

Meditation on Terror Following Terrorist Strikes Against The United States,
Rev. John Burciaga, minister
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix, Paradise Valley, AZ
September 11, 2001

Yes, there is much to do besides wringing of hands and calls for reprisal and retaliation. There is the work of healing and consolation that must begin with us and our place in this community.

It has been said that September 11, 2001 was "the day America's luck ran out," and that our lives never shall be the same again. Indeed, till now we have avoided the worst, but this transcends both Oklahoma City and the previous World Trade Center bombing and touched our common sense of identify. We feel wounded as a people, each is fearful for what his and her life and our children's lives may be hereafter.

We must confess also to anger as well as fear; to confusion that anyone would wish to do this to us; to a need to search our general ignorance of the world and of human nature, and to responses and solutions that may make terrorism untenable and impossible in the modern world.

We will think first of those whose lives are lost, those feared lost, family and other loved ones whose hopes, plans and dreams are altered forever. May every kindness and possible sacrifice be made for them, and every consolation offered.

Then may we remember, in these moments together, we are not called to wage war or to determine policy, but to reflection and to our better selves. For tomorrow is near; we wish our own children safe and hopeful; we yearn for lasting solutions and a pathway to peace. We shall rely on those who have knowledge we do not yet have and on their abilities to respond in a way that does justice to democracy and freedom.

We want our neighbors to be safe, as well as we. With humility and gratitude we acknowledge those who have dedicated their lives to our protection and defense as a people--firefighters, police, military, medical and other rescue personnel--who have or may be called to be in harm's way for our sake--not only today but for many tomorrows. Among them are those in our own congregation for whom we wish safety; and for their families who wait anxiously for word that may change their lives.

There may be reasons for the behavior of others, but for certain actions there is no excuse. It is unwise to withhold moral judgments on acts that are indiscriminate in their victims. We regret also that there are places in the world where our kind of suffering yesterday is suffered virtually every day of every year. We regret that others have felt so powerless and injured by international commitments that serve largely our interests and provide a way of life that bestows on us great privilege, luxury and convenience. We regret that there are places in the world where passionate, bright young people are also hopeless and without future, and vulnerable to a believing that the sacrifice of themselves in acts of violence will assuage the suffering and emptiness they see around them. We regret that Middle East nations, including Israel, must suffer the anxiety of when and whether worse attacks may be made against them.

We are here to hold each other and to think on these things. We are here to remember the Principles of Unitarian Universalism: the inherent worth and dignity of every person and the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all. How best can we serve these commitments and ideals of ours? First, let us reach out: all around us are hurting, including people with whom we associate little but who are fearful and daunted as are we; there are religious communities comprised of persons who share language, ancestry and heritage with those who would destroy us, but who do not share their beliefs or their actions; who are proud to be and to live as Americans, who would help us in our distress but are fearful that we now distrust and abhor them; they need to know that we believe in them as well, and that we wish them well and goodwill by brief, gentle expressions of neighborliness and common citizenship; we should attend their services of meditation and mourning as well as our own, in the wake of this national tragedy.

Yes, there is much to do besides wringing of hands and calls for reprisal and retaliation. There is the work of healing and consolation that must begin with us and our place in this community.

Let us not indulge ourselves in clamor, or be found denouncing those undeserving of condemnation, or engage in acts of self-serving self-righteousness. It is a time for measuring our present lives by all we pretend to be and to believe in.

In the prayerful reflection of Unitarian Universalist minister Harry Meserve:

"From arrogance, pompousness, and from thinking ourselves more important than we are, may (we be saved). For allowing ourselves to ridicule the faith of others, may we be forgiven.

"For making war and calling it peace, special privilege and calling it justice, indifference and calling it tolerance, pollution and calling it progress, may we be cured.

"For telling ourselves and others that evil is inevitable while good is impossible, may we stand corrected.

"God of our mixed up, tragic...doubting and insurgent lives, help us to be as good as in our hearts we have always wanted to be. Amen."

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Those present joined hands and were guided to meditate on the hands held as being, first, of those others who came to be together in their sadness, confusion and need for light in the darkness of tragedy; then to consider them as hands of those around the world who live in daily violence of the sort we recently experienced; then to consider them as hands of those who hate our country and feel that their hopelessness and desperation has to do with our international commitments that give us privilege and luxury.

Readings from statements by the UUA and the UUSC were made during the service, and lists of area Muslim mosques to be contacted in friendship and support and joined in their services

relating to the tragedy; information for donation of monies and blood for victims; and copies of documents relating to children and their grief.