

On Fear, Flying and Freedom

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A friend called yesterday and as we cried together she told me how afraid she now is of flying; yet her job requires it. She sounded panicky. I expressed sympathy but found that it took a bit of effort because I realized, to my enormous surprise, I wasn't feeling what she was.

Even more startling, I realized that my fear—fear about my own future that I'd experienced way too often in the last several years—had lessened. How could this be? How could I possibly feel *less* afraid after seeing hours of scenes on television of horror, unexpected horror, happening so close to me. (My son lives only a mile from the World Trade Center.)

Am I just numb? I thought so at first. Then I came to realize I was feeling a new freedom.

Most of us have the illusion that we can control our lives; control outcomes. This tragedy shows us how out of control we are. If we can't get control, then what point is fear? Fear I think lies in our struggle—our struggle to find security, to know we're okay, to know we can see the future. Fear is rooted in the thought that somehow, some way, we can protect ourselves, if we just could figure out *how*. But maybe we cannot.

Even before September 11th, our security was illusory. Our production-at-all-costs belief system is destroying the soil, water, air quality and species diversity on which human life depends, as well as destroying the lives of tens of millions each year who have no access to that production. But most of us didn't see it; we certainly didn't feel it. Just as most of us had no idea that in Afghanistan our own holy war against communism funded and trained the very jihad behind the acts that destroyed thousands of innocent Americans on September 11th.

Because of the terrorist attack, we all see how vulnerable we are; only we think the threat is primarily from the "enemies of freedom." No, the enemy is the human capacity to put a rigid belief system before life itself. We in the West are doing it our way. Islamic jihad members are doing it their way.

Feeling small and powerless against such pervasive belief systems is oddly freeing. With no hope for security, something else can sustain us. We are free to choose each day what human connections and constructive acts bring us joy and satisfaction. Seeing the suffering that results from all-embracing belief systems that are destroying the earth and each other, we are free from the struggle to find ultimate answers. We are free to focus on what we each can do day-to-day to break down the barriers among us, address the gross inequities that divide us, and to heal our relationship with the earth.

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