

**The Winds Have Changed**  
**The Reverend Beth Graham**  
**The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Huntington**  
**September 16, 2001**

It was last Thursday morning, around eight o'clock. I was on the phone, speaking to one of you. And as we readied to hang up you said, "Have you been outside yet today? The winds have changed."

You were talking about the odor of electricity and fire that filled the air. You were referring to the smell and particles that would, by day's end, get in our throats and nostrils and would make it such that area school children would not go outside for recess that day. I had only been out to get the newspaper and had thought the air smelled different. But I hadn't yet put it together yet.

"Oh my goodness," I said. "You are right. The winds have changed."

"That's the smell of Sarajevo," you told me. And you knew, having lived there recently. "That's the smell of urban warfare."

"Oh my God," I shivered. "The winds have changed."

The winds have changed. Here on Long Island. Here in the United States. Here in our world. In just over an hour's time, on a sunny September morning, 266 were killed in four different hijacked planes. We think that around 5,000 other people were killed on the ground - at least 350 of whom were firefighters trying to save lives. Thousands of others witnessed this devastation, first hand, at the three disaster sites in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania. And millions of others watched and heard the horror erupting before their eyes and ears on television and radio. In a flash, our world shifted.

The winds have changed. Personal priorities have been redirected. In the first day of this destruction, while part of our population struggled simply to survive, others in our country and around the world faced the tragedy of learning of lost loved ones. Thousands of others rallied around the hope of a miracle as they began the tortured process of waiting to hear news about the missing. Still others stopped whatever they were doing on Tuesday morning to lend their hands and expertise to help with the various rescue efforts. For our community, for our country, for our world, what seemed important Tuesday morning didn't matter by lunch time. All attention was turned to absorbing the immensity of what had happened.

Last Thursday morning, as we ended our phone conversation, all of these shifts and changes were flashing before me. "The winds have changed," I thought. "That is the most accurate way to describe the world today." Since Thursday morning, the air has cleared out here; that smell is gone; but so much more has unfolded.

Our nation has had non-stop commercial-free television coverage for more than four days. The New York Stock Exchange and all professional sporting events were canceled from Tuesday until tomorrow. Our county has lived through the worst attack on US soil in history.

We have moved from hoping for numerous rescues to realizing that we have been hit. And hit hard. As a firefighter in NY put it Friday night, "We are still looking because we might find one more person. We won't save the five thousand we think are under this debris. But we might find one more." Our next step? Acknowledge that we have been blind-sided so that we can muster the energy to move on. The winds have changed since Tuesday.

Our national struggle to embrace cultural diversity in this land has been blown apart. Arabs and Muslims - in our country and elsewhere - people of faith who don't support violence or the jihad against Americans or other populations - recoil. Though they are as outraged as everyone else by these vicious acts of terrorism, though they feel no sympathy or support for those who hijacked the planes and turned them into precision missiles of destruction, so many of our fellow citizens, desperate to release their anger at someone, have begun targeting these innocent neighbors. In this country, in this community of Huntington, if someone looks "foreign," they are in danger. Sikhs with their turbans; Arab American women with their scarves; anyone named Muhammad - these are real people whose lives are in jeopardy because of our human desire for revenge. Dr. Abdullah Khoui of Washington's Islamic Center had to defend his religion on Friday by saying, before the world:

What took place, no sound mind would approve of it, and no religion at all in the world would accept it... We do condemn in the strongest terms these attacks. We condemn these attacks as human beings, and Islam does not approve of what took place."

Groups of innocent people are being targeted for revenge by their angry fellow citizens. We must defend our Muslim friends. For in this land, the winds have changed.

Politicians who are so used to arguing with and trying to out posture one another have come together. On the steps of the Capitol, on Tuesday, just hours after the attacks Congress burst out in singing "God Bless America." On Friday, in the legislative chambers, nearly unanimous votes supported the President's request for the financial and military support to rebuild and to lash back against these attacks. This week, Senator Chuck Schumer and President Bush stood together shoulder to at the World Trade Center rubble. Mayor Guiliani and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton kissed. Former President Clinton and Vice President Gore reunited - bridging their recent estrangement - and shared with one another, and then with the current administration, their collective knowledge and experience about the intricacies of terrorism. This solidarity among our elected leaders is comforting to a nation in shock, of course. But fears creep in for many that in these efforts to stand united, a blind eye is being turned toward the nuances, the differences between vengeance and justice. Worries emerge about whether in Washington there is room - or whether there is time - for expressions of caution and concern for the innocent people in our country and in others, who might be caught in the cross fires of retaliation. How do we blend our national pride, coherence, and commitment to retribution with respect for human life and for impoverished peoples on the other side of the world? The complexities of national and international law are filling the air. The winds have changed.

Though national solidarity has always been what gets us through a crisis, flag-waving without introspection is as dangerous as a child flashing a red cloth before the eyes of a bull. There are countless Americans who, though repulsed and horrified by Tuesday's attacks, plead for us, as a people, to have time for reflection and analysis on how our culture contributes to the violence of the world, and what we can be doing to be a kinder, gentler people. As Presiding Bishop

Griswold said at the prayer service at St. John the Divine on Friday, " Each of us the past few days have thought about the sacrifices we need to make as a nation to fight terrorism and ensure our security. Perhaps sacrifices will have to be made as well in terms of our self-interest as a nation for the well-being of a larger world....May each one of us ...be caught up in such a wave of being for the healing of our shattered and broken world.

Our task in the days ahead is to find ways to blend the national solidarity we so strongly feel this week with a cultural commitment to hold up the mirror and see ourselves as much of the world sees us. Our challenge is to understand that such concerns aren't unpatriotic. Nor does wearing red, white, and blue mean you are a warmonger. There is a balancing act to all of this. The winds have changed.

We have had the wind knocked out of us. We have been bullied mercilessly. We are angry to our bones. But at whom do we lash back? What does the face of our enemy look like? A Cold War mentality won't work here. We can't just fight; win; go home. Whatever military or diplomatic struggle our country begins will be long. Arduous. Multifaceted. Complex. A war against terrorism will be slippery and ugly. What will our strike back look like? How do we fight back when we don't know who - what individuals or what leaders - sponsored the perpetrators? How do we endure whatever is to come? And what do we do, in the meantime, with our fears and anxieties - with the pit in our stomach and the sleeplessness at night?

We pray that our elected leaders have the patience to untangle the variables and alternatives as they prepare to stand up for our democracy and freedom. Since Tuesday, it is a different world. The winds have changed, dramatically.

This is Sunday. As we find ourselves somewhere between shock and grief, we are left sitting here trying to catch up with this new air that has blown in, and the climate it will create.

And where's the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur message in this week beyond belief? Ahh, it is simply this. The winds have changed. But they have also cleared the way for us to see one important truth. Old hurts and grievances might not matter as much as reaching out and holding your loved ones - or even a stranger's - hands. Old angers and irritations we have held, pale in comparison to the safety and well-being of our world. There is a different feeling in the air as this week of horror ends. It is one of camaraderie. One of compassion and generosity. Strangers are asking each other if they are okay. People are stopping on the streets to lend a hand to another. We are slowing down and noticing one another, our world, and the utter miracle of life amidst the impossibility of all that surrounds us. We are being more gentle.

May the clarity we have this week - about what really does and does not matter in life - be with us in the long weeks ahead. Let us hold onto the feelings we have today of appreciation that we have one another in this chaotic place called life, the feelings of kindness and love that are a balm to the broken heart.

As the Jewish community begins their new year, as they try to cast away the old and prepare for a new beginning, might we find some solace in the human impulse to reach out to others - to stand together as fellow humans when we need to cry out and when we need to find hope. Might

we find some solace in knowing that though we are all made of dust, and though it is to dust that we shall return, who we are and how we live our lives now, on this earth, matters. And might we have a fervent belief that love never dies in the heart that is allowed to grieve, allowed to mourn, allowed to hope, allowed to feel.

The winds have changed this week - in our hearts, in our city, in our country, in our world. And we know not in which direction they will next move.

We pray that the spirit of love and of life blows somewhere in their midst. May we do our part to make this so.

Will you join me in now saying Amen. Amen.