

## ***“For Whom the Bell Tolls”—Seven Years after 9/11***

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Not living in New York when the World Trade Center crashed, I felt presumptuous speaking about my experience of 9/11 till one person told me they wanted to hear if 9/11 affected me. Those words jarred me awake to the deep impressions left by that day and the seven years that followed in its wake.

I had just moved to Annapolis, Maryland to begin my internship there. On 9/11, my supervisor and I frantically called our daughters living in New York to see if they were ok. We couldn't reach them all day long. Alan and I were newly weds; he was on his way back to Virginia, crossing the Beltway when the plane struck the Pentagon. In the months that followed, anthrax mailed to D.C. took the lives of five people nearby. And sometime later, the Beltway snipers took the lives of others who innocently stopped at public places like gas stations and schools.

After the snipers were caught and the anthrax panic calmed, my fear and concerns for safety quieted, but not my concern for this country and the direction in which it was heading as we entered first Afghanistan and then Iraq. Fear was the predominant mood in those days and it is often evoked in the seven years since 9/11/2001.

This past Thursday, I attended a September 11 Memorial Ceremony here in Staten Island. A Roman Catholic priest and a Reformed Church pastor led beautiful prayers for unity, reconciliation and compassion. Later children and youth of diverse backgrounds added their voices to the call for remembrance but also consideration for people around the world and extending our hearts to the families who suffer such enormous loss. The music stirred my soul and tears traced their way down my cheeks.

But the voices of political figures broke the spell, talking about insuring this never happens again and finding the people who did this and bringing them to justice. I was deeply disturbed by this contrast with the clergy and children's messages. The voices of the children, the clergy and the politicians are all earnest responses to the attacks but two different inclinations. The children and the clergy responded with a voice of hope while the politicians were grounded in the voice of fear. Each of us has these voices inside us. Both responses are in our repertoire of human responses to crisis.

I returned home to find an e mail forwarded from a piece written by Deepak Chopra about the presence of the shadow in our midst and how political rhetoric is bound up with the shadow side of our culture.

Decades ago, Carl Jung came up with the concept of the archetype known as the “shadow.” It is the repository of images and concepts that are the opposite of our ideals. Inside **each** of us lurks this shadow side waiting to haunt our dreams and scare us silly. An awareness of our shadow side can awaken us to our whole selves, particularly the parts we don't want to admit to ourselves or anyone else.

Deepak Chopra says that the shadow has to emerge in the fierce political rivalries occurring right now. Anytime you have candidates talking about change, hope, global interests, repairing our image abroad, lifting up social justice, equity and compassion, the shadow side

must “out” itself. And so, now we have politicians denying the need for America to heal her image abroad and this was part of the message the other night at the Memorial ceremony—that the United States is the greatest country ever on the face of the earth and we have never done anything but befriend other countries and help them out. This is a blatant denial of the shadow side of American life. War tends to capitalize and breed on this kind of myth.

Yet the Religious Right are not the only ones with a shadow as Chopra pointed out. We all need to be aware of our whole selves, so that we can work together and see one another more clearly. I find hope in the messages given by the interfaith clergy on 9/11 and at other interfaith gatherings I’ve attended this past week on Staten Island.

Several years ago I read Rabbi Michael Lerner’s book, *The Left Hand of God*. It details how the religious right is impacting the political landscape because they speak to a profound spiritual crisis in this country. The people Lerner and his colleagues interviewed wanted to trust others but in their experience, the workplace and contemporary life was about scrambling to the top, often negating their own values and integrity to get there.

The coalition of political conservatives and the religious right often speak to this need that many Americans have for spiritual values that can sustain them against empty materialism. The Right says we Americans should be concerned about the spiritual dimension of our lives—family values, praying, going to church, reading the Bible—these are things that count.

And they do count for many Americans. The problem is that the political agenda and the policies that come out of the religious right and its coalition with ultra conservatives derive from what Lerner calls the Right Hand of God—the aggressive, vindictive, spiteful image of God that enters in when we are filled with fear and anger. And fear and anger erupt in each of us at some time or another—it is not the province of one particular side or another. I heard the public officials mourning the tremendous losses of 9/11 coming from that place. Policies emanating from this shadow side seldom value the diverse faces of America’s families, the unemployed or the uninsured. They seldom consider what might heal and preserve our earth. They really fuel our spiritual crisis by giving tax breaks to the most wealthy, by allowing corporations to pollute and devastate our fragile planet and by leaving **plenty** of children behind.

The religious right appeals to many progressive and spiritually minded people because they talk about spiritual values; it’s just that the Right enacts the spiritual values of the metaphor of the Right Hand of God, and that image is strengthened when fear grabs hold of the nation as we have experienced these past seven years since 9/11 and the ensuing wars. In Lerner’s view, “fear is the root of greed and selfishness and materialism.” He writes, “the key, then, is to take the energy that has been flowing toward fear and turn it toward hope.” (*Left Hand of God*, p. 220).

And hope comes from that other image, the Left Hand of God. It is the biblical image of God that cares about all people and provides safeguards for the most vulnerable—the poor, children and those with little means of support. That Left Hand of God is characterized by mercy, and compassion, imploring humans to welcome the stranger in our midst and be good

stewards of this earth. The Left Hand of God recognizes we are all indelibly connected to one another.

Religious liberals and spiritual progressives tend to avoid talking about spiritual values in the context of politics. We worry we may be thought politically naïve or guilty of mixing church and state. Most of us feel that just getting the daily consumerism grind doesn't give us any sense of meaning or purpose, but we can't really talk about that, can we, not in the political arena? We avoid the metaphor of the Left Hand of God, the God of hope, generosity, compassion and caring—all the values of Universalism.

This week, a number of people have verbalized (and I have felt it myself) a certain sense of despondency, despair and grief. It probably has something to do with the anniversary of 9/11 but even more than that, these feelings have to do with the shadow side emerging out of the thicket in this very important and groundbreaking election year. The Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi said, "I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified with the whole of humanity, and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of human activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments."

I agree with Gandhi. We need dialogue about a new spiritual politics, a growing awareness of building a world that fosters the values we hold dear—generosity, kindness, interdependence and a score of others embedded in our psyches—and in the Left Hand metaphor of God. It is too easy to denigrate the Religious Right, to believe they hold all the fearful qualities of the shadow side.

We are at a crossroads here. So much is at stake in continuing the onslaught of war and torture, demonizing those who wear a different face from us. Fears cloud our vision. As a community, there is a need to embrace the hand of hope, renewal and reconciliation and I promise you it does not wear the face of a donkey or an elephant. The spiritual values espoused by many at this church are those of many other faith communities. I heard them echoed in the voices of children and youth, and from a Roman Catholic priest and a Reformed pastor on 9/11. We are not alone as we fear—for generosity, loving kindness, peace and equality are traits we share as human beings.

Let us hear the bell tolling for each of us in this seventh year after 9/11; embrace the shadow as an essential part of our idealism, clasp the Left Hand of Hope and acknowledge the Right Hand of Fear and build, out of whole people, a whole community, a whole nation.