

THE ENTIRE WORLD IS MOVING FORWARD BY PATRICIA LOMDEN, 16 YEARS OLD, PHILADELPHIA

The following essay was written by Patricia Lomden as a personal response to the tragedies of Sept. 11. Her article does not necessarily reflect the opinions of Seize the Day or the SGI-USA.

If I had to write about anything, I guess it should be about Sept. 11, 2001.

It's time to write this date in every textbook because this is history.

No doubt many people are having nightmares about Sept. 11. No doubt there are those who will not be able to sleep because of that day. They fear for their lives. Who can blame them?

It seems that every generation has a special event that is burned in their minds forever. My parents had the Kennedy assassination. My grandparents had Pearl Harbor. They can probably remember where they were, what they were doing and how they felt at the time they found out about it.

How did I feel when I saw the World Trade Center towers looking like smoke stacks while attending my English class? I feel as if my mission has been laid out in front of me. I know that I can use my Buddhist practice to change this horrible situation. I chant for the perfect opportunity to reach out to others. When I chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, I feel hopeful and courageous. My deep potential comes out and I feel confident of the humanity in other people.

What happened to the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was the result of hate in someone's heart. I have spent my whole life fighting to stop this hate because I am angered at how people disrespect one another. I try to encourage others to apply alternative means of taking action. Peace! Peace! Always peace! When people choose to ignore violence or think it is impossible to end, then it gets bigger. There is pain in my heart for those families who lost loved ones on the planes and in the buildings. The sadness is like a sickness. I can feel it eating away at my heart and trying to nibble at my hope. But we should not feel there's nothing we can do. It's time to stop fooling ourselves. We must stop contradicting our potential. There is so much each of us can do.

We can change how we live our lives. Change begins at home, in our communities, our schools. We can have a meaningful dialogue with someone we do not know well. We can try to understand how that person thinks and what they feel. Think how wonderful it is if each of us can open our minds to another point of view. All human beings are connected.

SGI President Ikeda writes about the merits of interfaith dialogue in *The New Human Revolution*: "When conflicting political and social interests compound religious differences, the problem only gets more complicated. I think dialogue is essential, but I am talking about dialogue among human beings, dialogue that transcends religious distinctions.

"In other words, I think the most important thing is, as fellow citizens, as fellow human beings, to first of all frankly discuss issues of common interest. And from there to build a base of shared empathy" (Feb. 4, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 11).

Are our eyes and ears open? Has this event beaten us enough to let us rise and be

willing to listen to someone else? Let's make things better! As recent events have shown, it's easier to declare war than it is to say "Good morning" with a smile to someone we don't like. Why not make that little effort? Is it really so hard now that we realize life is a bit more precious than we thought?

When I heard people talk of America retaliating, I made a commitment that we will retaliate. We will have a major retaliation where others will jump for joy that innocent human beings didn't just die for nothing. This retaliation will put some substance behind all the American flags I have been seeing. This retaliation will not be one of guns and bombs and death. It will be one of life. It will be one of peace and dialogue. Think of it: a retaliation of peace!

I have studied America's history from the the Bill of Rights to the Civil Rights Movement. I have studied its birth. On Sept. 11, America seemed to die, to collapse in agony, for one morning. And then it was born again in people's hearts. It was born again in people's songs, in their tears.

This cycle of birth, death and renewal is not uncommon in the world. A flower is born from a seed. This flower grows, smelling ever so sweet. Then one day it withers and dies. Its leaves crumble and it folds into itself.

As we know, this is not the end of this flower.

Its seeds, which were always waiting to fall among its petals, drop to the ground and wait for rain. Among the dust and decay of their mother, the seeds come to life and grow ten more flowers, even more beautiful than the one before.

Can we renew ourselves amidst the dust and decay of the World Trade Center? Can we build up from the rubble and even the fear that others have caused? Just like a person, a country must face and change its problems from within. External forces are not the only problems we have. Inside, America needs a human revolution, a renewal, a rebirth, unlike any other before!

War is savage.

But the truth is that there are people who dream of revenge. How can we win over these terrorists without grinding our teeth and fighting, killing them?

We first must listen to them. Yes.

We then must understand them. Yes.

We then must speak to them. Yes.

We then must let them understand us.

Yes.

We all must have a goal, a common one, the whole time. Yes.

We must achieve it. Yes.

Peace.

Doesn't war cause terror? Most human beings are afraid of death when they are faced with it. Aren't all people who kill, terrorists?

I am very afraid of what war will do, what war is doing. War is a sign of weakness. It is a weakness of someone who gives up when they are not able to make someone else listen and understand.

Yes, working for peace takes effort.

How much effort did it take for me to write this article? How much effort did it take for you to read my words? How much effort will it take for each of us to change someone's life just by saying, "Don't worry, I can help you make things better"?

We are living out a drama. But the thing is, we don't know we hold the pen. No

one above or below us has the power over our destiny. Nothing outside of myself tells me I cannot change a nation with the growth of my own life. Do you see me? I am the epitome of youth and justice! I am the symbol of youthful passion and ideas! I am the embodiment of respect and humility to the older generation! Look at the big picture because it is getting awfully smaller each day.

I absolutely need to win in making people understand each other. This should be everybody's job. No excuses. I'll do anything. I'll write poems, speeches and songs and walk with the lonely crowd. I will change people's lives.

They say America, possibly the world, will never be the same after Sept. 11. That's right! A door has opened for things to get better. Things will change! Everything will be different! It might not seem like things are changing right away, but I can feel myself moving forward. When I know I am improving my own life, I know, somehow, that the entire world is moving forward.

After that day, my will and courage have become stronger. My hope has grown. My compassion for others is flourishing. My dreams are soaring higher than any skyscraper there ever was. My focus is my mission. My eyes see more. Oh, yes! Things will change! Where buildings have collapsed and bodies have breathed their last breath, new pillars of wisdom and peace will be built on the foundation. Those people have not died in vain. Look at the cause they made just by being regular people who were victims.

These are the times when artists are born. These are the times when human revolution springs forth from every individual like a fountain!

Believe me, Sept. 11, 2001, will never be forgotten. But neither will the days thereafter.