

Could We Talk, Please!

Speaking of 911 as not only American, but a global tragedy,

I am not here speaking as a Muslim.

I am not here speaking as an Iranian.

And I am not here speaking as an American.

I am here speaking as a person, as a human being, as one who has been affected, deeply and personally, by many inhuman, barbaric acts of humans against humans. As one who has lost dear friends and dear family members to such inhuman and barbaric acts. As one who has been awakened and reawakened by many disastrous, inhumane, unjust, unexplainable and barbaric acts of war, of humans killing other humans, of people destroying other people, all in the name of justice and righteousness.

Let me remind you of just few such incidents, one from each decade of the past 20 year. And since most of you are in your 20s, these are some of the events of your lifetime. In the early 80s, over three million Iranians, and perhaps as many Iraqis, many of whom were women and children, unarmed, peaceful and unaware brothers and sisters of the same faith, lost their lives to the Iranian Revolution, and its aftermath, the Iran-Iraq war. The boarder lines of these two Muslim countries became a vast graveyard for millions of bodies as young as 7 years old.

In the early 90s, the Gulf War claimed, if not millions, hundred of thousands of lives. Enough dead bodies were collected that mass graves were dug. Graves in which hundreds of people, some still alive, were thrown in and buried.

And now in the dawn of the 21st century, just eight weeks ago, we witness another barbaric act, another attack on humanity, a disaster that leaves over 6000 people dead or alive, buried in the most compressed Killing Fields of all times. And the killing still continues. Perhaps not as close to us, but somewhere on this planet, the planet where we all are sent here to share, to cherish life, to enjoy the gifts that have been given to us by our creator.

I am awakened, not for the first time, but nonetheless awakened, once again from a deep sleep, where I thought the heavy locks that I have placed on the doors of my dreaming chamber will protect me. The locks are broken, and my sleep is shattered, and I am awakened once again.

I am awakened and I am afraid, as Forough Farokhzad, the late Iranian woman poet wrote, "I am afraid of an age that has lost its heart afraid of the thought of so many idle hand afraid of so many alienated faces", and like a schoolboy "madly in love with [his] geometry lesson, I am alone"



And I think that our planet “can be taken to the hospital.”

I am awakened to this reality that alerts me, like it does so many of you, of my inability to control the “naked laws of power”. My inability to control the future I have worked, and am working, so hard, to plan, for myself, for my society, for my friend and for my family.

And I still feel as I did 20 years ago when I wrote:

“If the world

 --in my control
days begin with sunrise
 end with sundown
nights born in moontide
 die in moondusk
 (no light prisms
 the sun and the moon).

If the world

 --in my control
people breath peace
fire is honored
 and water, too
earth is worshiped
 and creatures
 and winds
 and rains
 and stars.

If the world

 --in my control
colors are shown
 as they are
 grass, green
 sky, blue
 blood, red...
 blood maroon...
 blood, red...

If the world

 --in my control
everyone lives for a reason
 and dies for a cause
 (and death won't be
 the end of all)
the living speak language
 understood by death
 (claimed and unclaimed)

If the world

--in my control
beauty is caressed
and justice is just
(decision evolves deed)

If the world
--in my control
woman...man
create
--god.

And today, I am awakened to this reality, the reality that surrounds me.
And today I am awakened to the reality that surrounds other human beings.
And today I question if my reality is indeed more real than the reality of the others.
And today I wonder if it is possible to understand the reality of the others.
And today I think that there could happen a dialogue between my reality and the reality of the others.
And today I believe that my reality could co-exist with the reality of the others in peace and harmony.
And today I try to understand the reality of the others.

Allow me to share with you a story that was written by a 12th century Iranian Sufi poet, Jalal Al din Rumi, and I read it again, twenty years ago, in a play written by Sam Shepard, a leading contemporary American playwright.

“One night there were some moths. A bunch of moths. In the distance they could see a candle. Just one candle in a window of a big house. The moths were tormented by this candle. They longed to be with this candle but none of them understood it or knew what it was. The leader of the moths sent one of them off to the house to bring back some information about this light. The moth returned and reported what he had seen, but the leader told him that he hadn’t understood anything about the candle. So another moth went to the house. He touched the flame with the tip of his wings but the heat drove him off. When he came back and reported, the leader still wasn’t satisfied. So he sent a third moth out. This moth approached the house and saw the candle flickering inside the window. He became filled with love for this candle. He crashed against the glass and finally found a way inside. He threw himself on the flame. With his forelegs he took hold of the flame and united himself joyously with her. He embraced her completely, and his whole body became red as fire. The leader of the moths, who was watching from far off with the other moths, saw that the flame and the moth appeared to be one. He turned to the other moths and said: ‘He’s learned what he wanted to know, but he’s the only one who understands it.’”

For some reason when I saw the amazing footage of that airplane, crashing into the 2nd tower of the World Trade Center, unbelievable as it was, this story came to my mind. I said to myself, There are only two groups who totally and completely understood what this whole disaster was, and how it felt; the terrorists and the terrorized. As the days went by, watching the news, looking at the pictures, and reading about every effort made to save one

more person, to recover another fallen man, to discover another corps, and to make sense of such a senseless act, I wondered as to what kind of a dialogue could be taking place between those two spirits, both fallen to their deaths, both trapped under tons and tons of concrete and metal, both sharing the same burial chamber. This conversation, that may still be going on, between these two people, the attacker and the attacked, the murderer and the murdered, the victimizer and the victim, the unjustified and the justified, buried side by side, dominated all my thoughts. Do they understand each other now? Do they accept each others' reality now? Are they in peace with one another now?

In Sophocles' play, Creon makes the following proclamation concerning the sons of Oedipus, brothers to Antigone, "both fallen, both slayers, both slain" that Eteocles, who "died defending his country shall be honored with all the burial rites due to a noble death, but the other, his brother Polynices who returned from exile intending to burn and destroy his fatherland, to drink the blood of his kin, he is to have no grave, no burial, and no mourning, he is to lie on the ground, left to be food for the dogs". But Antigone, their sister, defied this order. She buried both her brothers. She honored both her brothers. She mourned both her brothers. To Creon, she said, "That order did not come from Heaven. You are only a man and your edict was not so absolute as to override the unwritten, unalterable laws of heaven. These are the everlasting timeless laws". "Guilty against gods I will not be for any man on this earth" She continued "I was born to share my love not my hate".

Could this be a lesson for us? Could we the people of this new millennium finally realize that sharing our hate has not brought us peace and prosperity in the past few millenniums? Could it be that perhaps the greatest gift that is instilled in us, all of us, as human beings, what distinguishes us from other creatures, is our ability to converse, our talent to listen to the differing views, and our trainings to endure that? Could we at the beginning of the 21st century, open our hearts, and perhaps our arms too, to the others, and try to understand their realities?

Could we pause for a moment and think that perhaps there is a reason that we are given two ears and one mouth? Maybe it has been intended for us, as human beings, to listen twice as we speak.

Could we be thankful, to our creator, for all the emotions and feelings that has been instilled in us, and appreciate the similar emotions and feelings in other people?

Could we be thankful, to our creator, for the blessings that we are given, living in the most advanced country on this earth?

Could we be thankful, to our creator, for allowing us to be born in a land that living on it is every man and woman of this world's dream?

And could we, if only to thank our creator, try with a global courage, to do as Antigone did, to "Share our love not our hate?" for as Ahmad Shamlou, another contemporary Iranian poet cries out:

"gone are the days of morning some crucified Christ
for today every mother is another Mary

and every Mary has a Jesus upon the cross
albeit with no Crown of Thorns, no Cruciform and no Golgotha
...christ's all of a destiny, clad similarly... alike in everything
with the same share of bread and gruel
for sameness is indeed the dear heritage of the human race”

May God bless us all, all of us whom she or he created.