

MAKING SENSE OF EVIL IN LIGHT OF 9-11

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The devastation of September 11 and its military aftermath have focused our attention on the concept of evil, on those who inflict evil and the effects of evil on humanity. It is incumbent upon us to understand this phenomenon, its causes and our reactions, so that we may begin the difficult task of transmuting it into good, and through our understanding seek to prevent further encroachment of evil into our lives and surroundings.

Evil, as it relates to the terrorism of September 11, can be divided into three groups:

1. Those who deliberately plan with focused intent to cause harm to others;
2. Those who, through ignorance and/or a weak moral center, follow and implement the plans of the first group; and
3. Those who react to groups 1 and 2 by fanning the flames of hatred, revenge and separatism.

Plato said that the essence of reality is all good, that evil is the faulty reflection of reality found in the world. In other words, our interpretation of our perceptions and the originating source of the truths by which we live determine whether we live in harmony or harmfulness on this earth. Based on this definition and observing terrorism and its effects, we may conclude that the worldview of those who commit terrorist crimes is skewed, narrow and extremist, restricted by blinders of fanaticism born of hatred and ignorance. This distorted point of view serves as fertile ground for the harmful attitudes that ultimately lead to harmful actions. Thus we have in New York, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania heart-wrenching examples of a faulty reflection that springs from wrong perceptions and wrong interpretations of that which is perceived.

The first group carefully rationalizes its perception of truth and reality, which – if we probe deeply enough – is usually based on hunger for power; this hunger is further fueled by the emotional, mental and moral instability of the second group who have yet to develop the perceptual depth that aids in discriminating and critical thought. Consequently, the moral emptiness of the second group is filled with the half-truths and lies of the first group.

Those who are deliberately evil have little or no compassion for their victims or those they exploit to implement their plans. For them, the means justify the end regardless of the havoc wreaked, and the end usually includes the sacrifice of allies and presumed enemies alike.

Because of the spiritual and moral void that causes wrong perception, both groups choose the enslavement of their wills to their cause, blocking out the light of reason and stunting the growth of spirit. They, as well as the people harmed, become casualties of their self-imposed blindness and eventually of their own destruction, for their objective in the last analysis is not life fulfillment but spiritual deprivation.

This leads us to the third group. Anger, shock and grief can turn into revenge, ethnic hatred and separatism if we are not mindful of our reactions and attitudes. Depending upon our thoughts and feelings, it is possible to be sucked into the same quagmire from which evil flows. Mahatma Gandhi is quoted as saying, “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.” This quote, reflected upon, suggests a willingness to be open, to be inclusive in our worldview, to attempt to envision in our mind and heart’s eye a world in which we live in peace with our neighbors without threat of force or sanction.

One way we may aid in cleansing evil from our planet is to turn our focus on the future, and with our understanding of the past through lessons bought with hard and revealing experience, teach/show our children the benefits of love, sharing and brotherhood. If we endeavor to focus and think toward a future filled with goodwill and peace, our actions in the present will be based on truth, tolerance, thoughtfulness and wisdom, thereby erasing the possible spread of fear, hatred and injustice. We must remember that we *do* have a future and we are responsible for the quality of its expression.

The events of September 11 revealed the tug of war for the spirit of humanity, for the freedom to grow and flourish through right human relations based on free will and mutual understanding. We now understand that terrorism is about spiritual enslavement through fear and imposed authority; it is about extinguishing that spark of inner light that makes us human and humane; it is about the abuse and misuse of power without the tempering energy of love.

By stunting the human spirit, all that we know to be good, beautiful and true within us languishes. This is what we must guard and nurture in ourselves and each other with diligence and strength, for it is the human spirit that qualifies our present and creates our future.