

**SEPTEMBER 11, 2012**

**CGN September 12, 2012 by Rev. Robert Hill**

New images have been burned into the consciousness of humankind and no one of them will recur more painfully throughout our lives than the sight of a plane full of people being flown into the World Trade Center tower, tied as it will always be to the subsequent collapse of seemingly invincible structures housing thousands of our fellow human beings.

I am in Southlake, near the strangely calm DFW Airport. It is not yet five o'clock on the second morning of our new era and I am part of the way home to Houston from Little Rock, where the plane I was on yesterday morning was grounded as the horror unfolded and the talk of war and retaliation began. When the television here in the quiet home of my daughter and her family is turned on, there will be, no doubt, new images of devastation to be absorbed and, somehow, integrated.

I bother to write this and to contemplate sending it to you out of my own need to rework my concept of who we are as God's most creative and destructive creatures and to express my belief that, in whatever follows from yesterday's events, the need for Small Group Ministry, for Covenant Groups, will be even greater than before. We need to gather and draw near to the flickering glow of hope and possibility held out by our faith.

As I expect happened in our churches all across the continent, a special service was held last evening in our Dallas 1st Church. The Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman conducted the service and it was well attended. We will need so much more, though.

For the moment, we feel united in shock and sorrow, but that may be temporary. As event follows televised event in the coming days, months, and years, there will be much to consider, to weigh, to debate. We Unitarian Universalists, given as we are to argument and pronouncements, risk being divided both by further assaults on our fragile stores of hope and inner peace and by passionate disagreements among ourselves. We will need each other at our best. We will need situations of trust in which we may be open about our feelings and our fears in the presence of others and to respectfully hear what they have to say to us. I know of only one way to be sure such a co-ministry happens. We will need to meet each other in small, facilitator-guided groups for which there are covenants reminding us of how we wish to be, within the group and in service to others.

Our Small Group Ministries can open space in which we may begin the great work of getting beyond the images of September 11. Our Covenant Groups can help us call back to our awareness another indelible image living within our human consciousness: the dark photo of a small, blue-green sphere floating in space, Earth as seen from our moon. The book on which I will continue to work carries a bold sub-title about saving the world ten at a time.

For now, we need to be about healing ourselves and the world ten at a time. We need to be considering how we may help to save our democracy in a world of technologically-enhanced evil and, lest we forget, good. Let us meet regularly in small groups to listen. Let us come together in trust to honor and encourage the shared power that lives within even those who do great harm. Let us sit together and invite back the blue of skies free of mayhem, the green of organic growth, the blue-green image of the home we must all share with the rest of creation. Keep up the good work. -- Bob

# September 13, 2001

## CGNews #38b

An occasional newsletter about a new/old way of organizing your church read by 731 forward-looking Unitarian Universalists.

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### HAIKU

clerk at the wine shop  
notes the date  
nine one one

-- *Johnye Strickland, President, Unitarian Universalist Church, Little Rock, AR*

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### SESSION PLAN

*The Rev. Glenn Turner was preparing for a workshop he will be doing soon for eight congregations in Schenectady, NY, when Tuesday's horrors happened. He put together the following session plan which may be useful to the facilitators of Small Group Ministries or Covenant Groups:*

#### OPENING WORDS:

The central task of a religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others.

- *Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed*

Our conversation and our ministry begins when we turn to each other and ask: What are you going through?

#### CHECK-IN/SHARING: (25+ minutes)

The facilitator should explain briefly that this is a time when each person in the group has about one or two minutes to share their joys or concerns, to share what's happening in their lives, what they are going through.

#### FOCUS: (30 minutes)

The following is a reading from Loren Eiseley:

"...on the edge of a little glade with one long, crooked branch extending across it, I had sat down to rest with my back against a stump. Through accident I was concealed from the glade, although I could see into it perfectly."

The sun was warm there, and the murmurs of forest life blurred softly away into my sleep. When I awoke, dimly aware of some commotion and outcry in the clearing, the light was slanting down through the pines in such a way that the glade was lit like some vast cathedral. I could see the dust motes of wood pollen in the long shaft of light, and there on the extended branch sat an enormous raven with a red and squirming nestling in his beak."

The sound that awoke me was the outraged cries of the nestling's parents, who flew helplessly in circles about the clearing. The sleek black monster was indifferent to them. He gulped, whetted his beak on the dead branch for a moment and sat still. Up to that point the little tragedy had followed the usual pattern. But suddenly, out of all that area of woodland, a soft sound of complaint began to rise. Into the glade fluttered small birds of half a dozen varieties drawn by the anguished outcries of the tiny parents."

No one dared to attack the raven. But they cried there in some instinctive common misery, the bereaved and the unbereaved. The glade filled with their soft rustling and their cries. They fluttered as though to point their wings at the murderer. There was a dim intangible ethic he had violated, that they knew. He was a bird of death."

And he, the murderer, the black bird at the heart of life, sat on there, glistening in the common light, formidable, unmoving, unperturbed, untouchable."

The sighing died. It was then I saw the judgment. It was the judgment of life against death. I will never see it again so forcefully presented. I will never hear it again in notes so tragically prolonged. For in the midst of protest, they forgot the violence. There, in that clearing, the crystal note of a song sparrow lifted hesitantly in the hush. And finally, after painful fluttering, another took the song, and then another, the song passing from one bird to another, doubtfully at first, as though some evil thing were being slowly forgotten. Till suddenly they took heart and sang from many throats joyously together as birds are known to sing. They sang because life is sweet and sunlight beautiful. They sang under the brooding shadow of the raven. In simple truth they had forgotten the raven, for they were the singers of life, and not of death."

Analogies are never perfect, but from Eiseley's metaphor we can focus on three aspects of our response to evil:

- 1) our outrage
- 2) our anguish
- 3) the song that we will pass to one another

Remember that this time of focusing is not an argument or a debate, but an opportunity for each of us to give voice to what is in our hearts.

**CLOSING WORDS:** (join hands)

Hold on to what is good even if it is a handful of earth.

Hold on to what you believe even if it is a tree which stands by itself.

Hold on to what you must do even if it is a long way from here.

Hold on to my hand even when I have gone away from you.

-- Nancy Wood

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## REPORTS FROM READERS

No UUA staff members, to our knowledge at present, were killed in Tuesday's violence, although some were stranded far from home, including the acting head of my department, the Rev. Tracey Robinson-Harris (on the West Coast). Five or six friends of our Program Consultant, Jennifer Nichols-Payne were employed in the Trade Center Buildings that were destroyed and there's been no news of them. The Fire Department Chaplain who was killed was a family friend of the Rev. JoEllen Willis, minister of our Little Rock church.

For advice on talking with children about this tragedy, you may go to the UUA web page, [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org) You'll also find a statement there from UUA President Bill Sinkford and other information.

As I thought, many of our congregations held special services Tuesday evening. Here are a few early reports.

BATON ROUGE - The Rev. Steve Crump, minister of our Baton Rouge congregation and the SWUUC Settlement Representative, had to endure a 36-hour bus home from an interrupted trip, but a member of his congregation, Diana Dorroh, reported:

"Our Branches 1 group had a previously scheduled meeting on 9/11. Our topic was Forgiveness, from the Glenn Turner document. The leader asked if we wanted to postpone the topic, but the group felt that it was appropriate to take it up and we continued, after the check-in, to talk about the tragedy and forgiveness.

"Members said they felt much better after our meeting, partly because they had heard so much talk of immediate retribution, such as "Let's just make a crater out of Pakistan," and were glad to be in a religious group of ten rational, feeling people. Some even expressed the hope that our country would become a more rational, feeling place, as a result of having its innocence taken away.

"We've continued scheduled church activities. Last night, our "Intro to the Jesus Seminar" course met for the first time. We all expressed our feelings and thoughts about the tragic attack and related it to the topic at hand. Again, it seemed to help.

FORT WORTH -- The Rev. Craig Roshaven is in England on UUMA business, and in his absence, the Rev. Marjorie Montgomery, member, conducted a service at First Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church of Fort Worth. The Rev. Lillie Henley put together a candlelight vigil for Westside Unitarian Universalist Church there. Only a few attended, but those who did, according to member Myrtle McMann, "found comfort from one another."

LITTLE ROCK - President Johnye Strickland reported: "Our church had a memorial service Wednesday night. It was helpful, I think, to those of us who came. Board members were asked to form a telephone tree to alert every member/friend, and email messages were sent to everyone on our church lists.

"We also were asked by the head of our Social Action Team (seconded by several other members by email) also by email to go to the Red Cross headquarters to give blood, rather than waiting for the scheduled Blood Drive they were going to do at our church in October."

NESHOBA CHURCH, CARDOVA, TN -- The Rev. Jean Rowe, minister, and Vicki Grimes, President, of our congregation in this Memphis suburb sent a letter today to the local Imam and Muslim congregations offering support. They wrote:

"On behalf of the Board of Directors of Neshoba Unitarian Universalist Church, we extend the right hand of fellowship and good wishes. Concerned at backlash towards our Muslim neighbors in Memphis and America, we want you and the other Muslim congregations in Memphis to know that we reach across interfaith lines to embrace you as brothers and sisters in the service of God and community."

We also want to offer you meeting space should the need arise; if you ever feel threatened and need a safe place to gather and pray. We have just moved into our first "building of our own" just east of Shelby Farms. ."

We are praying for all the people of our community, our country and the world and earnestly and sincerely hope that this will be a time of bringing people together, not dividing us further based on prejudice and fear. Please let us know if we can be of help to you."

OTHER DISTRICTS - I have heard from colleagues on the UUA Field Staff that leaders of our congregations elsewhere are also reaching out to Muslim groups in their communities. Meetings are being canceled for this weekend in many places because of travel uncertainties.

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*CGN September 17, 2001*

## **AN OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY PROFUSSION**

Please do not fear that your mail box is in danger of being swamped with long CGNews issues. It will not be, I promise, even though this is the third in about a week instead of one every month or so. I have the nerve to send this out to you, though, for two reasons. One is that I'd like to call your attention to a sermon which I consider to be a powerful analysis of our world situation with a (faintly) hopeful conclusion. It was given yesterday in our Austin First Church by the Rev. Davidson Loehr, and I expect he'd send you a copy by email if you asked for it: [Davidson.Loehr@firstuuaustx.org](mailto:Davidson.Loehr@firstuuaustx.org).

Second, I just received the following email and service outline from the Rev. Kathleen Ellis. If you are in charge of leading a service this coming Sunday or sometime soon, you may want to emulate and/or borrow from what our folks in College Station did. I feel sure it was a powerful and helpful service. -- Bob

### **FROM THE REV. KATHLEEN ELLIS --**

Some time ago the Covenant Group Facilitators in College Station decided to transform a Sunday morning service into a shortened CG format to give people a taste of CGs and to encourage further participation. We settled on 9/16 for the service.

In light of the world events, we modified the service still further. The CG segment was only 30 minutes, following an abbreviated service for the whole congregation, which I led.

I met with the children during the first part of RE to talk with them and pray. They did not come to the main service as usual. Instead, when the adults formed groups of 6 for their personal sharing, I rejoined the children and told them a story about "The Evil Wizard" and a little girl Esmerelda who fought him off time and again. (Story in *What If Nobody Forgave, and Other Stories of Principle*, but I can't remember the author's name.) I had time to converse further with some of the older kids.

Then I went back to close the main service. Received a request to sing hymn #159: "This Is My Song," which we did instead of the postlude, and people loved it.

At least one person suggested that we use this format 3-4 times a year. Although it was not quite like my first vision, it worked well. - Kathleen Ellis

### **Order of Service 9/16/01**

**College Station Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, College Station, TX**

**The Rev. Kathleen Ellis, Minister**

### **Prelude--Dries Berghman**

Introduction to the service For several weeks we have been planning to devote this hour to an experience of Covenant Groups. Because of the event of this week, the service has been modified to allow us to gather together as a single group, and then to move our chairs into small groups so more of us can share our feelings about the catastrophic strike against civilians.

Those of us who have joined these groups think they have really strengthened our ties and have actually contributed to the congregation's depth of community. And so, we invite the rest of you to consider signing up. If you would like to be a facilitator, by all means ask me about that.

One thing we encourage is to have an empty chair, as we have on the stage. This signifies that someone new might join the group or help start a new one with a similar common interest.

### **Chalice Lighting** (congregation in unison)

Let us open our eyes to see what is beautiful;

Let us open our minds to learn what is true;  
Let us open our hearts to love one another.

**Opening Words** by Herman Hesse

Heaps of shards and shambles far and wide:  
Thus ends the world, thus ends this life of mine.  
And I wished but to cry and to resign-  
If there were not this stubbornness inside,  
This stubbornness to ward off and to fight,  
Defiance deep, deep in my heart below,  
And then my faith: That what torments me so  
Must, must one day turn into light.

**Conversation with the Children** (pass offering baskets now)

Go now in peace, go now in peace . . .

**Ancient Readings**

Psalm 1 (not Psalm 5)

Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the way of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers;  
2 But his delight is in the law of Yahweh; On his law he meditates day and night.  
3 He shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also does not wither. Whatever he does shall prosper.  
4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.  
5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.  
For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked shall perish.

Qur'an 5:32 (not 42:30-43)

The Qur'an tells the story in which Cain killed Abel, but in doing so, he ruined his own life. Chapter 5 verse 32 says

"On that account: We ordained  
For the Children of Israel  
That if any one killed  
A person-unless it be  
For murder or for spreading  
Mischief in the land-  
It would be as if  
He killed the whole people:  
And if any one saved a life  
It would be as if he saved  
The life of the whole people.  
Then although there came  
To them Our Messengers  
With Clear Signs, yet,  
Even after that, many  
of them continued to commit  
Excesses in the land."

Related note: Islam says: if you must take a life for a life, at least there should be some measure of equality in it. That is, the killing of (one) should not involve a blood feud where many people would be killed. The law of mercy, with reasonable compensation, would be better.

Modern Readings [excerpt from] "Conscientious Objector," by Edna St. Vincent Millay

I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death.

I hear him leading his horse out of the stall: I hear the clatter on the barn floor.

He is in haste; he has business in Cuba, business in the Balkans,  
many calls to make this morning.

But I will not hold the bridle while he cinches the girth.

And he may mount by himself: I will not give him a leg up.

Though he flick my shoulders with his whip, I will not tell him  
which way the fox ran

With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him where the black boy  
hides in the swamp.

I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death;

I am not on his pay-roll.

I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends nor of my enemies either.

Though he promise me much, I will not map him the route to any [one's] door.

Am I a spy in the land of the living, that I should deliver men to Death?

Brother, the password and the plans of our city are safe with me;  
never through me

Shall you be overcome.

from The Young Dead Soldiers, by Archibald MacLeish

We were young. We have died. Remember us.

We have done what we could but until it is finished it is not done.

We have given our lives, but until it is finished  
no one can know what our lives gave.

Our deaths are not ours; they are yours; they will mean what you make them.

Whether our lives and our deaths were for peace and a new hope or for nothing we cannot say;  
it is you who must say this.

We leave you our deaths. Give them meaning.

We were young. We have died. Remember us.

## **Prayer**

Let us pray:

God of Every Name, we pray for the office worker, the rescuer, the airline passenger. One by one their stories come forth and they become more than faceless numbers. We pray for their families who expected them home again, for children who need a kiss good night. We pray for the injured and the medical teams who tend them. We pray that anyone left alive will be found-and soon. We are grateful for the outpouring of compassion. We pray that wisdom will rule the reaction, that pain will not give way to blind vengeance, and that the innocent will not suffer with the guilty. May we learn new ways of being in the world. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

## **Covenant Groups**

Opening Words

THE CENTRAL TASK OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IS TO UNVEIL THE BONDS THAT BIND EACH TO ALL. THERE IS A CONNECTION, A RELATIONSHIP DISCOVERED AMID

## THE PARTICULARS OF OUR OWN LIVES AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

- Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed

### **Check-In** (15 minutes)

This is a time when each person in the group has about one or two minutes to share your joys and sorrows, what's happening in their lives, what you are going through. It might be helpful to have a timekeeper.

**Focus: Saving the World Six at a Time** (15 minutes) In times of crisis, people reach out to one another or they risk feeling isolated. We believe that close connections made through Covenant Groups are an excellent way to offer support even within the larger membership of a congregation. Talk about your small groups and the benefits you gain from participation.

### **Check-Out** (3 minutes)

Describe how you feel now in one or two adjectives.

### **Closing Words**

LET US GO FORTH FROM THIS PLACE  
READY TO EXTEND A HAND TO OTHERS,  
OPEN OUR HEARTS IN SHARING, AND  
FIND KIND WORDS OF PRAISE FOR ALL WE MEET.

*Scotty Meek*

Benediction Hymn #184: "Be Lamps unto Yourselves"

### **Chalice Extinguishing** (congregation in unison)

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,  
The warmth of community, nor the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts until we gather together again.

### **Postlude**

**Hymn number 123:** "Spirit of Life"

Message Tragedy has shocked us into an examination of the way this country does business in the world. From the first awful news I have experienced all kinds of reactions: shock, anger, disbelief, deep sorrow. My mind wanted to know what happened, who did it, and why--even while I tried desperately to believe all would be well.

But all was not well. Nor shall it be. Ripples of pain have spread in all directions, churning the waters deep and wide. Where is God now? Where is Allah? Where is Yhwh? Have they abandoned us utterly?

Linda Causey shared this Sufi teaching: "Great God, how is it that a loving creator can see such things and yet do nothing about them?" God said, 'I did do something. I made you.'"

And so the world has responded. We will never forget the story of rescuers who rushed into the buildings to help, only to be crushed when the buildings collapsed. We cannot dismiss the image of a bucket brigade of workers who continue to remove rubble and precious body parts down the line.

I have noticed several changes in myself in the past few days: More prayer; more giving, and more awareness. Friday's prayer service took place right under that beautiful oak tree. A dozen of us shared our thoughts and feelings, and we represented at least five different countries. It occurred to me that it would be good to have a multi-cultural awareness group. We need to learn more about the real people among us who come from all over the world.

Then yesterday when the Manor Volunteer Fire Department was collecting donations on Highway 290,

I dug much deeper into my wallet. I think a lot of us have even more respect for the work they do.

I have also become more aware of myself as a world citizen. I find myself looking upon strangers more kindly. And I pray for our future.

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