

terrorism and nonviolence

By Arun Gandhi

When in despair I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won; there have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall.

M.K. Gandhi

Understandably, after the tragedy in New York and Washington DC on September 11 many have written or called the office [of the Gandhi Institute] to find out what would be an appropriate nonviolent response to such an unbelievably inhuman act of violence.

First, we must understand that nonviolence is not a strategy that we can use in times of peace and discard in a moment of crisis. Nonviolence is about personal attitudes, about becoming the change we wish to see in the world. Because, a nation's collective attitude is based on the attitude of the individual. Nonviolence is about building positive relationships with all human beings — relationships that are based on love, compassion, respect, understanding and appreciation.

Nonviolence is also about not judging people as we perceive them to be — that is, a murderer is not born a murderer; a terrorist is not born a terrorist. People become murderers, robbers and terrorists because of circumstances and experiences in life. Killing or confining murderers, robbers, terrorists, or the like is not going to rid this world of them. For every one we kill or confine

we create another hundred to take their place. What we need to do is dispassionately analyze both the circumstances that create such monsters and how we can help eliminate those circumstances.

The consequences of a military response are not very rosy. Many thousands of innocent people will die both here and in the country or countries we attack. Militancy will increase exponentially and, ultimately, we will be faced with other more pertinent moral questions: What will we gain by destroying half the world? Will we be able to live with a clear conscience?

I think we must move from seeking to be respected for our military strength to being respected for our moral strength. We need to appreciate that we are in a position to play a powerful role in helping the "other half" of the world attain a better standard of life not by throwing a few crumbs but by significantly involving ourselves in constructive economic programs.

For too long our foreign policy has been based on "what is good for the United States." It smacks of self-

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ishness. Our foreign policy should now be based on what is good for the world and how can we do the right thing to help the world become more peaceful.

To those who have lost loved one's in this and other terrorist acts I say I share your grief. I am sorry that you have become victims of senseless violence. But let this sad episode not make you vengeful because no amount of violence is going to bring you inner peace. Anger and hate never do. The memory of those victims who have died in this and other violent incidents around the world will be better preserved and more meaningfully commemorated if we all learn to forgive. Let us dedicate our lives to creating a peaceful, respectful and understanding world.

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