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9/11 in Israel

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When the Boeing 767 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 in the morning, 6,000 miles away in Israel, Sept. 11 was nearing an uneventful end. It only took a few minutes, however, for a weary public all too familiar with conflict and chaos to tune into the various media outlets and start making sense of the terrible rumors of a devastating terror attack in the heart of western civilization. As teenagers growing up in Jerusalem during the second Palestinian Intifada, a bloody wave of suicide bombings that claimed hundreds of civilian lives, we were accustomed to grim headlines; nothing, though, could prepare us for the magnitude of this unprecedented tragedy.

While the world slowly came to terms with that fateful day, in Israel, we empathized with a reality so tragically familiar to our own and so inherently foreign to Americans - the fear and trauma of living in a society whose every playground, shopping mall, restaurant and public bus had become the frontline of a battlefield.

Growing up in this reality and serving in the army, we witnessed the Israeli psyche suffer blow after blow and gradually become jaded by the constant threat of terror. Perpetual fear made Israelis insular, prone to aggression and innately mistrusting of 'the other'. This collective trauma and sense of disillusionment are partially responsible for the Israeli paralysis toward making major concessions for peace with the Palestinians. Similarly, over the last ten years, we can identify parallels in the western world's response to terrorism. Sept. 11 continues to claim new casualties every day. Two wars have been declared and fought overseas, while in some western cities it has become unsafe for Muslims in Chador, Hijab, turban and beard to walk the streets. Islam has become the target of unwarranted condemnation based on the actions of a few morally perverse fundamentalists, while religion is perceived as the root of global conflict, rather than as a facilitator of compassion and constructive change.

As a result, the generation of 9/11, our generation, has been brought up to think in black and white: The world is destined for eternal conflict stemming from an irreconcilable cultural and religious divide, or there will only be peace once we dissolve all countries, abolish all religions, and march in unison as a collective homogenous horde.

We'd like to suggest a third option. As young participants of a multicultural global community, our challenge is to ground ourselves unapologetically in our own individual identities, religions and cultures, celebrate what makes us special and unique, and, at the same time, harness our individualism to further mutual respect and understanding. Rather than fear our differences, we can embrace them, move beyond absolutist dogma to acknowledge and appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of every person and belief. The real "clash of civilizations" isn't between east and west, but between moderates who promote peace and extremists who oppose it.

On the tenth anniversary of Sept. 11, we honor and remember the thousands who died on, since, and as a result of that day. We honor the countless families and communities affected by the ongoing conflict—on all

sides. And we acknowledge that no single person, community, or culture has a monopoly on suffering.

Memory and mourning leave us two choices: We can either sink deep into the pits of despair, unwilling to recognize the humanity of the other, or we can begin the process of healing, acknowledging that while the pain may never subside, wounds heal and can become a force for compassion, understanding, and reconciliation. The choice is ours: Will we allow ourselves to be shaped by September 11th, or will we shape our own future and build a more peaceful, better world?

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