

This is an article written at the request of certain Southern California radio and Television stations and was published and available on the internet until recently.

The Twin Tower Tragedy: A “Holy” (Wholly) Different Perspective

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I know we are not supposed to be laughing at a sorrowful time like this, and God knows we have done nothing but cry our hearts out each in our own way during the past few days. But there is a funny yet poignant anecdote that best illustrates the deeper tragedy that lies beneath the rubble of our crumbling towers and our crumbling view of Reality.

Ironically, the story I am about to tell you comes from the wonderful mystical side of Islam, the same religion whose hideous fundamentalist side has brought us this unspeakable calamity. This is a short story from the life of the idiot savant Mulla Nasrudin whose image, according to the Sufis (Islamic mystics), represents the sum-total of human idiocy.

Mulla was traveling on a cruise ship one day when the ship’s engine caught fire and soon the entire ship was engulfed in flames. Everyone was running around trying to put out the fires and rescue the passengers, but Mulla was spotted relaxing comfortably sipping hot tea (or Pinea Colada) on the deck. When his frantic wife yelled at him: “For Heaven’s sake Mulla! How could you sit so calmly? The ship is going down! DO SOMETHING!” He calmly replied: “What’s it to me if the ship’s going down? It’s not as if it belongs to me or my family!”

For years now the ship we call the Planet Earth has been engulfed by the devastating fires of rampant materialism on the one hand and religious fundamentalism on the other. We have witnessed human consciousness set on fire by the greedy pursuit of *more, better and different* material things regardless of the cost to human dignity, creativity, and spirituality. We have seen innocent men, women, and children set on fire by fundamentalist hate-mongers of all religions. We have seen the rich and the powerful get richer and more powerful by exploiting their less fortunate brothers and sisters across the globe and setting fire to their hopes and dreams. We have witnessed the excruciating agony of the Afghan women as the tyrannical fire of the fundamentalist Taleban engulfed them, and we saw these same Islamic fundamentalists blast away the statues of the compassionate Buddha using the firearms sold to them by our own leaders.

We have been witnessing all this. Yet, like the Mulla, we have been sitting serenely in our little corner of the deck, sipping the dulling potion of self-centeredness and thinking “What’s it to us if the ship’s going down?” But now that the fiery destruction has hit home, and now that we have come face to face with our own vulnerability, we must be careful not to succumb to another idiotic Mulla-like reaction. Our individual and collective response to this tragedy can help us soar to the heavenly heights of the ladder of spiritual evolution or plunge to the depths of hellish egocentrism and false patriotism.

From the perspective of *Spiritual Psychology*, all of life's fiery experiences, as unpleasant as they are, serve a vital alchemical function. These fires are meant to burn away all traces of excessive materialism, narcissistic self-indulgence, separatism, power mongering and cruelty from our hearts. The mystic writer of the Book of Isaiah, for instance, quotes God as saying:

*See, I have refined you for myself like silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction....*
– Isaiah 48:10-12

The same motif is echoed in the words of the most beloved poet in the world, the Sufi mystic Jallalidin Rumi:

*Surrender your brass onto the flames of Divine fire
Burn it into gold, let this be your Soul's true desire*
– Rumi

What's more, sages and mystics of all ancient religions as well as the most advanced physicists of our own time have been telling us that human consciousness is directly involved with the events of the physical universe. Not only we are not separate from the rest of the universe, we are also completely interdependent and interconnected as human beings. In the prophetic words of the distinguished Quantum physicist, Victor Mansfield:

...it would be magnificent if we could realize, as in nonlocal quantum mechanics, that the interconnections between people, races, and countries are more fundamental, more real than the independent existence of our little egos, nationalities, or nations. Given the realities of our world, such a revolution in outlook seems visionary in the extreme. However, an equally extreme need exists for fundamental changes in attitude if we are to survive in our nuclear era. (From: *Synchronicity, Science, and Soul Making*, p. 226)

Above all, let us not forget to be cheerful amidst the tears; for no matter how grim the outlook, things are never hopeless. As we search to bring to justice those directly responsible for the recent heinous acts of terror, why not choose also to influence the outcome of world events on a higher and deeper level by searching our own hearts for traces of greedy materialism, religious fundamentalism, cruelty and separatism? Why not invite our Moslem, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, atheist and agnostic friends to sit together and engage in a dialogue on issues that can bring us together as One Humanity?

The Twin Towers were destroyed in yet another historical clash between the twin evils of meaningless materialism and soulless religious fundamentalism. We have been told that the destruction of the metaphoric *Tower of Babel* led to the confusion of tongues and separation of the human family. Is it possible that, with correct understanding, the tragic destruction of the *Twin Towers* of the World Trade Center could lead to the fusion of our hearts and the realization that *WE ARE ONE*? That we are all in this boat together?