

Yom Kippur 2001
At-one-ment
by The Reverend Kathleen Hepler
Sept. 23, 2001

Poem

Try to Praise the Mutilated World

by Adam Zagajewski (translated from the Polish)

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June's long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of wine, the dew.
The nettles that methodically overgrow
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships,
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.
You've seen the refugees heading nowhere,
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the gray feathers a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.

Sermon

We are so fragile. Every human being is fragile. Some less than others when considering their station in life materially or in some other seemingly big, life ways. But all can change for anyone in a moment... just around the corner on a day like any other day. My friend is one day watching her lovely daughter of 18 months walking and playing. In a turn of the head her child is without the ability to move her lower body at all, for life, due to a viral, spinal infection. In a breath, a heart breaks for the inability to make it right for her most cherished.

On September 11, over 6,000 went to work, or got a plane thinking about their day, their job, their part in life's drama, whatever it was. Terrifying events ensue and gone are the 6,000. In the space of that infamous hour many, many hearts break for the inability to make it right for their most cherished.

Whatever else can be said about our processing of the past two weeks, may we each grasp the awesome fragility of being human, and the heart's desire to open in compassion as a result of fully realizing this.

It is the time of Yom Kippur in the Jewish tradition. A time of atonement. It is no frivolous play on words to call it a time of at-one-ment. In this time of turning, in this season of changing colors, in the throws of processing this great tragedy...it seems to me the religious response is to turn toward that which knows a oneness in life. Now is the time for a profound understanding of our common fragility. Every human being on the planet has this in common. Always has, always will. Any safety felt in power or ideals or wealth or things or health....all temporary. No one is exempt and this can bind us in god's compassion.

We are all inherently worthy with great potential toward the good.

So very often we can rely on the goodness within people to carry the day. We rely so much on the good intentions of others in order to navigate our lives. Just going the five miles from my home to here, I bank on everyone following the traffic laws for our mutual benefit.

So often people are good. So often they are more than good, heroic. My friend puts the braces on her daughter's legs as the child resists. The leg braces hurt, and she has to sit in a wheel chair when they are on. My friend puts them on in spite of the tears, promising her lovely child, later she can wear her sparkling dress and take the braces off and move on the floor in the way she knows how to dance. I cannot fathom such heroic goodness. But love makes it so. I saw it.

The people on the Pennsylvania flight who derailed the terrorist's from their target...going down fighting. I cannot imagine such heroic goodness. But love makes it so. All of those who have shown up and shoveled and opened their veins to give their blood and offered their shoulders for weeping and sent their money and wrote their songs and gave of their love...so very often we can rely on the loving goodness of people.

It is the time of at-one-ment. In this time of turning, in this season of changing colors, in the throws of processing this great tragedy...as we turn toward oneness now is the time to affirm that every human being has inherent worth and deep possibility for goodness.

We can all be severed from our own goodness, from god, from unity. It is not Allah who guided those terrorists, it is not the Muslim religion. It is the result of humans living in a harsh world and responding in unthinkable ways, for a variety of complex reasons, to that harsh world. It is not an excuse. It is what is true. We can all be severed from our own goodness, from god, from unity. Fear and war and poverty and misuse of power and profit not aligned with fairness and humility...all these diminiat were a travesty of truth. Pity anyone who reveres human carnage as sacred.

It is the time of at-one-ment. In this time of turning, in this time of the changing colors, in this time of processing this great tragedy, as we yearn to understand what oneness means in this mutilated world, let us say, in great humility that we can all be severed from our own goodness, from god, from unity. In my opinion, healing begins with humility. The groaning world asks for

us to humbly see the whole world (not just our nation) with the eyes of compassionate wisdom and daring creativity, and seek to walk a loving global path. It is not an easy path, but it humbly holds itself before us, because it knows how beautifully fragile humanity is and how precious and riven with saving goodness. Amazing.

We are called forth into new territory in this time of turning. Into wisdom we have, but do not often apply in the public sphere. Our President modeled that wisdom when he counseled to separate this act from the way most Muslims live their religion. He modeled this wisdom as he affirmed the heroic goodness in human beings. We still have a way to go to stretch our wisdom to own the ways we all perpetuate the reality of a broken world...and seek the deeper causes that bring this hatred to the fore in our web of interdependence.

In this time of turning, in the beauty of autumn, in this time of at-one-ment may we apply the wisdom we have toward the needed changes for world unity to be advanced. If there is another way to address terrorism without a bloody war in an already suffering land, may it be so that all creativity and commitment be brought to bear on this way. If war ensues, may it be embarked upon reluctantly, with a yearning toward other ways always present in the conversation...and not simply the thirstiness for revenge or our pattern of wanting mighty and swift fixes. If war is entered into may that decision be excruciatingly painful because we know, in our oneness we will be killing ourselves. We pray for creativity to rise mightily in the human community at this time.

Something there is that wants more kindness. Something calls. Put your faith in it, no matter what you call it. Don't withdraw for long. You are needed for the healing. It is the purpose of our birth.

Praise the wild strawberries...the gray feathers a thrush lost...praise the tears in every fragile eye that speaks loss and pain...praise that look of glee on that face of the little one in the sparkly dress dancing without her legs...try to praise the mutilated world...and the gentle light that strays and vanishes and returns

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