

Safety and Security
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"I wondered about what I espoused as a pacifist and as a lover of life. As a Unitarian Universalist I dug for answers. But I had no answers. I still felt scared, horrified, hurt, angry, and shocked." -Tom Capo

How has this attack on our safe and secure country affected us? When a catastrophe of this magnitude strikes it is easier for us to deny, minimize or ignore the emotions that we feel, because the horror is so big there is no emotional connection to it. If we put faces to it, then we might begin to feel the grief, the fear, the horror. When a little girl, is trapped in a well, we learn about her, we empathize with her and her family. But when two towers, four planes, and part of the Pentagon are destroyed and thousands of people are killed, it is too big for our emotions to grasp. We can go from shock to numbness.

I want to share with you my experiences, my emotions, in hope that some of what happened to me might resonate with some of you. I was at my counseling office talking to a writer for the Beaumont Enterprise at 9am Tuesday morning. He wanted to interview me on the differences between spirituality and religion. We talked for a while, then he said he had to go, something was happening. This did not startle me, but as I walked out, one of my secretaries said, "Tom, an airplane has hit the World Trade Center." I was numb, interested, but unsure of how to react. Something in my gut couldn't take it all in. My next patient arrived soon after, and as we talked I was aware I was shedding tears. I soon realized that both my patient and myself were in shock. We were overwhelmed by the horror of what had happened. I remember saying, "I think we should all go home and hug our kids and affirm what is good in our world." I think I even said this a few times. Realizing that I was in shock did not take away its effect on me, but increased it.

Both my patient and I realized that we were experiencing a sense of unbelief, almost in a fog, with a deepening sense of the unreality of what had happened. We both felt this couldn't be real, but it was real. We struggled together to grasp some sense of the pain we were both feeling, the sinking sensation that would not stop. She began having flashbacks to other traumas in her life. I began to wonder how this was affecting all the people that I love and care about. I hoped no one I knew had been hurt.

Then slowly as the day passed I moved from shock to anger. I wanted revenge, I wanted the people who did this to pay for what they had done. When I came home later that night and began to see the horror on television for the first time, I heard of the 300 firemen who were killed trying to save people in the Towers. I wondered in my heart, how many more will die, and am I willing to support killing more people to get revenge. Am I willing to support putting Americans out there in some foreign country where many of them will be killed so I could feel some justice? Am I willing to support the killing of innocent men, women and children in the Middle East so I could feel justice had been done?

I wondered about what I espoused as a pacifist and as a lover of life. As a Unitarian Universalist I dug for answers. But I had no answers. I still felt scared, horrified, hurt, angry, and shocked. I know that we must all be willing to feel these feelings and more to face this horrific terrorist action, but I wondered how we could possibly make meaning of our lives when something like this happens.

As I strayed out into the world, I began to see the effects on people around me and I began to attend to the various medias. I saw an emotional Peter Jennings on the verge of tears, say, "I felt a need to contact my children."

My oldest son, Aaron, refuses to watch anything having to do with the attack. My youngest son, Jacob, was watching the news with fascination; then he asked me, "Dad are we going to war, and if we do will you have to go to war." I responded, "I do not know if we are going to war, but I am too old to go to war." Then he said, " Will I have to go to war." "No", I said, "you are too young to go to war." He seemed quite upset about the possibility of someone in the family having to go to war and maybe get killed.

I went to Kinkos and heard a man say, "Lets put our new sign on our building, and hope no planes crash into it." His friend said in response, "Don't joke about that man, I wanna kill somebody." I have heard many people saying that they had bought a gun or will buy a gun.

Many people are reacting, making public statements, trying to find meaning in these events. Some of those statements are helpful and healing and some are not. Reverend Jerry Falwell said Thursday that the reason for the attacks is that God has lifted his protection from the United States because of spiritual weakness-that abortion providers, gay rights proponents, banning school prayer, legalized abortion, and the general secularization of society caused this to happen.

I see American flags everywhere. I was driving down Fannin St. and saw a flag store with people lined up around the block waiting to buy American flags. Pride in our country, the Congress singing "God Bless America." I too feel pride in our country, but not because we have the ability to retaliate.

I began to hear the stories of people in New York. I heard on NPR about Michelle Enriche who was missing; she was due to be engaged this Saturday. She worked in Tower One of the World Trade Building and called her fiancé when the first plane hit but then nothing has been heard from her and she's presumed lost. Her fiancé's family and her family are searching for her, asking at all the hospitals and even people on the street.

And I heard of Franco Menosk who called his wife as soon as he got to work at 7am, Tuesday morning. He worked in Tower Two of the World Trade Center. She has not heard from him since. She is scouring all the hospitals, she is plastering signs everywhere. She called on the favors from friends and relatives as she searched desperately for him. She had to stand in line for hours to report him as missing.

I met with the Houston Ministers Consistory on Wednesday, and we all shared our feelings with each other. We understood this was a very complicated and emotionally intensive incident. I was

surprised at the concern expressed over the effects on our Muslim neighbors. Many of the congregations were bringing members of the local Mosques to be part of the healing services planned for today.

And what is the Arab community facing? A mosque in Irving had shots fired at it, hate phone calls are being made to Arab companies, ABC received an email that said, "We should deport all Arabs until all terrorism has ceased." There was a stoning of Arab kids in a school yard in North Houston; several Arab and Muslim groups in California received threatening phone calls. Maha Elgenaidi, executive director of the Islamic Networks Group in San Jose, said one of the hate calls the organization received was from a caller who said, "get the hell out of this country. You people have done nothing but ruin this country. You don't belong here. Your religion is vile and evil." Perhaps, we have not found out how to reach out to the Muslims. Yet part of this horror has something to do with the difficulty we have making connections with the people in the Middle East.

Love, hope, good, caring--are these words we are saying? I am hearing the words retaliation, revenge, murder, kill, hate. The intensity of these responses frightens me. Fortunately, I saw a bumper sticker that helped me remember there are others around me who might not let these destructive intensive feelings overwhelm them, it said, "Hate is not a family value."

How can we find the best of our civilization as we face such horror? Again, fortunately, I found this story of the Vienna Philharmonic. In 1945, the Vienna Philharmonic continued their performances even as the Soviet army was fighting near the city. The Vienna Philharmonic held up their schedule for one week after the entry of the Soviet Army, but then continued. This continued performing was "an affirmation of the ultimate triumph of all human gestures of creative beauty over the gestures of destruction, and even over the ugliness of war and death." Can we find the best of our civilization as we face so much destruction and so many deaths? In this time of horror, this story reminded me, that we need to hold onto to what is good. One way we can hold onto what is good is to hold onto what affirms life and beauty in our world, from the creations of our great musicians and artists to the beauty of children at play. We need to look for goodness in our world during this time when goodness and beauty seem so far away.

And we need to stay present with our suffering. This may seem incongruent with looking for goodness, but we are suffering grief, some of us to some larger extent than others. Our lives have been changed because of this event. We may ask ourselves what things will change now and what things will remain the same? How much change we will have to face will vary, but we will all have some change to face: we may feel less safe when we fly; we may have loved ones hurt or injured in some way; we may have to face the prospect that family members may go to war. Grief is not a simple process, and we will need to help each other and this community through this process.

How can we help those affected by this event? We can listen to each other, realizing that we may not yet be able to be comforted by each other's words. We can reach out and touch each other, physical connection can do much more than words. We can help others in pain, particularly those who have been hurt by this horror. We can donate blood, money, food, clothing, and we can send out our thoughts and prayers to those going through much more than we are. Bobby Cowart sent

me the statement from the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. The UUSC reminds us that we should focus on helping the victims of terrorism and that we need to reach out to those who are suffering and grieving, rather than placing immediate blame or vilifying entire nations.

There are no clear answers, no real justice, but there can be healing and integration. We need each other in this healing process, and there are others in our community, our country and our world that need us in this healing process. This church community can help us to feel safe emotionally and spiritually even as we might fear for our physical safety. We can feel safe again with each other. We need to remember that this is a place where we can come together with others who will listen when we need to share our feelings. This is a place where we can come together with others who will share love and hope when we cannot contain the anger or the pain. This is a place where we can come together to begin to heal when we face the loss of meaning that is inevitable with this kind of horror. And this is a place where we can come together to remember the good, the beautiful and the spiritual that surrounds us, when we face the horrors of terrorism and the horrors of the retaliation that many seem intent on. Let this always be a safe place, a secure place, a place of love.

Amen