

[Understanding the Lessons of September 11](#)

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MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Understanding the Lessons of September 11

We must take this opportunity as tragically given as it is to turn back to God, the only true protector

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September 11 was a tragic day of unprecedented proportion. Never before in the history of the world had one group so blatantly, so callously, so mercilessly struck at so many thousands of innocent people.

We were in Munich, Germany, on the Vishwa Dharma Prasaar Yatra, traveling first to the Caribbean, then to the USA and Canada, then to the UK and then to Europe, spreading the messages of peace, unity and Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam, that "The whole world is one family." In the midst of this yatra, we heard the shattering news. Times like this and acts like these almost render us speechless with sadness. It is only after the sand has settled back on the beach after the storm that we can bend down and examine the pieces of that which was crushed in the tempest.

Those who engage in these unforgivable acts of terrorism, intimidation and violence claim that they are fighting a jihad, a holy war. However, the term "holy war" is itself an oxymoron, a paradoxical fallacy. A war can never be holy. Only peace is holy. That which is holy is peaceful, loving, pious and compassionate. War, by its very definition, is none of these. The terrorists claim they are fighting a war in the name of God. However, there is no such thing. War—especially those acts which kill innocent people—cannot possibly be undertaken with God's consent or to win His favor. How can we—in God's name—kill His children, His creation? Could you possibly kill your sister or your brother and claim you did it for your mother's or father's sake? Or that you did it in order to win your parents' appreciation? This would be absurd.

Rather than fighting a true "holy" war, the terrorists are using God's name in order to justify their own evil, violence and aggression. To me, the true jihad is a holy war within ourselves, a war against that which is unholy within our own hearts, a war of annihilating our own egos, our own jealousies and grudges.

However, simply condemning the acts is not enough. That which happens must happen for a reason. That which happens must have a lesson inherent within it. Let us then look at what we can learn, what

reassurance we can gain from this tragic event. What can we take from this which will both help us grow individually as people as well as help us grow as nations and as a world?

To me, one of the most important lessons here is one of safety, one of comfort, one of complacency. So many people throughout the world (especially those living in India, or Indians who live abroad) think of everything Western as superior, as inherently "safe." If you give someone a gift and say it's "from America," their eyes will widen with anticipation. If you tell someone that a particular object you own is "from America," that automatically grants it "First Class" status. The idea of sending our children "to America" for studies or work is one that fills us with great pride, comfort and security. It is every parent's dream to send their children "to America," and it is every child's dream to go. It is not only that parents think their children will have a higher income in America. Rather, there is an inherent yet almost tangible feeling of safety, security and superiority about everything Western.

Additionally, from what I have seen, people living in America have a very deep sense of safety, security and invincibility. There is a sense—taught since childhood—that living under the umbrella of the American flag will guarantee not only material

prosperity, but also personal comfort and safety. And, I am not condemning this feeling. I personally love America and love Americans for their great openness, great honesty, eagerness and steadfastness on the path to God. And in many ways this feeling of security regarding the country is not misplaced. The West achieves standards of excellence which are unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. The education and professional fields are peerless.

However, none of us, regardless of where we live, regardless of where we work, regardless of where we have attained our education, is invincible and invulnerable. It is only by the grace of God that we wake from our sleep each day. It is only by the grace of God that the billions of neurons in our brain continue to function properly, allowing us to breathe and our hearts to beat. It is only by the grace of God that our legs move when we think "move," and that our ears can process the sounds we hear. It is only by His grace that the thousands and thousands of blood vessels in our body continue to carry blood safely to and from the heart, without rupturing along the way.

We must take this opportunity as tragically

given as it is— to turn back to God, for He is the only true protector. No insurance policy could have protected those thousands of poor, innocent people working in the high reaches of the World Trade Center on September 11. No matter how good the policy or how high the premium, once that tragic moment came it was only a matter of them and God. It is only our Divine Insurance Policy in whom we can have total trust. It is only the Divine Insurance Policy who truly renders us safe and protected. Thus, let us turn back to Him and realize that we are simply in His hands, and that it is only by His will and His grace that we continue to exist and to prosper.

The tragedy struck the top CEOs as quickly and mercilessly as it struck the mail deliverers and window washers. It struck those living in the posh suburbs of Long Island as ruthlessly as it struck those sharing cramped apartments in Soho. This does not mean, of course, that there is no benefit to advanced degrees or good jobs. I always advise my youth to study hard so they will succeed. However, it means that we must see these achievements for what they can really give us— comfort, ease and the ability to perform up to

our potential. However, they cannot provide us with safety, security or immortality. It is only by turning to Him, by dedicating our hearts and our lives to Him, regardless of our profession, that we are truly safe and truly secure, not just our bodies, but our souls.

Today, the big issue is whether America should go to war, whether and how we should avenge the lives which were so mercilessly taken in this atrocious act. Yes, the perpetrators should be punished. Yes, they should be brought to justice in whatever way possible. Yes, we must show the world that these sorts of crimes will not be tolerated. However, is war the answer? Is dropping bombs on a country full of innocent, impoverished people the answer? Do we need to sacrifice more innocent lives in order to avenge the death of innocents? Will an "eye for an eye" make us a better world, or will it make us all blind?

Whatever action the US government decides to take, I pray that it will be action in the name of compassion, action in the name of a better,

peaceful future, action done after great thought and deliberation. I pray that there will be no more acts of impulsiveness, no more acts of vengeance, no more acts in which innocent lives are senselessly taken.

The violence perpetrated against New York and Washington, as well as the innumerable acts of terrorism throughout history, are acts of ignorance and hatred. They are acts of people who are trained to think of "us versus them." They are acts of those who are taught to see people according to color, religion and nationality. These are all veils of ignorance, veils of illusion. The solution cannot be to continue fighting from behind borders and beneath banners of religion, nationality, color or creed. The solution can only come by breaking these borders, by breaking these boundaries and by throwing away these banners.

The answer cannot come by the civilized, educated, peaceful nations of the world lowering themselves to the level of the ignorant. Rather, the wise ones must educate the others. We must

continue to spread the messages of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam, "The whole world is one family." We must continue to pray Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramayah, sarve bhadrani pash-yantu, ma kashchid dukhabhagbhavet
~"May all beings be happy. May all beings be healthy. May all see the divinity in everything. May there be no unhappiness or sorrow." For, if we, too, start to pray only Hindavah bhavantu sukhinah, Hindavah santu niramayah~"May Hindus be happy, may Hindus be healthy;" Americaha bhavantu sukhinah, Americaha santu niramayaha~"May Americans be happy, may Americans be healthy;" then we will fall into the same well of despair as those who committed these horrendous acts.

Lastly, God has given us an important lesson in this tragedy: life is so short. We don't know when or how our end will come. Every moment is a gift. No matter how high we build our towers of prosperity, we never know when they can come crashing down. Therefore, why not live peacefully, why not live every moment in love, in harmony, in joy? Who knows if this moment will be our last?

Let us take a new pledge, in the fertile ground of the rubble. Let us vow to live our lives as precious gifts, to come together as sister and brother, to forgive and forget our grievances and our grudges, and to join hands together in rebuilding the towers. But let these new towers be not only towers of trade and towers of wealth, but let them be towers of love, towers of unity, towers of brotherhood, towers of peace. Let these new, divine towers reach unprecedented heights, soaring toward the Divine, Infinite Abode of the Lord.

We, on the holy banks of Mother Ganga, in the lap of the sacred Himalayas, offer our deepest prayers that the departed souls may rest in peace, and that those who are shattered, broken and bereaved by this tragedy may find solace and serenity. Lastly, we pray for those who have committed this atrocious act and for all those who have plans or desires to commit a similar act—we pray that God may bestow wisdom and compassion upon them, so that they can see the folly of their ways and transform themselves. We pray for peace to the Heavens, peace to the Earth, peace to all the humans, all the animals, all the

plants and peace for every being in the universe.
Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti—Om, Peace, Peace,
Peace.

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