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When the Terror Won't Stop

By Dr. Dorree Lynn

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WHEN THE TERROR WON'T STOP

The New Reality

The planes bursting in air causing mayhem and destruction gave Americans a rallying point to come together, to hoist our flags and to be patriotic. As was appropriate, we joined as one nation. Though stabbed with shock, we reacted bravely and generously. We felt buoyed by a united congress singing God Bless America. We harkened to Bush, Pataki and Giuliani's entreatments to be strong, resolute and steadfast. We tried to live our lives as we had before. Most of us wanted to, few were completely able to.

We understood that those immediately and intimately affected, those living in Washington, DC, New York or Pennsylvania, those who lost a loved one or knew someone who did, would probably have a more traumatic reaction than those untouched or living elsewhere. But no one prepared us for our own anxiety, depression and restless nights. We reached out to loved ones, to family, to religion and to community. Instinctively, we understood that we needed all the help we could get and give. We did everything we should. So, why are so many of us still experiencing distress? Why are so many of us still afraid?

One recent survey said that seventy-five percent of Americans are now depressed. Fifty percent say they are having trouble sleeping. And, that does not include those who are feeling more tearful or who are experiencing bursts of unfocused anger, or those whose insides are chaotic or who are unable to concentrate as well as they did before September 11th. The New York Times reports an increase in heart attacks. Stress does nasty things to our bodies and our minds.

As a practicing psychologist, last week was the most stressful that I can recall. Normal solid citizens came to see me, expressing upset of every dimension. Most were finding their sleep disrupted, some wanted to sleep all the time. They were worried about their children's futures. Would sons and possibly daughters have to go to war? What kind of country would we become? What would happen to our

When the Terror Won't Stop

freedom? Fear of flying, germ warfare, a TV program on how to fit a gas mask to your face ... where will the next attack be, will my money be gone and maybe my job? The terror had only begun.

The economic situation didn't help. Some knew people who had been laid off. Some were afraid of losing their own jobs. Others felt a deep humanitarian concern and worried about having to fire those in their charge. Where would the jobless go? What kinds of jobs would be open to them? People talked about diminishing 401Ks and buying or selling stocks and homes. They spoke of dreams shattered. And, because dreams are ephemeral, they take a long time to mourn.

Although the media offered endless explanations about how people might feel, almost everyone thought it applied to someone else. Few understood why they were in such a funk. About the best I could do was to tell people that their response to abnormal events was normal, that they were not

going crazy, and that they were not alone. We talked and talked and I advised people to do simple things, talk, hug your loved ones, find community, pray and talk some more. This time-period will be the worst part. Becoming accustomed to the fact that life has changed and that we are vulnerable takes getting used to. Accepting a new normalcy isn't easy and takes time. Eventually, for most, symptoms should ease. For others, even with medication, symptoms will continue and their terror won't end.

Those of you who find yourself in pain should understand that there is nothing wrong with you. Just because our leaders request that we remain strong and even though we want to, doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with us if we are weepy, unfocused and scared. Human beings are not made of steel. We hurt when our armor is pierced. One wise man defined post-traumatic stress disorder as being frozen in shock. Our nation remains in shock and will do so for a long time.

One CEO of a large company put it this way, "I don't know what 's wrong with me, I had to fire someone today and I couldn't. I don't like firing employees, but I have never before been unable to. What's wrong with me?" He asked. "Nothing." I answered. "You feel personally wounded and you feel as if your own heart and soul have been pierced. There's nothing wrong with you. You are just like everyone else." "Oh." He slowly smiled. Color returned to his ashen face. I think, even though I don't want to, I can fire him now. I hate having to do it, but I will. Life must go on."

Though the terror continues, as we get accustomed to our new reality, we will adjust. The English planted their victory gardens while bombs were bursting around them. Israel, Palestine and other countries have learned to cope with constant threats of terrorism. Their citizens continue joyfully, though never fully at ease, with their weddings, births and deaths. They have learned to live with their reality. We will too. Just expect these next weeks, and maybe even months, to be the hardest.

Is there anything we can do to make the transition to our new normalcy easier? Yes. Turn off the TV, reach out to friends, be cautious about self-medication such as alcohol and drugs, keep a routine, work, exercise, meditate and if you are so inclined, pray. But most of all --- love. Love shared is doubled. Terror shared is halved.

Life is too hard to do alone,

Dr. D.

Dorree Lynn, PH.D.

Dr. Dorree Lynn is co-founder of the Institute for the Advanced Study of Psychotherapy and a practicing clinician in New York and Washington, DC. Dr. Lynn served on the executive board of the American Academy of Psychotherapists and she is on the editorial board of their publication, Voices. She is also a regular columnist for the Washington, DC newspaper, The Georgetown. Dr. Lynn is a noted speaker and well known on the lecture circuit.

The Politics of Freedom

By Kathy Simcox

The Politics of Freedom by Kathy Simcox

The war on terror should not be a political war. It should not be a war pitting Republican against Democrat or Christian against Muslim. The war on terror is a war on evil. There have been countless wars in our world that to some extent have protected against some level of evil. But this evil we fight today is an evil more bitter, more deadly, than anything you or I have ever lived to see. It is an evil so deeply rooted in hatred that it will take a very long time, if ever, to defeat. I am against war not because I am a Democrat or a peace-loving hippie, but because my Christian values tell me killing is wrong; because my Christian values tell me to love my Muslim brothers and sisters even though they worship God differently than I do; and because my Christian values tell me that its wrong to kill millions of innocent people, on both sides, because of those differences. I support the war on terror not because I am a Republican or a conservative bigot, but because I am an American who holds the value of freedom very near my heart; because I am an American who wants to live within the protective walls of that freedom for as long as I can, the very same protective walls so many young people have sacrificed their lives to keep standing; and because I want so very much for the rest of the world to know how wonderful that freedom feels and the peace that freedom brings.

I support our President not because of any hidden agenda or foolish conspiracy, but because he is an American like me who despises the enemy of freedom and the enemy of his faith; because he despises the enemy of ALL faiths, including that of true Islam; and because he despises the enemy of humanity. I am a free American, and I believe in all who fight for that freedom.

About the Author Kathy Simcox, Columbus, Ohio, United States hrdude28@hotmail.com Kathy works as an Administrative Assistant in the College of the Arts at The Ohio State University. She holds a BA in Psychology and is currently working on a second BA in Religious Studies. In addition to writing, her passions include hiking, biking, kayaking, photography, and singing in her church choir. She is also known to read an occasional book.



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