

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Tuesday, September 09, 2008

Reflections on 9/11 - A Seventh Anniversary Essay

Reflections on Sept 11

One cannot help but remember the tragic losses of lives that occurred seven years ago. The images are perpetual. Seven years later, we remember what happened, what happened because of sheer hatred.

Have we stepped closer to a resolution of the causes of that tragedy? Militarily, we have been at war. Politically, we have expressed influence. We have Presidential candidates debating on whether these efforts have been successful or not.

My reflections today attempt to uncover the root of such vitriolic and destructive hatred. My thoughts here are intended for all but are written from a Jewish perspective.

In our world, because of the inherent reality of lack, we are competitors. That is the basis of our economy, of our lives. Healthy competition. We have things we lack (and therefore want) and we have healthy constructive ways to provide fulfillment of those needs and wants.

Yet, as part of human nature, when there is competition for certain things, there can be jealousy. When we lack something and normal means of acquiring it do not prevail (usually because the control of the system is not in our hands) our sense of lack often may trigger a jealousy of those who do not lack that same thing. Many of us when faced with these jealous emotions will resolve them with acceptance, prayer, compensation, goal-setting or other activities that empower us so that we do not feel we are lacking anything. From there, we can move forward healthfully.

But perhaps there are circumstances whereby we are not successful in empowering ourselves or accepting something. What would be something lacking that may not be in a system we control? Love. Our own self-esteem and confidence.

Examples of this are sibling rivalry. Also, we may see this in the broken hearted, in love and unrequited love. The one that lacks the love they feel they deserve can become jealous and can be overcome with competition and hatred and a desire to lower a person in the eyes of others. It is an erroneous belief stemming from the lowest parts of human nature to believe that if we can lower a person in the eyes of others that we become the more beloved one. I am certain that every person reading this can recall a story from their own life or from history or from the Bible where they can see an example of how this operates and the outcome. The outcome is usually human tragedy, loss, destruction, and pain. And for no successful purpose, because the objective was to win love from someone who most likely is (or if the jealous attack was a hidden one, someone who would most likely be- if it were revealed to them -) repulsed by these actions. Ask yourself, would you love and trust someone who stooped to such tactics? Would you want that person in your intimate circle affecting your own emotions?

If a person is without conscience, truly caring nothing for the one they are jealous of, perhaps there is a sense of victory and success at eliminating the competition. Rather cold-blooded and calculated, but the simple formula is fulfilled. Elimination of the competitor means no more competition. But gaining the object of one's desires...how can that be advanced? And, how would we feel about ourselves if we set material and external goals as a justifiable object of our desires, no matter what the cost in money or human life?

What we saw on September 11 was an example of people claiming, in the name of a Higher Consciousness, victory and success. This is confusing. Most people respect religious goals of other people. On principle, living in a democratic country with freedom of religion and thought, we do not ever question someone's claim that this brings them closer to their religious goals. In our country, this is sacrosanct, the foundation of our freedom. Thus, claiming this destruction in the name of a religious goal categorizes this action, in our way of thinking, as something besides hatred, jealousy, and viciousness.

In a one world picture of competition, a simplistic picture of conquering one's enemy can seem as though it is a victory, for it appears as though the Higher Consciousness is on the side of the victor because the tragedy was permitted. One can make that erroneous assumption only in a one world picture. Are we favored by the Higher Consciousness for eliminating our competitor? Have we been blessed to be able to do so? Are these universal truths? Let us look at this from the perspective of the Torah, which teaches us that hatred is unjustifiable.

What we know from Torah is that we are able to control our thoughts, speech and deed. The internal struggle that each person has is to come to the understanding that at all times we have real choice, and that choice is whether we will conduct ourselves in a way that is pleasing to the Higher Consciousness or in a way in which the Higher Consciousness will use us for His purposes, which we cannot begin to understand. Our efforts and conduct are in our control. The consequences of our efforts are in the hands of the Higher Power, who determined even before we acted whatever loss would be incurred. Our eternal souls will be rewarded or punished based on our choices. In a two world picture therefore, if a person is successful in harming another, it is not a logical conclusion that, because it is the Divine Will that someone is harmed, that the one responsible for the action that leads to the suffering is beloved to the Divine One.

The basic premise of what I want to bring out is that the Holy One did not create mankind and the world so that we will kill each other and thereby come closer to Him. He created us so that we would bring His Middos into the world and serve Him and shine a light wherever we find darkness. We are here to fix and mend things within ourselves so that we can ascend to Heaven when the time comes. If we did not need to fix and mend anything, we would not be here. We would have not been born.

Take a look around at all the diverse people on this planet. It becomes quite clear that the Holy One likes diversity. He did not create everyone the same, neither with the same intelligence, looks, talents, personality or challenges. Each person sees the world in their own way and interacts with the world in his or her own belief system. We have free choice. Are we going to serve the Holy One or are we going to serve His Purposes? Are we going to build, fix and mend or are we going to destroy?

And further, can we, through jealous, hateful acts, tear down, in the eyes of the Holy One, anyone? Here in lies the answer. In the eyes of the Holy One, human hatred and jealousy do not tear down anyone except the deliverer of misdeeds. A person who so badly succumbs to their jealous and thereby hateful nature as to speak poorly of another or cause another pain has torn down only his own image in the eyes of the Holy One. Why? The answer is that if we are connected to the Holy One, if that is truly our primary love relationship, we see each other with love and respect as His creations. It would never be my place to try to diminish another – if I disagree with someone or feel they might be misguided, it would be out of love and concern for that person that I attend to the matter.

For example, if a person turns their foot and sprains an ankle, we do not cut off the foot in anger. Instead, we nurture the ankle, bandage it, elevate it and otherwise attend to it. We are not angry at the foot. It is the same with our fellow man. If someone is suffering from a negative experience or emotion, we try to help the person, we might suggest therapy for anger management or the like.

The goal is to bring the person back to a position of health, of positive thinking, of love and respect for each other.

When there is unbridled hatred and unhealthy competition that includes win at all costs tactics, including the death and destruction of others, a red flag needs to go up. Where are we?

If as a whole, mankind comes to compete to its own destruction, what have we accomplished? Have we enacted the highest part of ourselves or the lowest? And when we tire of seeing people die because they are hated, will we face our own natures and realize that we cannot as a race achieve the peace and any kind of utopia until we divest ourselves of the very cause of our own destructive nature, which is hatred based in jealousy-generated unhealthy competition.

What actions can people take to combat such influences? The successful actions that each person can take are internal to ourselves, because that is the arena that have the commandment to control. We must try our best to overcome our own jealousies and hatreds and to see that these are ultimately futile. We must not indulge them in ourselves or rationalize them. When we choose with our free will to send them out of our lives, we will not see others who indulge these negative traits as having been successful or victorious, but rather has having fallen victim to their own human nature. When we can see that we can have some success with our own nature, we may understand better how others may not. We may have sympathy for their

failures, but it takes away support for their erroneous goals.

Imagine that your children come home from school and each one got A's on their report card and one got a C. The one who got the C is upset and starts speaking poorly about the teachers and how they didn't help him. As the parents, you know that this child did not do his homework and did not study. Let's say that the child has no learning disability, that it was just a lack of self-discipline that caused the low performance. Yet the child insists it is because of the teacher, because of something that happened in his class – placing the blame outside of himself. As the parent, would you then take up the child's cause and go to the teacher and complain? What good would it do? Even if the teacher did every single thing you demanded, the child would still not succeed! That is not the root cause of the child's poor performance, even though the child claims it. You as the parent understand the child does not know how to discipline himself to conform to the requirements. Is it a lack of motivation? Is it a lack of caring? Is it a lack of confidence? Whatever it is, a good parent would focus on the child's strengths and reinforce the child's positive qualities and address the child's study behaviors and negative emotions, but would be smart enough to not go to the school with a self-blinding picture of reality, a hope and prayer that this support will miraculously cause the child to obtain self-discipline and learning skills. Every person has to reach down to a point of truth within themselves and accept themselves in order to move forward and rise above their limitations.

Let us give each other fortitude so that those who fall victim to their lower urges are not rewarded with our sympathies for whatever cause they blame for their hatred. We can sympathize with their inability to overcome their nature, with their difficulty in their own internal struggle, with their confusion in choosing such an erroneous response, but hardly should that ever translate to sympathy for the cause they are blaming or putting forward, especially when more than reasonable effort over decades has offered to provide a solution for that cause, only to be rejected as not enough, not good enough.

If we accept a world-view where mankind is created by the Holy One in diverse manner for His Purposes to serve Him in a pleasing way, it changes the way we see the causes of hateful acts.

Let us place the responsibility for hateful acts where they belong, on the perpetrators' failure to overcome the lower nature common to every person alive, and not on the ones the perpetrators would blame out of frustration, hatred, jealousy, confusion or other intense destructive emotions. Why? Because anyone who is successful at blaming others for their own failure to regulate themselves in a positive manner (or anyone successful in obscuring their failure with their own internal struggle or anyone confusing themselves about their failure with their internal struggle) will continue to do that, never seeing that it is in fact their own failure to overcome the negative emotions generated by their sense of lack. No matter how difficult the circumstances are, no matter what is lacking or for how long, healthy competition requires compromise and accommodation, healthy boundaries, diversity and it needs peace. Let us all divest ourselves of unhealthy competition, jealousy, hatred, unreasonableness and let mankind as a whole be good citizens of the world.