

Islam Teaches Value of Human Life, Not Terrorism

One God, one nation, one people – what happened last week? It's unbelievable, unspeakable and unfathomable. In the most surreal sequence of events, we witnessed the end to the lives of thousands.

As an American, I am appalled. As a Muslim, I am mortified. The events that transpired were evil and heinous. Unfortunately, many Americans are still unclear of what Islam teaches.

NOUMAN SIDDIQUI
GUEST COLUMNIST

For the record, Islam supremely values human life. "If one killed a human being ... it is as if he has killed all of humanity. And if one saved a life, it is as if he has saved all of humanity" (Qu'ran, Chapter five, verse 32).

The value of one human being is equated with all of humanity. Preliminary estimates have it that 5,000 or so people died in Tuesday's attacks. This means that humanity was killed 5,000 times over.

Muslims still smart from Oklahoma. A day

after the bombing, headlines reported, "In the Name of Islam." Many Muslims were unfairly harassed and threatened.

There are 10 million Muslims in this country. Americans need to realize that Islam is not an "over there" phenomenon. Islam is an American phenomenon. Many Muslims in this country were born here, and others have converted to Islam. All consider America home.

When was the last time that the Ku Klux Klan, with its cross as its emblem, served as a symbol of Christian ideals? Why then should any act of terror be equated with Islam? Even if at times the perpetrators follow Islam, only in name are they Muslim.

American Muslims are appalled, and we are deep in mourning and prayer. Many innocent people were killed Tuesday – many of whom were also American Muslims.

Islam is a radically monotheistic religion.

Muslims dedicate their lives in submitting their will and ego to that of the Creator. The term Allah literally means "The God." Muslims have a very pure notion of God. Islam rejects any other false god that we may erect: power, money, status, ego, et cetera. In fact, Muslims believe that the only true reality is God and that all else is a relative reality that derives its real form from God, "The True, Absolute Reality."

Islam considers itself a way of life. Unlike most religions, Islam recognizes war is unfortunately a necessary phenomenon of life and therefore lays down the strictest criteria. What is jihad? Jihad literally means struggle. Islam does not endorse a holy war. Above all, there is restraint and forgiveness. There are only two situations in which Muslims are allowed to engage in battle: 1) in the case of oppression or 2) in the case of religious persecution.

When in battle, Muslims must abide by the strictest code of conduct. Muslims can only strike down the oppressor. The elderly, children

and women are not to be struck down. Nobility and honor are the code. A tree cannot be hacked down. The water cannot be polluted. The harvests cannot be destroyed. The earth cannot be scorched. Islam teaches, "Don't oppress and don't be oppressed."

A famous story that typifies this strict code of conduct appears in the example of the Caliph Ali. He was engaged in battle, and he had his opponent pinned to the floor. As he was about to deal the mortal blow, the opponent spit in Ali's face. Ali put his sword down and walked away. The opponent asked, "Why didn't you strike me down when you had the chance?" Ali said, "Before you spit on me, I was striking you down because you were a perpetrator of oppression and tyranny. After you spit on me, I was striking you down out of anger and ego."

Skyscrapers are a symbol of permanence and security. To see the twin towers come down like a stack of cards forces all of us to question our sense of reality. There are many things we have

taken for granted.

After I spoke at the peace vigil in the Pit last week, a UNC freshman got up and told us how she used to go to school three blocks from the World Trade Center. She couldn't believe the pictures of her familiar surroundings converted into an amphitheater of ash and smoke. Her school is now a triage center.

We as Americans have become zombies – robots with a fixed routine. It is only after such catastrophic events that we feel how naked we really are and begin to question our false sense of reality.

Along with the shock and grief, there is also a sense of what is real after all.

"Whatever is on the Earth will perish. And the Face of your Lord full of Majesty and Honor will remain forever" (Qu'ran 55:27).

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Good vs. Evil: The Choice That Will Confront Us All

This evening is the start of the two-day Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashana, the Jewish new year. Jewish students and guests will be gathering over the course of these days at their home synagogues and at N.C. Hillel to bring in the new year as a community.

The month leading up to the new year is set aside as a time of personal reflection about repairing the things that we did over the course of the past year that do not make us proud and how we can rectify them. With the horrific destruction of life in airplanes, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the world is forced into communal reflection.

Jewish tradition holds that we are put on this Earth to make a difference – a positive difference. One of the Jewish terms for wrongdoing is *chilul hashem* – emptying the world of God's presence. Not only did the terrorists kill and injure innocents, not only did they make the entire world feel unsafe, but they also committed a great *chilul hashem*, and their actions have reverberations in every aspect of our existence.

The feeling of horror that I had upon hearing the tragic news is not unfamiliar to me. I remember the years that I lived in Jerusalem and the low level of constant fear of a terrorist attack that I felt any time I heard a truck door slam or a sonic boom from an airplane overhead.

I remember in 1995 when a suicide bomber killed himself and all of the other passengers on the No. 18 bus that passed by my house. I remember my study partner being called out of class later that day to be told that his friend was on that bus and had been killed. I remember family members calling frantically to find out if we were OK.

Now the phone calls are going the other direction. There is a strange irony in getting phone calls from Israel to "check in" after a terrorist attack. Back on American soil, I can say I remember hearing the news of the attack on the World Trade Center and watching the gruesome scenes throughout that day. Now Americans and Israelis share the fear of terrorist

attacks on our friends, family and children. We also share the deep grief for those who have been killed. Perhaps now, when Israel acts to eliminate terrorism from her midst in the way that she deems appropriate, the world will be more understanding.

OR MARS
GUEST COLUMNIST

The great Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai long ago wrote a poem called "The Diameter of the Bomb." It is all too appropriate for the events of the last days.

The diameter of the bomb was thirty centimeters and the diameter of its effective range about seven meters, with four dead and eleven wounded. And around these, in a larger circle of pain and time, two hospitals are scattered and one graveyard. But the young woman who was buried in the city she came from, at a distance of more than a hundred kilometers, enlarges the circle considerably, and the solitary man mourning her death at the distant shores of a country far across the sea includes the entire world in the circle. And I won't even mention the crying of orphans that reaches up to the throne of God and beyond, making a circle with no end and no God.

The "bomb" in Amichai's poem is a *chilul hashem*, because it created "a circle with no end and no God." So did the terrorists who attacked our country. This Rosh Hashana, we should consider our ability as human beings to either diminish or increase godliness in the world. That ability is a gift that we must use as a blessing in our relationships with others, as citizens of the United States and as humans.

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As Flames Are Put Out, Many Questions Linger

Where were you the day peace was shattered? When four planes fell out of the sky and into our nation's collective memory forever?

You were skipping class. You were rolling out of bed. You were driving to work.

Then you heard the news, and you watched, appalled, as innocent people jumped to their deaths from the top stories of the World Trade Center, not waiting for the towers' inevitable plunge to bury them.

You frantically raced through your New York and Washington, D.C., connections, wondering if you knew someone – anyone at all – who might have been in the paths of those planes. You prayed you didn't. You saw New Yorkers racing from hospital to hospital, looking for any sign of their loved ones. There were few that found any.

And then the stories and connections began to surface: a brother's girlfriend who just got a job at Cantor Fitzgerald. A former teacher on his way to Los Angeles from Boston. A classmate whose mother worked at the Pentagon.

Through the week, the stories began to fit together seamlessly like so much broken glass in a mosaic. The mortar that held them together was uncertainty and death.

So you reached out for those you love. You called your parents. You hugged your significant other a little longer than usual. And you mourned the loss of 5,000 people you didn't even know.

And where are you now? Who are you now?

The sky is still the same deep blue that perversely showed off the brilliant oranges and reds of Tuesday's explosions. We are on the same soil – ground that until Tuesday we considered invincible and unpenetrable. But we are not the same nation anymore. And you are not the same person.

We are now a people preparing for war, mentally and physically. We are a country whose leadership is determined to dig out the terrorists from their holes and kill them before they kill any more of us.



CATE DOTY
POINT OF VIEW

But underneath this exterior of bravado and emotional determination, we are terrified. Those who work at the White House say they're scared to go back to work. They tremble at the sound of a plane, any plane.

Many of us have turned off our TVs. There is no news now – no stories of miraculous survival. There is only the growing death toll, the grim faces of families still grasping at hope for those probably buried under the towers, and a government designing the kind of war it wants to fight against an enemy we once thought invisible.

President Bush says this war will be the first of the 21st century. But against whom will we wage it? A region? A country? A religion? Will this be our generation's Vietnam, with Osama bin Laden's operatives playing the role of Charlie and innocent Afghans as the real victims?

So much uncertainty. So much death. The potential for so much more. And in the face of this horrific bleakness, who are you now?

You are afraid of war – and yet, privately or publicly, you push for the slaughter of those who killed so many. You are an American who, until Tuesday, had not considered what being an American meant. You still reach for those you love, but with increased urgency and warmth.

You don't know how to ask your Muslim friends to stay away from their mosques. You have seen what one form of fanaticism can do, and you are frightened that another kind – one that could strike much closer to home – will take them away from you.

You are the person who lost a friend, a brother, a teacher. But you are part of a nation that lost its innocence – that dropped its guard and paid far too high a price.

And, horrified by what you have already lost, you are terrified of the toll we will extract from others.

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Hard Lessons From the Cruellest Teacher: What Have We Learned?

Though an unexplainable and heart-wrenching tragedy has shaken our nation this week, we can come out stronger as a nation, as a government and as individuals. We can come out victoriously only if we can learn some valuable lessons from this terrible attack and change our ways.

We cannot let even one death be in vain. We cannot turn off the television because we are afraid of the utter depression that can set in. We must not shrink away from pain but mourn with those who mourn. How easy it is to block out what happened, like it's all a bad dream and maybe tomorrow when we wake up, it will be gone. No, instead we must learn from this.

Starting with lesson one: We must not forget what has happened. "Guard yourself and guard your soul carefully, lest you forget the things your eyes saw, and lest these things depart your heart. And you shall make them known to your children and to your children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:19).

Perhaps America has been awakened from its slumber in order to defend the victims whom we have unintentionally cast aside. Before Sept. 11, news reports of bombings, gunfire and fatalities in Israel were just annoying. Once you've seen one car explode, you've seen them all, right? And e-mail chains urging us to take action against the brutal forces of the Taliban and their cruel treatment of women were easy to delete – after all, who has time to read them?

But now the oppression, persecution and evil that have been overlooked for years in the Middle East has banded down the door and forced us to be engaged. We have the opportunity now, like never before, to partner with other nations to seek justice not only for the United States but also for all those across the world who have suffered under the rule of heartless offenders.

But how do we do this? Do we let our forgiveness cover all the wrong that has been committed, turn the other cheek and vow for peace and nonviolence? Or do we return hate for hate and use our power, money and whatever means necessary to destroy and kill?

JULIE MANCUSO
GUEST COLUMNIST

Lesson two: We must understand the subtle differences between revenge and justice. Webster understood it, God understands it and now, we must desperately seek to understand it – lives depend on it. To seek revenge is to inflict harm, pain, suffering or injury. To seek justice is to pursue fairness and impartiality. While the words can seem similar at first, a second look can reveal much.

For example, just a few days before Tuesday's attacks, a Los Angeles man was beaten severely by an angry mob of more than 20 people. He was a tow truck driver who had accidentally hit and killed a 4-year-old boy riding his scooter. As he got out of his truck, he was met with a raging group of onlookers who immediately began to attack him and beat him so viciously, he needed hospitalization and reconstructive surgery. Is this justice or revenge? Was anything gained by beating a man so violently?

Let's be honest. It is sickening to watch Palestinians celebrating in the streets with their kids cheering and smiling while Americans are weeping, and children here are left fatherless or motherless. I am torn between emotions; while I am enraged to see such vile disregard for the sanctity of life, I am also grieved to see Palestinian children who have been taught to hate Americans.

I think God sees a very similar image when he looks at this place. He too is enraged by injustice, but He is also full of compassion and love. In fact, it is this love that runs so strong that causes him to administer justice for his children. America should not play the "tough guy" by blowing up whoever or whatever we so desire.

God and His scales of justice should be the standard by which we act. Do not be misled. God is not weak, helpless or afraid. He detests acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent.

Therefore, lesson three: As a nation and as individuals, we must humble ourselves and seek wisdom from our provider. God told his followers, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways, I will come and heal their land." We must pray that those God has placed in charge will seek Him for direction and decisiveness, so that everyone will benefit from their decisions.

Finally, perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from last week's evil is that tomorrow is guaranteed to be no one. Yes, this means we should be the best citizens we can, conveying our love for others everyday in words and in deed. But it goes deeper than that. We must be ready. Whether we want to think about it or not, we must be prepared for what lies beyond this life. The Bible speaks of life as a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. While we should not fear death, we must seek to understand and be assured of our destination if death should come knocking soon.

This nation can come out stronger than ever before, but we must not live in hate or anger, nor should we live in fear. We must not become desensitized or displace our pain on Arabs of any kind, especially here at home.

Righteousness can prevail if we seek to learn from our mistakes and the mistakes of others. As the disciple Paul told the church at Corinth, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

Learn, America. Learn.

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