain I felt when I learned that a good friend of mine, naval officer Michael Noeth, was killed at the Pentagon on that tragic morning. Hearing this piece of news made it all real and tore my heart to shreds. The feeling of absolute helplessness is something I will never forget.

My initial response was to cower at home, the terror felt so overwhelming.

I was scared to take my children to school or go out to the market to pick up food. I was virtually paralyzed. Several hours into the day I called a fellow rabbi for some comfort, but all I heard from him were dreadful thoughts and fearful warnings.

But then something very odd happened. It was at that moment that the triumphant human spirit we all share began to shine forth. I turned to my wife and stated that if we react in this fashion, then the terrorists have effectively won. We agreed that we had a moral obligation to go about our lives and continue with our normal routine for our sake, for the sake of our children, and most of all for the memory of the thousands who were killed.

That was, in essence, America's response as a nation. We mourned and we cried, but then we dusted ourselves off and resolved that we would not let these cowardly fanatics and their minions undermine the freedom and beauty of our lives in this great country.

We can proudly say that 10 years after the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil, we are today a stronger people and a more resolute nation. Our enemies' wicked goals were not realized, and in fact the terrorists have been severely weakened. Indeed, even the hopeful moments we have witnessed during the so-called "Arab Spring" contain a potential repudiation of the Islamic extremists' goals of establishing a harsh, theocratic rule across the region.

On this 10th anniversary of September 11, 2001, as countless memorials take place across the nation, I call upon my fellow citizens to commit themselves to performing acts of goodness and kindness. On this solemn day and in the days to come, let us strive to be compassionate and understanding toward one another. By doing so, we strengthen our moral fiber and send a loud message to all of humanity that although evil may strike, the power of good will always prevail.

Rabbi Simcha Backman

Chabad Jewish Center

Glendale

As I write this, it seems that every segment of our society and culture, in every community, is poised to mark the 10th anniversary of 9/11 with honor, remembrance and mourning. Locally a Crescenta Valley interfaith event will observe 9/11 by serving the living with a blood drive.

Given this sincere and voluminous outpouring, I have this thought — can it also be true, as I read in a recent poll, that about a third of us believe the U.S. and/or Israeli governments were behind 9/11? I wonder what percentage in the Muslim world rejects the official story about Osama bin Laden's killing because his body is gone, among other reasons?

This leads me to think about how much I deplore and regret that Osama bin Laden did not stand trial for the horrendous taking of life of which he is accused. Even the Holocaust murders and torturers were tried at Nuremberg.

In the end, he was unarmed and undefended, save for his wife, who lunged unarmed at a Navy SEAL who was heavily armed and in full assault gear.

It seems he could have been brought back for trial, creating a full, factual, public record on al Qaeda's alleged mastermind.

Like the Nuremberg archives, it would enable research and preserve public memory, and loudly declare, “never again.”

Especially I hope that thought joins emotion as part of the anniversary observances — on all the podiums, in all audiences public and private, and in all media coverage.

How can we move toward a world without the hate and ignorance, acted out as violence in the extreme, that was the 9/11 attack? How can we effect a just and intelligent foreign policy, one that doesn't contribute to the emergence of terrorist plotters at home and abroad?

How can we atone for, and avoid in future, the sort of completely misdirected response as ours to 9/11, the invasion of Iraq?

Roberta Medford

Atheist

Montrose

I wish we could call this 10th anniversary year a sort of Jubilee Year, like the tradition cited in Leviticus, which calls for everyone to say, “I'm sorry,” and be universally pardoned. The prisoners would be freed, and all debts forgiven, mostly because we need God's mercy and a new start more than anything else. In Leviticus, Jubilee is supposed to be every 50 years, but I'm not sure we can make it another 40 without letting up.

Sorry to the 9/11 victims' families still grieving. It's not fair. It's never been fair. We all pray your freedom from despair and anger.

Sorry to the 9/11 responders who had to wait 9.5 years for assistance with debilitating and life-threatening health issues. Breathe freely.

Sorry to the families of 7,494 American, British, and “Other” soldiers for the loss of your spouse/child/parent in wars that our leaders used 9/11 to start. It is a debt that can only be forgiven, never repaid.

Sorry to the innumerable Iraqi and Afghani families for the loss of your spouse/child/parent. We didn't know you, so we have found it hard to count you. Is there pardon for that?

Sorry to the innocent “illegal enemy combatants” who have been tortured in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram, and who knows how many other U.S.-run prisons. Go free.

Sorry to all of us for \$3.7 trillion spent on war instead of on education, housing, food, infrastructure or health care.

Sorry to our Muslim American neighbors for the assumptions made about your allegiances, and that you have had to tell us so many times that 29 Muslims died in the Twin Towers.

Sorry that this train barrels on with no Jubilee in sight. Ground is broken on a \$3.4 billion Department of Homeland Security building to house the huge and sprawling intelligence network that no one is quite managing or coordinating.

Sorry that we will watch the Twin Towers collapse again and again, knowing that people died, and some part of our national soul died, and that nothing will make it all right again, except God's mercy and resurrection-fueled repentance, forgiveness, neighbor-love and new starts. God bless America.

The Rev. Paige Eaves

Crescenta Valley United Methodist Church

Montrose

My thoughts are many on this, the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

First and foremost, my heart still goes out to the families, relatives and friends of those individuals who lost their lives on that day. Time may heal wounds, but it does not replace fallen loved ones.

Second, I still vividly remember the events of that day. As a family, we watched on TV with shock and unbelief as the Twin Towers came down, the Pentagon was hit and one of the hijacked planes crashed. My children begged me not to go to work. My office was located on the 52nd floor of the Library Tower, which is the tallest building in downtown Los Angeles, and they were truly scared. On that day, no one knew what was safe.

Third, the United States government has been able to keep Americans safe, but I view the world now as less safe than it was on September 10, 2001. Added to that is the world's current turmoil and instability, both politically and economically.

Fourth, I see tough times ahead. When I graduated from college in the early 80's, I felt a sense of optimism. As I see my children graduate from college, I have a sense of pessimism.

Fifth, I see the need for an anchor of stability in our lives. I am reminded of a scripture found in the Book of Mormon that reads, "Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God" (Ether 12:4).

In times of trouble and turmoil, there is one sure anchor and that is our lord and savior Jesus Christ.

On this 10th anniversary, may we reflect on the past and hope for a better future.

Rick Callister
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
La Cañada

This Sunday is the 10-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. When people were murdered because passenger jets slammed into the Twin Towers, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field, we began a new historical time period. In the United States we call this 9/11. We are referring to the event and the U.S. response and how the world has changed since.

We citizens of the United States have learned lessons from 9/11, and we've experienced changes in how we operate. We began, and still continue to be engaged in, the longest lasting military conflict in our nation's history. There currently are 100,000 U.S. Troops in Afghanistan after that conflict started on October 7, 2001. Human rights changes have been carried by the United States, including use of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, rendition, water-boarding and increased surveillance on U.S. citizens. Military expenditures have increased while resources available for domestic programs like schools and city and state infrastructure are in short supply.

While many arguments are made for the changes in the U.S. since 9/11, I believe much of the motivation for these changes is the desire for revenge and proving the strength and fearfulness of the United States.

That desire has been fulfilled. Revenge has been taken against many people in the Near and Far East, and people around the world fear the next attack of U.S. troops. But I have a dream and hope that positive change can take place in the United States because of 9/11. I want 9/11 to remind people of the great dreams and aspirations of the United States. My desire is for an image of the U.S. as an example of respect for human rights, love of humanity and diversity and for justice.

I hope that someday, we may remember 9/11 as a cause for our nation to be inspired to lead people to make a better world filled with respect and peace.

Steven Gibson
South Pasadena Atheist Meetup
Altadena

On September 11, 2001, I was telling my Gina, “breathe,” for the umpteenth time, as she nearly crushed my hand and blew out a big exhale in the final sequence leading up to a blood-curdling scream. Thus was born a perfectly wonderful little munchkin that I knew immediately as my daughter. Today that munchkin is 10, and only now is she really capable of comprehending the magnitude of events that took place the day she took her first gasp of air. Her mother and I are forever grateful, and we’ll forever remember that fateful day with mixed emotions.

Half a decade later, I visited Ground Zero as a stopover on my Israel pilgrimage in ‘06. I rented a car and tooled around Lower Manhattan trying to see something, but nothing ascended above the fence. I was angry. Our government should have ordered round-the-clock construction to rebuild with such fervor and intensity that the world would thank Al-Qaeda for giving them one of the new seven wonders of the modern world. We should have rebuilt with such an overwhelming statement like that, rather than just erecting monuments with light bulbs, which seemed to be its fate only a few years ago.

Three thousand murdered, 300 million mourning their loss, and some prognosticators estimating 30 years total recovery time. Sheesh! But I’m hopeful. The new One World Trade Center (Freedom Tower) is currently growing to be the tallest building in America when it is completed in 2013.

I also thought last year’s discovery of a colonial-era boat below the disaster rubble was very poetic; our cast-off humble beginnings, mixed together with the collapsed evidence of our modern international greatness. How far we’ve come, and not without struggle.

Life goes on. My daughter just started fifth grade, and 9/11 is memorialized as yet another bit of history in her textbooks. The big takeaway? “No one knows when their hour will come ... people are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them” (Ecclesiastes 9:12 NIV). With our savior, Jesus, those times are not without meaning and hope. Without him, it’s all tragic pointlessness.

Rev. Bryan Griem
Montrose Community Church
Montrose
