

THE LOSS COUNSELING CENTER® OF WASHINGTON
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**AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY – PROFOUND LOSS
THE SLEEPING GIANT MUST WAKE UP**

Loss by the numbers blocks us from our feelings. It is almost too big for us to react to. It becomes an abstraction. How did we react to the six million killed by the Nazis? With so much denial. To connect, we have to bring that loss down to the level of our individual experiences; we have to be willing to identify, be willing to empathize with the terror of an individual sitting in a hijacked plane, to allow ourselves to see ourselves there, to be a person in the World Trade Center as a plane explodes, to be an individual who suddenly moves beyond denial to the unspeakable horror that they are in an exploding and burning building, to feel the panic of a father whose son works in the Pentagon and he doesn't know if he's okay.

I listen to this unfolding tragedy on the television in my office this morning. And, at once, while struck with horror, I also feel strangely disconnected from the passions it stirs in me. I walk outside with my dog into the sunshine of Georgetown and want, expect, something!! to be happening in the streets. But people are strolling, smiling. Acting as if nothing of momentous consequence has just occurred. But it has. Our belief in our safety is shattered. Thousands upon thousands of people have been killed. I cannot be calm. Walking my dog, I look at the faces of people, who look strangely blank or "normal." But this is not normal. This is acting normal in the face of insanity. At the little store on the corner, the owner can barely contain herself from being flooded by her tears as she waits on people. Some smiling jerk talks about how stupid it was that people jumped out of the window at the World Trade Center. I talk to two young Georgetown graduate students who are feeling the immensity of what has occurred. And suddenly, I connect. I feel flooded by tears as the grief of this tragedy hits me. It is in my engagement with an individual that removes this tragedy from the abstract and brings it home personally, that the sadness, the overwhelming sadness strikes my heart and floods me.

I find myself thinking about World War II and the refusal of the United States to aid the millions of people being killed by the Nazis. The safety of our American sanctuary was shattered by Pearl Harbor and we woke up. Denial was no longer an option. Isolationism was no longer the rule of the day. We play politics to death. We strike deals and make money, regardless of the consequences to people around the world. We talk and talk and talk.

While I know rational thinking may ultimately rule, rational thinking without emotion ignores the passion that lights the fire of definitive action. And definitive action must be taken. I, personally, do not believe in turning the other cheek. Yet, I do not want to become what I so despise – that of a fanatic driven by such virulence and hatred as to do violence. I do not sanction any kind of fanaticism because fanaticism feeds on itself and is driven by blind emotion, demands unquestioning obedience and intolerance, rather than acceptance of diverse viewpoints. But I do not believe in passivity either. Nothing goes away until you are willing to take a stand that says you may not cross this line because if you do, this will be the consequence. Well, the line has been crossed. You hurt my people, you hurt my country – you hurt me.

I think of myself as a gentle loving soul. To be loving, to give love, is my guiding light. I feel for people who are so riddled by blind hatred because I know they are driven by pain that they cannot, or choose not to face. They have never healed but are stuck in a devastating space that

consumes them up from the inside out and consumes their very soul. But I do not excuse behavior. Behavior counts!

If a child of mine is threatened I become a lioness. If my people are threatened I feel a personal sense of violation that I react to. If my country is threatened, my patriotism soars to its highest level. I believe that the line has been crossed and punishment for this transgression of my person and my country's boundaries is imperative. I trust that rather than dissolution and chaos in the face of this tragedy, that what these terrorists find instead is that this country comes together in a way that hasn't been seen in over fifty years. That instead of dissolution and chaos, we unite and roar like the lion we are. Enough politicking and talk. Action and retaliation is imperative. We have been so afraid to be the lion, afraid to be seen as the bad guy, that we have NOT drawn the line in the sand and said you may not cross this line or these are the consequences. I trust (though it's working backwards), that we will now say that line has been crossed. And, I hope, we will maintain, over the long-run, a strong definitive position. To take a stand is not being the bad guy. It is taking a stand with very clearly defined consequences. We need to do more than put ourselves in a position of being a reactor. I want to see this country be proactive, not just as a reaction to the current tragedy, but on an on-going basis. It's the equivalent of being a parent who is afraid of being firm and setting boundaries, let's their child run out of control and reacts only situation by situation. Instead, that parent needs to step back, size up the situation and say this is what MUST be done.

The response to this situation has to be retaliation and punishment. But it has to go beyond that. It has to be a change in political philosophy. It is foolish for other countries to confuse our softness with weakness. We ARE a soft country. Politically, we make many mistakes, in the name of politics and isolationism, and don't speak out strongly enough about abuses to people in so many other countries. But to confuse our softness with weakness is beyond STUPID, it is dangerous. When this country is threatened, when this country allies in the face of any outside threat, we are very dangerous.

The pain of the loss of each of the individuals involved in this tragedy is almost beyond comprehension. But for each of us to deal with this, to connect with this – you have to allow yourself to feel the terror at an individual and personal level, to allow yourself to feel it for the individuals involved, to feel the loss of each of the people who have died so tragically. I am so sad, so filled with sorrow. We will hear of the individuals involved, we will learn the stories. It will touch losses in each of our lives. It will stir us at the level of personal sorrow. And it is through that that I hope we can feel grief for the individuals who have so needlessly been killed. To heal from this means to allow yourself to connect with the deepest feelings in yourself. You, as an individual, we as a country, cannot go back and pretend that what has happened has not occurred. Denial is NOT an option. To survive this well you have to feel to heal.

And, we, as a country, in order to adjust to the change in our perception of our country's safety, have to mourn the loss of our sense of security. We have to adjust at a different level of integration to absorb and cope with this tragedy. I believe we have to ally nationally as fighters, as outraged fighters who say to fanatics you have crossed the line and caused a pain for which there will be punishment but you will NOT create chaos. Across diverse cultures, countries and religions, putting aside the petty differences which have kept our culture fragmented, we need to ally and unify in our approach to terrorism. Fanaticism that violates the lives and rights of others is not to be tolerated to any degree. You, the terrorists, have awakened the sleeping giant and you will regret this day of infamy to me, to my fellow citizens and to my country.

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