

world. Compassionate witnessing, words, and actions won't make our country weak—we remain the most powerful country in the world by far. They will, however, go a long way toward changing much of the world's view of our country as an arrogant, exploitative bully that has to be wounded before it pays any attention.

Despite the reactions of mainstream media, in listening to talk shows on NPR, I hear many people echoing aspects of what I am writing. I believe that there is a grassroots recognition that something different is needed this time. Politicians and pundits can't represent that position for fear of looking unpatriotic or weak, but we can. So what can we each do individually? I have, as I expect you have, received e-mail messages from different groups inviting me to join in praying for peace, and I'm doing that and also working with my parts a lot—using the emotions that Tuesday evoked as trailheads to find and unburden key parts. But I am also trying to use Tuesday's events to further strengthen my commitment to bring more Self-leadership to the world and to get more clarity regarding my path in that direction. I hope this can be a wake-up call for all of us. Although sitting in our offices healing one person at a time is a noble and rewarding pursuit, we need to lend our voices and energies to movements that can bring Self-leadership into larger spheres. There may be more opportunity right now for Self to break through than ever before. That won't happen, however, if we continue to hear only from our country's protective managers in the media, or from the protective pessimists in our heads that say that there's nothing we can do or there's no way to change our country's trajectory. I won't presume to tell you what kind of action to take. Instead I encourage you to spend time inside with the intention of finding your Self's vision for future steps. Ask your pessimists to step back and see what comes. No matter how grandiose or impractical it seems, stay with it until it clarifies.

May you feel held in the firm embrace of your Self, the Self, the Source, during these turbulent days. May you find the strength to help others feel that, too.



Bouncing Forward: Resilience in the Aftermath of September 11

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IN the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11 we have heard frequent reference to “resilience” in the many stories of recovery, heroism, and courage. Resilience is a valuable concept for these turbulent times: it refers to strength in

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rebounding from crisis and overcoming persistent challenges (Walsh, 1996, 1998). As we reflect on the responses to recent and unfolding events, it is worth considering the potential utility of this construct, and clarifying common misconceptions in light of research on this important subject.

Resilience is commonly thought of as “bouncing back,” like a spring, to our pre-crisis norm. However, when events of this magnitude occur, we can not return to “normal” life as we knew it before September 11. Our world has changed and we must change with it. There is no going back. A more apt metaphor for resilience might be “bouncing forward,” to face an uncertain future. This involves constructing a new sense of normality as we recalibrate our lives to face unanticipated challenges ahead.

A serious error is to view resilience as invulnerability and to expect immediate recovery from crisis events. From this perspective, resilient individuals are presumed to have innate character armor that protects them from trauma and suffering; unscathed, they simply put terrible events behind them and move on with life. Vulnerability is seen as weakness; prolonged suffering and “normal” reactions to traumatic experiences (common and expectable in such situations) are too readily pathologized. To the contrary, resilience researchers note that invulnerability is antithetical to the human condition and that recovery from traumatic events is not found in quick and easy solutions. Resilience entails both suffering and perseverance, “struggling well” to work through emerging difficulties as we strive to integrate the fullness of the crisis experience into the fabric of our individual and collective identity (Walsh, 1998). The suffering and losses of September 11 require time and shared reflection for meaning-making and healing. We must question old assumptions and grapple with a fundamentally altered conception of ourselves in relation to others in our shared world. Taking a systemic view, the terrorist acts (from many sources) and our response (influenced by our own past) generate multiple ripple effects and consequences we can’t foresee or control. Mastering these challenges will require great wisdom and humanity in the months and years ahead.

Resilience is too often viewed narrowly in terms of personal strengths, reflecting American culture’s myth of the “rugged individual.” However, a consistent finding across many studies is the relational foundation of resilience. Resilience is nurtured by supportive relationships. We draw courage through encouragement. We can best surmount adversity through connection and collaboration. In the wake of the terrorist attacks, national surveys revealed that, indeed, most Americans found strength, comfort, and solace by turning to their families and loved ones, and by turning to their faith.

What I most appreciate in the concept of resilience is that, beyond coping or weathering adversity, it involves transformation and growth. In the Chinese pictogram, the symbol for crisis is both danger and opportunity. The worst of times can also bring out our best, as shown by New York’s Mayor Giuliani and the rescue teams at ground zero; by volunteer efforts and memorial offerings, candles, and prayers; by new firetrucks built and sent as gifts to New York from other parts of the country. Forged in the cauldron of crisis and challenge, new strengths, untapped potential, and creative efforts can emerge as we reach more deeply within ourselves and reach out to connect with others.

Sparks of such resilience can be seen around us. This past week, just two months after terrorists crashed into the World Trade Center, American Airlines flight 587 crashed after takeoff in the Rockaway neighborhood of Queens, a working-class Irish and Italian-American

community that had lost many firefighters at ground zero. On that flight headed for the Dominican Republic, most of the casualties were from the Dominican community in Washington Heights, a poor neighborhood at the other end of the subway from Rockaway. As all New Yorkers reeled from yet another plane crash and fear of more terrorism, the leader of the Dominican community and Mayor Giuliani were moved by the intertwined suffering of these two communities and together seized the opportunity to plan a joint memorial service, bridging a longstanding racial divide and bringing together families who had never before had contact. One family member remarked that he had always assumed they were so different and had nothing in common; in coming together in sorrow, he found that they shared deep religious faith and strong family values and looked forward to further contact. [Dwyer, 2001]

These troubled times can jolt us to question what really matters in life and inspire us to reorder our priorities and take initiative in caring actions to benefit others. As a nation, we have lost our illusions of invulnerability and our isolationist stance as the rugged individual, gaining appreciation for our common humanity and global interdependence. As we navigate the perilous times ahead, let us hope and pray that we reach deeply and widely to seize every opportunity for lasting peace and justice.

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