

Do you remember where you were ten years ago today when America was attacked by terrorists. There are only a few dates in history that I think have that same type of capacity for instant recognition. I am told by those older than me, that the assassination of President Kennedy had a similar affect on them. For me a similar event was the assassination of Martin Luther King, which occurred when I was 8 years old. What I was doing at that time was seared into my memory even until this day. And so I imagine it was for many of you ten years ago when the Trade Towers and the Pentagon was attacked and an aborted attack ended with a plane crash in Pennsylvania. I remember I was sitting at my desk at work.

Someone came in and told me a plane had flown into the Trade Towers. My immediate response was "Oh a terrorist attack" the person who walked in was dumbfounded, what makes you say that what do you mean they said, maybe it was an accident with a plane that was flying off course. I hated being correct about this. And for hours as I am sure we all did, everyone in my office stood riveted watching the television as the day progressed. That day jarred this country out of our innocence. We somehow thought we were untouchable, and we realized just how vulnerable we were. But why now, why this event. Terrorist bombings had been happening throughout the world for years.

And in the three years prior to 2001 there were three attacks against US embassies and military. Those didn't affect us we thought...well that is the risk of living overseas...that cant happen here, that is the risk of being in the military we conjecture. We were still innocent. And yet why, because this was not the first terrorist attack on United States Soil. Actually in 1920s there was a bomb set by anarchist in Wall Street and again in 1970 a bomb at a Wall St. Restaurant by a Puerto Rican Nationalists group. Both of these were smaller in scale. There had been a previously unsuccessful attempt on the world trade center. Were we lulled thinking that either we were capable of stopping it or the enemy was incapable of success.

I don't know why though. Was it innocence, Was it our mind set of exceptionalism, and manifest destiny that we thought we could remain free from terrorist attacks. The bombing in Oklahoma City by anti-government Americans I think made us take pause and reflect on extremism within our own country. But 9-11 came as an attack from outside America by religious extremists. 9-11 became a reality tv terrorist show for everyone. It struck at a symbol of America and we saw that symbol live on television crumble before our eyes. And with it our innocence crumbled. Again, we often don't hear or talk about the Pentagon being hit. I do want to raise that up as well. I think we as a country take the view that being part of the armed services, there is the risk. But innocent civil servants died. But there before our eyes, the trade towers, the symbol of America was destroyed. That symbol was not just capitalism. It was the symbol of what we viewed human potential to be, the dream of human progress, and as well the dream of a diverse, inclusive, pluralistic America now being separated by a narrow minded extremist view of the world. We had lost our innocence. The innocence that we could be untouched by violence, the innocence that we could march forward in a linear path to evolve into what we believed to be the potential for humanity. Maybe we need to redefine just what we mean by progress and the evolution of human potential.

We have spent the last 10 years not only trying to prevent future attacks but trying to recapture that innocence that we once had. But that is impossible. Once you lose your innocence it is gone. A couple of weeks ago one of our members talked about the story of Adam and Eve and eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. and having to leave the Garden of Eden. To me that biblical story is one of losing ones innocence; It is the bridge into a new state of awareness. It is about having to live in a difficult world and make difficult choices and thus we need to lose our innocence and have knowledge of good and evil to help us make better choices in our lives.

So I ask you have we become more aware, I would like you to reflect on how have these events changed the way you have come to view the world, and has it changed how you have interacted with others in the community. Have we retreated in fear or have we engaged with curiosity to discern how we can build a better more loving community, a world where this could not happen. Are we looking for ways to work for peace in our community. Are we going home today to watch football or are we going to the inter-faith commemorative service in town. These are the choices that we make with our lives every day. I do not judge your choices, I just ask that you consciously think about your choices.

For me, I would say the one positive aspect of the aftermath of 9-11 is that we have learned more about Islamic faith, and the many multi-faceted layers of it. We cannot put our head in the sand, we

have to work for peace. It is not enough to love our neighbor. We have to know our neighbors. And we can not just know our neighbors, we have help our neighbors when they need help. We cannot regain our innocence, but with new eyes, new vision, new awareness we can work for a world in which there is no violence.

Now I have read much leading up to 9-11 that indicates that we should be more forgiving of our enemies, and that it was our own excess' that led to this tragedy. But I cannot accept that. As Edmund Burke, the an 18<sup>th</sup> Century member of the British House of Commons said, "When bad people combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle." I did know one of the victims personally, the wife of someone I worked with. I had a cousin, who worked in the trade towers who luckily had a doctors appointment that day. Seemingly random fate. My sister has a neighbor who was attending a corporate meeting at the towers that at the last minute was moved from the 90<sup>th</sup> floor to the 63<sup>rd</sup> floor, and because of that, the people in that meeting lived. Maybe it is because I walked by those buildings every day for years on my way to classes at a nearby university. There but for the grace of the universe go I, I think.

I can intellectually understand how our foreign policy would lead others to want to attack us. But it is the death of innocent lives that I do not accept. But the reality is those 3,000 Americans that died on 9-11, were just living. They were a diverse group of people just trying to survive in the environment in which they lived. The victims who died were nationals of 115 different countries, of multiple different religious backgrounds of which 31 victims are Muslims who died in the attacks. The victims ranged in occupation from dishwasher to CEO to visitor to the firefighter who knew walking in, they was probably not coming out alive. This was truly the diversity of American Life compressed into one building.

I don't accept the killing of innocents as a way of being.. So having said that, I don't accept our governments killing of innocent people as a way of being either. I want to take this time to remember all innocent victims that have died in war. The Iraq War Logs released by WikiLeaks contain records compiled by the United States military through December 2009, which indicate that there have been over 66,081 Iraqi Civilian deaths. And let us not forget our armed services members serving our country in combat since 9-11 – Over 6,000 dead (more than twice the number of people who died at the trade towers) and 45,000 wounded. And this is not even counting the mercenaries we have hired to fight for us who have died. I also want to raise up that there are over 15,000 murder victims a year every year in the United States.

Let this day be a remembrance of all innocent victims, but particularly of the people in the towers and on the planes, of the firefighters who heroically tried to rescue them. For innocent victims all over the world due to all wars. Let this day be a day we can rally for peace. A peace our principles call us to work towards. Principle #6 – The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. Let this day be a day we can rally for love. A love that is a core value of our religion. A day we can remember a time before we all lost our innocence that yet may be once again for future children. A day not calling for retribution but a day of remembrance, A day not calling for division but rather a day of healing.

For I would hope that one day, we could prevent the need for such human sacrifice and we can find our way to a peaceful coexistence in the world. Now I am certainly not naive, and I understand that it is not going to happen overnight, but if we don't take steps in the direction of peace, if we don't even start down that path, we will never get there. So we must start. Peace does not mean we surrender to our enemy. But neither does it mean we have to kill all people who think differently than us. As Sun Tzu wrote in "The Art of War", to win without fighting is best. But who is to say what winning is. Is keeping gas prices low winning. Is insisting the world follow our form of government winning. Or is fighting for individual rights of all humans winning. There are no easy answers, but I think we must consciously ask the question of ourselves – what does winning constitute for us and the world, and what is its cost. I have thought and often said that if we develop alternative fuel sources we can free ourselves from the middle east entanglements, and thus end this conflict.

Now I think alternative fuel sources are an important thing if for nothing else than for the long term environmental sustainability of the planet. But in truth, in this day and age, we shall always be interconnected and interdependent with each other. Whether the resource is oil, or water, or food, or medical care, or knowledge, the distribution or lack thereof has for millennium and will continue to lead

to conflict. And we have found that the larger one country tries to spread their influence, the larger they are, the harder it is for the country to impose its will. Whether this was the Greeks under Alexander, or the Roman Empire or the British Empire or Germany, the Soviet Union, and now the United States it will not be done unilaterally or merely by brute strength.

For people come to resent being forced into submission. Trust me, I think back to that bully in third grade...It took many years, but I never forgot and eventually when the time was right years later I got him back...Looking back on it, as an older, more mature, more reasoned person I now see there could have been other ways to deal with it and I have learned to over the years to be forgiving. I have learned that violence begets violence. ..I have learned that the overall good is sometimes more important than what is good just for me. There are times, I did not want to go to work, or work overtime, but I did for my family needed the money. There were times, I did not want to come to church for a meeting, but I did, because I have made a commitment to my community..

So I ask you, what type of commitment are you going to make. I have been watching the “I will” – advertisement campaign. It is mostly celebrities or sports stars, I hate it when they show celebrities and I have no idea who they are. Can someone be a celebrity if I don’t know who they are? The campaign shows these people saying I will do this or I will do that in memory of those who died on 9-11. The “I Will” campaign encourages people to do good deeds in remembrance of those who died on 9-11. The man who started the campaign said ” “After 9/11, there was a sense of unity across the country that was unlike anything I’ve ever experienced. The 9/11 Tribute Movement attempts to recapture that spirit by inspiring selfless action, bringing the country together for the common good.” So what will you do. I encourage you to reach out to the larger community. Perhaps find someone who Muslim and learn more about how they view their religion. If you don’t know someone who is Muslim, ask me and I can arrange a meeting.

So many people have and continue to die, for a dream of a better tomorrow, for a better world for everyone. I dream of a time when people do not have to sacrifice their lives for such a dream to come true. I dream of a time when peace will be a way of life instead of us trying to find a way to peace. Imagine if, instead of sending people to other countries to fight, we could send people there to share and learn about each other’s culture, and to share and learn about each others religions, and to share and learn about each others medical practices, and to share and learn about each others hopes and dreams. To share a meal, to share a smile, to share our peace with each other. Just to share and celebrate life. For I believe deep down, we all are peaceful people...Maybe we just need to evolve and mature a little more as a species....maybe we just want to feel safe, and it is fear of things that are different that makes us not feel safe....

So we must break down the barriers that limit knowledge, we must open ourselves up to new ideas and new possibilities, which means like the water in story for all ages, we must be willing to change to get to where we want to go. If we are willing risk all this, then maybe just maybe if more and more people live in such a way, then as it says in the Book of Isaiah  
They shall beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks  
and Nation shall not take up sword against nation  
and they shall never again know war.

May it be so