
Thoughts on 9/11: Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

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Those of us who were in New York on that fateful 9/11 will never forget the horror of that day, the terrible loss of lives, the great acts of heroism on the part of so many who strove to help victims of the attack. None will ever forget how vulnerable we are to acts of terrorism.

The media coverage that I have seen and read understandably focus on stories about those who died in the attack; about their families; about the rescue workers. There is much discussion of heroism, resilience, the great American spirit of overcoming tragedy.

All these themes are important.

But we also need to deal with the fundamental questions: Why did this happen? Who were the perpetrators? How are we combating the terrorist ideologies that endanger our lives and our way of life?

9/11 didn't just happen. It wasn't a neutral attack by neutral maniacs. It was the result of years of radical fundamentalist religious indoctrination within the Muslim world. While it surely is unjust to smear all Muslims for the crimes of some Muslims, it also is unjust--and self-defeating-- to ignore the source of terrorism against America in particular, and the West in general.

The United States and some allies have waged military attacks on the enemy and have killed some of the leading perpetrators of terrorism. The U.S. and other countries have greatly increased homeland security. These things are important--but they do not address the basic problem.

The basic problem is the fundamentalist religious ideology that promotes hatred of America, Israel, the West, Christianity. Children are brainwashed to become "martyrs." Religious leaders teach hatred rather than love. Terrorist groups lionize the "martyrs" and teach that the "martyrs" are rewarded by God.

The United States and the West need to be militarily strong; but we also need to promote a spiritual message to all people everywhere. This message is one of peace, tolerance, compassion. We need to speak constantly and forcefully on behalf of these ideals and to speak constantly and forcefully to undermine the ideologies of hatred and inhumanity.

We need a "Voice of America" that will transmit our message to all peoples in their languages. We need to reach the grass roots members of all societies, in the hope that they will recognize the evils that are foisted on them by their radical teachers and leaders.

If we would spend as much money on peace-making as we do on war-making, we might actually have a chance of undermining and uprooting the sources of terrorism.

When we remember 9/11, we certainly should remember the innocent victims of terrorism; the heroes who sacrificed so much to help others; the American resilience and courage. But we should also remember why 9/11 happened, and who committed this most heinous crime.

And we should be thinking very hard how we can successfully uproot the seeds of hatred and terrorism throughout the world. We should be devoting tremendous energy and resources to fighting the real war of our time: the war against religiously-inspired hatred and violence.

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