

**THE DAY THE WORLD FELL APART:  
REMEMBERING 9/11 TEN YEARS LATER**

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A car of strangers pulls up on the corner near my office building in lower Manhattan and one of the strangers says to me as they catch me on my way to cross the street. "Which is the way to Ground Zero?" I wince. I feel offended, invaded, intruded on by what appears to be a bunch of out of town tourists asking me for directions to a local tourist spot, asking as if they have gone down a list, and now are just focusing on their next renowned destination, which happens to be 9/11's sacred and tragic "Ground Zero." I am struck by my own reaction because it is so different than any other time that a stranger, whether a tourist or a New Yorker, asks me for directions. Usually I am friendly and try to help out as best I can, especially if I'm not in a particular rush as most New Yorkers are. But this time is different. I start to appreciate feelings that I didn't realize were there. My first feeling is anger, and some indignation, as I feel alienated from these strangers who are not among the vast clan of New Yorkers who actually experienced 9/11 close at hand, together as native New Yorkers. I don't think these people can really understand, even though I never had such thoughts before when all the news reports brought our whole nation together as Americans when the cultural heart of America was struck with sudden devastation. My next feelings are of grief, sadness, and a silent nostalgia that I have no attention of sharing with this car load of strange tourists. I waive them towards the downtown area and dash away!

I am now jolted into remembering the actual day, the actual time, the actual place. I find myself walking past the outside garden restaurant where I sat with a friend on that day, dazed and unbelieving as a picture perfect day surrounded me, belying what I had already experienced that morning. For it was after a cell phone call from a patient heading to my office, which blared out a message that made me pick up the phone in the middle of a session with someone who had made it to my office that day, that the shock of what was radiating all over the world entered my consciousness. At first she said: "I'm on the way to your office but I'm afraid for my staff," and then a long pause, "Oh no there's another plane. It's heading at a building. I can't come. I have to go back and be with my office staff!" After she hung up, I turned on the radio to hear what was happening because some catastrophe was obviously at hand! The female patient who I was with was in her 80s, and as soon as WNYC's reporting of the imminent events could be heard, my patient began to tell me about the day the Japanese invaded Pearl Harbor, the day of the 1940's catastrophe that had ushered America into World War II. Suddenly, the roles of me and my patient seemed reversed. My mid-80's patient came out of her childhood transference state-- in which I often played the role of her mother-- to relate to me, as someone around much before my time, the historic preludes to this current invasion from abroad.

*As a Clinician*

But now I wish to convey to you some thoughts about 9/11 as a clinician, as a psychologist and psychoanalyst who has practiced for 36 years, and who remembers some critical clinical work that I did with my patients during the traumatic impact of 9/11. I want to

stress that I believe the most important work I did during the time of 9/11 was truly as a psychoanalyst with my ongoing, mostly long term, patients. This doesn't mean that I didn't volunteer to be of help in a short term way with those in acute crisis. I did. I did a little bit in talking to those in shock inside the doors of a corporation that was enlightened enough to have mental health professionals on hand for their employees to talk to. But my most true, in depth impact was with my very own patients, the ones I had been engaged with over time, the ones whose process I had been nurturing all along. In fact, a significant part of this impact was with the lady who had called on the cell phone, a business woman, who ran back to be with her staff of employees at the time of imminent crisis. Her business office had been severely damaged, and she lost a lot of business, which had made it impossible to pay her exorbitant New York rent for a month. And this was after she had moved her office into her home, so both her home and business, and business relations, were threatened if she failed to pay her rent. I believe that her ability to stand up to Red Cross officials and demand that she be given compensation for the month's rent and business expenses, was a direct result of the analytic work we did in her regular treatment sessions, as I interpreted how the current crisis, in which she felt her world falling apart, was exacerbated by her unconscious re-living of the first time she had felt the world was falling apart, in her childhood, when she was nine years old. It was when she was nine that her mother decided to leave her father's home and take her and her brother with her. Pretending to be an adult, and in an effort to support her mother, she declared as she was whisked away in an automobile with her mother, "Well, I'm glad that's over with!" But inside her inner world was falling apart. Her sense of self, that had been so associated with the applause and cheerleading of her father, was plummeting into the depths of despair and into a hidden and covert helplessness! She put on a brave face and an attitude of bravado for her mother, but inside she was enraged at the mother who was dragging her away from both the father and the home she absolutely loved. Of course she could not at any cost allow herself to be conscious of her rage at her mother because now her mother was her only parent, the only one she had to depend on in all the world-- and she didn't even know where she was going. Everything was topsy-turvy as she was sped off in a vehicle with her angry and depressed mother at the wheel! She left behind the painted bedroom that was called the "upside down room," with the ceiling looking like the floor. Now things were really upside down!

But every week, this middle-aged female patient, this generally assertive business woman who felt like jelly inside, came to her twice weekly analytic sessions, and re-lived with a more acute conscious grief than ever before, as the memories rushed up within her, her feeling that "the whole world is falling apart!" And in this re-living, with the holding environment that she and I created together in the treatment room, my patient was able to piece by piece separate out the memories of how the world had fallen apart when she was nine, and the current realities of how the world was falling apart in the present, in the wake of 9/11 that had happened in her backyard. I had a number of other patients whose homes and art studios, or offices, were besieged by the assaults of 9/11 on the lower West side, and they too had to remember all the earthquakes that emerged from their unconscious internal world domains with the current external and sociological shocks. But I remember the work with this woman most of all! I remember how she saved herself financially, as she saved herself psychologically, by working faithfully within the well-kept boundaries of the psychoanalytic process, in the treatment room where it was safe to remember and safe to experience the flood of feelings that she had repressed and kept at bay all these years, all though we had touched on them before. The acuteness of the

trauma of 9/11 was with us all, but I was most centered and least helpless, and most effective, when I stayed loyally in my psychoanalytic role and worked progressively with this woman. Her trauma and resilience is obvious. But my own resonates too, through the work I did in connection with her.