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# *Terrorism and World Crisis:* Finding Moral Compass on Ground Zero\*

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At times like this it is even more important to *feel* clearly than to *think* clearly, for emotions can ignite action in a way thoughts cannot.

**T**he terrorists may have failed to distinguish between devotion and fanaticism, but we cannot fail to distinguish between chastisement and hatred as we react. Crime, diabolically ingenious and parochially perpetrated, must not go unpunished, but the retribution must follow from motives higher than those of revenge. Martin Buber said that nothing becomes a person more than to act towards another in justice—unless it be out of love. To most this Gandhian option will appear pathetic in the incongruity of its sublimity, but the Buberian injunction applies, for to seek revenge is to become unjust in the pursuit of justice.

A disaster on such a scale should at least unsettle our prejudice that terrorism is something out there. What we have witnessed is the globalization of crime by those who consider the kind of globalization they have witnessed a crime, at least historically. The U.S.A. can no longer live in a safe world of its own so long as the world is not safe. The world will not be safe unless contemporary moral discourse is ex-

\* *Editor's Note:* Although not part a member of the AAR Islamic section's steering committee, we are pleased to include this brief reflection offered by Arvind Sharma.

tended to embrace at least the acknowledgment, if not the righting, of historical wrongs. Is the fact that the tragedy occurred so soon after the near-failure of the racism conference as symbolic of its cause, as the World Trade Center is of its effect? What are a few centuries among friends? Or enemies. Arnold Toynbee once said that Muhammad was Asia's answer to Alexander.

But to understand is not to condone. If the current tragedy does not allow for a resignation of feeling, neither does it allow it to the intellect. While the former sustains a campaign against global terrorism, the latter must find new insight and distinguish between orthodoxy, which is a religious tradition's response to loss of piety and fundamentalism, which is its response to loss of power. Passion then becomes a substitute for power. Passion blinds. Even moral passion blinds. And it becomes possible for some to be blinded by the intensity of the luminosity of their own religious tradition. But perhaps in time heat will produce light.

Will a tragedy of such colossal magnitude not shift our paradigms at least an inch or two?