

The First Letter

A Personal Journey 9/11

by Hal Stone, PhD & Sidra Stone, PhD

Dear Friends,

We have not been able to be in touch with you earlier than this because we have been very much “in” the events. Since September 11th we, like others, have been feeling the vulnerabilities, the conflicting selves, the moments of awareness and the hummingbird-like hovering between opposites - many opposites - as we’ve looked at the changed world in which we all now live.

We flew back East to Philadelphia to attend a wedding on Sunday, Sept. 9th. Then we drove Washington, DC on September 10th and woke up to the bombing reports on the 11th. Our first reaction in Washington was disbelief and then the vulnerability of not knowing what was coming next. We were clearly in one of the target zones. Our immediate need was to make sure the grandchildren were safe at home and that Sidra’s daughter and son in law were safe at work. Both of them work in places that could be vulnerable. We remained in D.C. until Sunday and then we drove to New York City.

On the Wednesday evening immediately after the bombing, we were scheduled for a three-hour relationship presentation in Bethesda sponsored by Francine Pinto. We had just a few cancellations and quite a few more people signed up at the last minute so we ended up with a group of well over a hundred people. It was a remarkable evening for us all and we were very moved by the entire event. It felt so very good to be dealing with issues of consciousness that we all could sink our teeth into, particularly at that time of intense vulnerability and not knowing. And it was a beautifully open evening in terms of sharing!

We entered Manhattan through the Lincoln tunnel. There is a loop as you approach the tunnel where traffic was stopped and from here, for about half an hour, we looked across at the New York skyline. For Sidra this was a very powerful experience since she is a native New Yorker. To see the gaping hole in the skyline and the smoke rising from the place where the twin towers had been was indeed a strange and sad experience. It was like looking at a face you know and love and finding some important piece of it missing.

When we arrived in New York we drove to the Waldorf Astoria (where we like to treat ourselves with a free stay using our Hilton Honors points). The garage was closed and cars had to be handed over to attendants who inspected them thoroughly before parking them. We could only enter the hotel through one small door which was flanked by guards. When we finally entered the vast lobby of the hotel after going through a careful inspection, which included photo ID, we found ourselves totally alone. There were three very subdued employees behind the reception desk and absolutely nobody else. This was a very eerie experience; it felt like a dream. This is a huge lobby that is usually crowded with hundreds of people all bustling about with a sense of excitement and it was empty, totally empty. The second image that has stayed with us is our walk through the outer,

very large, lobby where a woman seated up on a balcony was playing the piano and singing to a room that was totally empty. She usually plays to a room filled with chatting people enjoying cocktails or afternoon tea.

One of the most powerful sights in New York were the hundreds upon hundreds of computer generated 8 by 11 announcements with pictures of missing loved ones, a description of where they had been in the World Trade Center, and a plea for information. The pictures were of men and women of all races and ages – they truly gave the feeling of the US as a great melting pot, a poignant picture of our great diversity. These poster-like announcements were plastered all over the city but were more numerous in lower Manhattan where we saw them on the walls of buildings, on advertising posters, in front of the fire stations and hospitals, and on the bus stops. At night they were lit by hundreds of burning candles. There were corners in Greenwich Village that were set up as shrines to the dead and missing with these posters, flowers and candles. At first, we stopped to read them; we wanted to honor the people by reading them all. But, in the end, we had to stop because the sadness was too great and the vulnerability was too deep.

Our October Denver training which had been scheduled for the following weekend was cancelled. We rescheduled this program for May 3-5 of 2002. This proved to be a blessing for us because it gave us the chance to drive home. We no longer had plane tickets. We couldn't even reach the airlines by phone and flights were being cancelled at the last minute whenever a new threat was discovered. There was no way we could be sure of getting back home for our Thera training on September 30th if we relied on the airlines.

Sidra, whose blood carries a very high volume of gypsy red and white cells according to Hal, suggested we drive home. National Car Rental was totally cooperative (they made special arrangements for anyone who had rented a car before the 11th and was stranded by the attacks). So we left on Wednesday the 19th and arrived home the following Wednesday. Our September training began the following Sunday and ended on October 6th.

This week we have been playing “catch-up” and we leave for Calgary on Sunday where we will be doing a full weekend relationship training. We are then home until Thanksgiving week when we return to D.C for the holidays and then back here for our December training. We are both feeling well. Marilou has kept things under wonderful control here even while rehearsing for and performing in the local production of Stephen Sondheim's “A Little Night Music” where she was, indeed, a real star.

The Journey and the People

Our pilgrimage across the US touched us deeply. It has been 50 years or more since either of us drove across this complex and achingly beautiful land. And we are more in love with it than ever before. Although we have spent time in the East and the West, and even in Florida, we had forgotten the magnificence and sweep of the entire country as we

felt it driving from “sea to shining sea”. Each part of the country has a special delight, a special energy to contribute to the whole, much like all the selves contribute to an Aware Ego process. And this land that we have been blessed with is precious, unbelievably precious.

We felt surprising feelings of pride and patriotism towards our country and our fellow citizens. We were deeply moved by what we saw and - equally - by what we did not see or hear. We heard people singing “America the Beautiful” and “God Bless America” rather than the “Star Spangled Banner”. They were drawn to songs of the heart and spirit, rather than our more war-like national anthem. We felt a stirring of pride and patriotism that we haven’t felt since WW II. But, on the other hand, we know well the blindness and potential destructiveness of patriotism when there is no responsible, questioning voice to balance it and so we have another self that fears the stirrings of nationalism. Each side exerts a powerful pull and we find ourselves holding the tension of these opposites.

Everywhere we went, there was an outpouring of love, a sense of unity, caring, and generosity. The first, of course, were in New York. We had been jarred by the “business as usual” look of store windows, of billboards, and other advertisements with happy, smiling, consumers. But the grand old stores - Saks Fifth Avenue, Lord and Taylor, Bergdorf Goodman’s, and, later, Macy’s - removed their window displays and replaced them with either flags or expressions of condolence. Human values took precedence over consumerism and sales. At least for a while. It would be wonderful if this kind of self-monitoring could presage a change in consciousness and the opposites of self-interest and concern for others could be held simultaneously.

There were dozens of ways that people were raising money for relief funds. There were the usual appeals for the frontline agencies that deal with disaster, like the United Way’s September 11th Fund and the Red Cross. There were individuals and groups collecting money - and, of course, blood. A coffee shop in Utah was raising money for the families of the restaurant workers who were killed in the Windows on the World. Firemen were raising money for the families of the firemen. Each hotel we stayed at had a sign expressing regret, often with specific notes put up by individual employees. And most were collecting money for the September 11th victims. When we returned home, our local fire department and our restaurants were also holding fundraisers. This generosity moved us deeply.

In over 3000 miles, we saw only one overt sign of hatred and call to violence. It was a hand-lettered banner hanging from a freeway overpass in New Jersey with a crude picture of Bin Laden’s head and the words: “Behead Bin Laden”. We are not innocents. We knew that there was a groundswell of distrust of Middle Easterners and that many dark-skinned people were harassed, perhaps even killed.

But we did not hear hatred and polarization as we crossed the US. Nor have we heard it since we returned home. These were on the call-in shows that encourage polarization and hatred. But on the streets, instead of hatred and polarization, we heard ordinary

Americans questioning of why this had happened, what it meant, and what might best be done. These questions were heard in every state we visited on the radio, on TV, and in the newspapers. We overheard them discussed in conversations in the streets, in coffee shops and in restaurants.

We did not experience a rush to judgment, but, instead, felt a space in which new learning could occur. Wherever people met, they were wondering about the meaning of all this and how it could be addressed. Of course, each answered in terms of primary selves, but it seemed as though many different primary selves were given the chance to air their views.

The Many Views of the Attacks

There have been hundreds of Emails circulating that discuss the bombing from a multitude of viewpoints. They have been fascinating, exhilarating, and also depressing. We personally have learned a great deal from many of them. Many of these present us with a new voice or new information that needs to become a part of our new and - expanded - reality. With so many viewpoints represented, it is certainly clear that we need an Aware Ego process. It is only an Aware Ego process that can allow us to embrace the multitude of ideas, recommendations, facts, and judgments that we have all been reading during the past month.

In looking over the Emails we received, we saw some of the following primary selves: First, the political primary self. These letters varied widely from the simply political to the strongly polemic. They dealt with the long term negative aspects of our foreign policy. Some of these have been truly comprehensive and remarkable and we want to thank all of the people who have been devoting themselves to finding the best articles to send out to their Email lists. It has been a real service and a real education. It is sad to think of the mischief we have done and continue to do; but this is a reality that must be faced and integrated.

Then, there was the economically-oriented political self. These were the letters that explained how globalization and the increasing power of the multi-national corporations have gone too far and that it is this economic inequality that has resulted in the breakdown of the system and the enmity of oppressed peoples. They see the only cure for this as the destruction of the multi-national corporations and an end to globalization.

In contrast to these primary selves, we received many Emails that were totally a-political. These were from people with spiritual primary selves who reacted to the tragedy in their particular way. In their letters, they say that we must pray, we must meditate, and we must surrender to God. This, they feel, is the only way to deal with the current situation.

There are anti-war primary selves that see no possible reason for armed conflict, no matter what the situation. They deeply believe that conflict begets conflict and can never solve anything. Their opposites are the "eye for an eye" primary selves. This self is not

prevalent in the Email of the consciousness groups but can be heard in more conservative groups and on radio talk shows.

Some religious/historically oriented primary selves focus upon this as a holy war and cite that as the basic cause for conflict. These people send letters dealing with the historical nature of the current conflict as a holy war, some tracing it back to the Crusades. The other major issue discussed by this group is the very major one of Fundamentalism versus modernity, a polarization that is extremely intense in many parts of the world, including the US.

Then there were the spiritual selves that believe in love and in the mastery over negative thoughts. This idea says that anyone who has a negative thought is contributing to the negativity of the world and to this particular crisis situation. They believe that we must learn to love full time. It is a fairly classic spiritual idea that unfortunately leaves out the consequence of always trying to be loving. As any psycho-spiritual therapist or teacher will tell you, there is no faster way to build a psychic garbage dump than in trying to stuff your negativity and judgments into a bag called love.

Each of you will address the political and economic issues in your own way. Your level of activism depends upon your own inclinations. The impact that it has is beyond your immediate control, but this need not discourage you. Much has been gained in the past by political activism. But, if you do, having an Aware Ego process -especially as an activist - should be a great asset just as it is in any other arena of life.

Ultimately, however, we are not the ones who make the political decisions and, for most of us, the large arena is out of our control. What is in our control at some level is our own psycho-spiritual process and how we interact with the people in our lives.

Psycho-Spiritual Reality

Psycho-spiritual reality refers to a process of transformation that is inclusive of all of our selves or energy systems. It means learning to embrace our psychological nature and our spiritual nature. It means learning to embrace our mind and our imagination. It means learning to embrace the reality of our physical body as well as the totality of our psychic makeup. It means learning how to embrace the light and the dark.

We have seen how this psycho-spiritual consciousness process can impact our personal and business relationships. We very much believe that, with time, it can impact our country and our country's relationship to the world. Each one of you is involved in this process at some level. In the months to come we will be speaking about many of the consciousness issues that we feel are central to our collective situation. We want you to speak to them also. We have our forum for you to send things to. We have our dream room. We would like to see a great deal of energy go into the dream process so that the unconscious of each of us can go into high gear and bring us its collective wisdom and power.

We want to thank so many of you for sending us your very caring words during the last month. In these troubled and very vulnerable times we are aware of how much we need the contact with you as well as with our personal families, friends, and acquaintances. Because this has been, and continues to be, such a vulnerable time, the one Psychology of the Aware Ego area that we want to deal with in this letter is the vulnerability that is so central to all of us.

Vulnerability

The citizens of the United States have had their first taste of vulnerability. The attacks were brilliantly devised to strike at our primary selves, the centers of power. They struck at our financial power and our military power. We have been the undisputed super power in both of these arenas. The World Trade Center and the Pentagon were the icons for this power as well as its nerve centers. Our money and our military as primary selves were shown to lack ultimate power. We need now to move past these to something new; to care for our vulnerability as a nation in a new way.

They struck at these “primary selves” with our own people in our ordinary passenger planes. Interestingly enough, the freedom to travel and to explore new frontiers without fear or impediments is also very precious to us as a nation. Being able to travel freely without fear has been part of the American dream. Our movies and our literature are full of images of people leaving where they are and going off hopefully - not as refugees, but as visionaries - to a new and better place. Suddenly, the nation’s airways, roads, tunnels, and bridges seem vulnerable. Our primary self of “the free person who moves on” is no longer quite as easily accessed.

Terrorism is meant to produce vulnerability and the more brilliant, passionate, devoted, and disciplined the terrorist, the greater the vulnerability he or she can produce. We have gotten our first tastes of this. As we said earlier, many nations have known this vulnerability for many years. And we are challenged to meet this vulnerability in totally new ways because our old primary selves will not work in this situation. Our primary selves are suited to the old kinds of war, not to combating terrorism.

While in New York, before he had begun to deal seriously with his own vulnerability, Hal had the following dream:

“I am going through a highly accelerated consciousness process, like nothing I have ever known or could imagine. Then it stops and the dream presence says the following to me – You (meaning me and all of us) must learn to fully experience your vulnerability without having it rule you. When you have done this then this kind of accelerated process can be available to you (us)! “

Vulnerability brings us closer to our soul reality and to God. We don’t know what divinity has up its sleeve for all of us, but we believe that this is a collective dream and it shows the basic task we all have in common right now. We want you to know that we are feeling very good and that we are very highly motivated to teach, to write, and to support

the consciousness process on this planet to the fullest of our abilities. We believe that this kind of accelerated process is possible and when it happens to enough of us things will change.

We are not sure yet of the exact form our effort will take but it is job we will do, all of us, together. During the early and very dark days of World War I, President Roosevelt made the oft-quoted comment that “The only thing to fear is fear itself.” To live with our vulnerability and yet not live in fear is part of everyone’s initial work. In times like these, we need to know how to surrender to God, how to surrender to the process of conscious relationship, and how to surrender to the process of consciousness and transformational work in general. It is really the same as it always was, but now the heat has been turned up, and the pot is cooking as it never cooked before.

Reactions from Primary Selves

The first reactions to a vulnerable situation are always from the primary selves. But, in the case of these attacks, the old primary selves no longer worked. In fact, it was these very primary selves that were directly attacked. We could not retaliate militarily, even though we are a Super Power, because there was no single enemy. Military power is not effective if there is no clear-cut enemy to vanquish.

In the beginning, it was just too much and most people just went into a state of shock and disbelief. It was unthinkable. What they saw was not in their consciousness and at first could not be comprehended. Later, the primary selves began to emerge.

We saw the first reactions of many primary selves and, we must say, we felt many of them ourselves. The warriors wanted immediate vengeance. The spiritually identified began to meditate and pray and urged others to do the same. The responsible parents volunteered their time and gave money and blood. The rebel sons and daughters blamed everything upon the government and big business and sided with the attackers. The astute businessmen began to make American flags. The victims felt victimized and helpless. The thinkers tried to figure things out. The feelers could not stop crying. The writers wrote and the singers sang.

What You Disown, You Marry

Each of us attracts people who carry our disowned selves. They are what we call “God’s little heat-seeking missiles.” And they are the people who give us the most trouble in our lives. The perfectionistic, totally dependable employer finds herself surrounded by incompetent employees. The responsible father has a do-nothing son. The tidy mother has a slob for a daughter. The hippy parent raises an accountant or a lawyer.

At a time like this, it is important to try to see what it is that we, as a nation, disown. We were fortunate to have people who were born in five different countries in our last training group here at Thera and we all thought about this question together. Here are some of the ideas that we came up with: We are strong; we disown our vulnerability. We

preserve life at any cost, and we disown death. We are independent; we disown our need of others. We are the have's; others are the have-not's. We have been the good guys, the cowboys in the white hats who rescue others; we disown our bad guys, our terrorists. We do only good; others do evil. We are smart, we know all the answers; we don't need others to help us figure things out. We are identified with our minds; others are identified with their souls. We believe in our individual freedom; we disown our fundamentalists who carry the need for outside regulation of our behavior. We are innocent, eternal optimists; we disown our sense of futility. We are young and self-impressed as a nation; we do not value the wisdom and experience of other, older nations. We know how to give; we do not know how to receive.

Remember that disowning an energy doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. It just means that it operates unconsciously! And so it is that our disowned terrorists and fundamentalists operate beyond the boundaries of our awareness and beyond our conscious control. We do not know them, and we have not accepted responsibility for them.

Our Previous "Marriages"

History repeats itself and those who do not learn from it are doomed to repeat it. This is true in interpersonal relationships and it is true in the relationships among nations.

In our attempts to do what we thought was right - or was in our best interests which, by definition, was something we thought was right - we have chosen partners who carried our disowned selves.

Our nation "married" Pinochet, Noriega, Saddam Hussein, the Shah of Iran, and, to our most recent dismay, Osama Bin Laden. Let us hope that we exercise a bit more caution with our next partners. We are not political experts and we don't know the answers, but we do urge caution in the new alliances.

Let us learn the lessons of history. As individuals, and as a nation. But again, we must walk between opposites. We must become aware of, and then embrace, our own fundamentalists and our own terrorists before we can deal effectively with the fundamentalists and terrorists on the outside. We must clearly recognize our contribution to the current situation. But we must not assume total blame. Just as in relationships between two people, it is all a dance. Both sides contribute to the overall picture.

A Current Danger

If we do not learn the lessons of the past and break our familiar patterns of behavior, we will make the same mistakes. And these patterns have created increasingly destructive situations! We don't know how long this current struggle is going to last, but we pray that it will not continue for hundreds of years as such polarizations have in the past.

Perhaps if enough people think, feel, and do their own individual work, something will shift in a shorter time. Each of us can try to do our best to defuse polarization when we witness it.

We were heartened to see that our leaders seemed to be taking input from many sources and did not precipitously jump to action. Fortunately, our president cannot easily identify with the hero archetype because a pure hero could be very polarizing at this time in history and could make poor decisions. Instead, he has risen to the occasion and integrated a bit of the hero energy that is required of a leader in a time of crisis, but he still carries its opposite, the ordinary guy. He has characteristically taken advice from many others and tried to balance this advice.

The early moves of the administration did not promote polarization. There was an attempt to balance the need for action with a respect for spirituality in the immediate arranging for prayer services that honored all religions. Military action was paired with humanitarian aide. Direct action was paired with an attempt to stop the flow of money to the terrorists.

Let us hope that as our leader the president will continue to listen to both sides and make his decisions from a position between opposites and that he will continue to carry his (early) awareness of the vulnerability of the nation. This would put him in the symbolic position of the Aware Ego of our country.

Linkage

There is something new on this planet and it is “energetic linkage”. All of us were moved by the responses of individuals and nations to the tragedy of September 11th and to our sudden vulnerability. It was not our personal tragedy; it was shared by much of the world.

Indigenous people, mystics and spiritual teachers have always taught that we are one family. For the first time in history, the rest of us have felt this as a tangible reality. The media and the internet linked us instantly so that what happened in New York and Washington was felt all over the world with an immediacy never before experienced. (Our beloved friend, Lydia, awake at 3 AM in Sydney, knew of the World Trade Center disaster before we did and emailed her love to us immediately.) People were able to contact their loved ones across continents and seas. And they did.

The oneness of the planet was an unavoidable truth. The love and support could be felt all over the world after September 11th. And so could the hate and the wish to destroy. Much as our sense of ourselves shifted the first time we saw a picture of the Earth taken from space; the sense of our planet has shifted once more. We are all one. Now the oneness is not observed from the distance of outer space, but it is felt within each of our hearts. Again, however, there are the opposites. We feel the closeness and oneness both in our love and gratitude towards some and in our fears of others.

The Hope

We are not young and we feel deeply - and gratefully - the richness of our lives and experiences. We remember Pearl Harbor, World War II, and the Marshall Plan. And we remember the McCarthy hearings and Viet Nam. We remember Cambodia, Cuba, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, and more. We remember times when we knew we were heroes and that our country could do no wrong and we remember times - later times - when we knew we were villains and feared that our country could do no right. These memories - these opposites - are held deep within each of us.

This is a new century and a new millennium. In these past weeks, those of us here in the US have joined the rest of humanity. We, too, now know what it feels like to be attacked without warning as we go about our daily lives. These are feelings that are all too familiar elsewhere on this planet. Now we, too, are vulnerable in our homeland. Now we, too, are neither heroes nor villains. Instead, we are a very disparate group of vulnerable human beings. And our nation is no longer special, but an ordinary member of the family of nations. We are no longer the Super Power; we no longer have all the answers. Let us hope that we move forward with the appropriate humility and awe, and that we continue to look at the current situation from many viewpoints - including those that differ from our dearly held beliefs - because much is at stake and what we do now has grave consequences.

We do not have the answers but the beauty of this time is that no single group can give us all the answers, just as no primary self can give us all the answers. What we do know is that - just as in our personal lives - the more disparate the selves that are included in any decision, the sounder that decision will be and the less likely we will be to regret it and the less likely we will be to feel the slap. Just now, we desperately need our hearts, our minds, and our spirits united within ourselves, whatever we do. And the more diversity we, as a nation, can access, the better. This is no longer a good idea, it is an absolute necessity. We need our spiritual selves and our pragmatists; our warriors and our peaceniks; our patriots and those who fear the evils of rampant nationalism; our humanitarians and our Machiavellis; our lovers of civil liberties and those of us who are willing to sacrifice some portion of these liberties for safety's sake; our planetary citizens with their world views and our isolationists who see no further than our borders; our historians who remind us what has gone before and our visionaries who can give us pictures of a better future; and more. We are basically a nation of optimists. Because we are a young country and have not suffered war with foreigners invading our homeland, we are like children who never suffered abuse at home; we still have a certain innocence, an attitude that we have resources and that can do it if we can only figure out what "it" is. Let us keep this optimism and add to it a humble awareness of the complexity and awesome gravity of the current situation.

For the two of us, the events of the past month create an opening to new possibilities. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon blasted open a door. It stands open; may we walk through it. This is a call for each of us to do our own particular work. As we continue our own journeys of consciousness, let us trust that the intelligence of the universe will work through each of us and guide us through our dreams and our intuitions

to make our own particular contribution. These will be as different as we are different from one another. Some of our contributions will be more obvious, and some will be more subtle.

You may never be aware of what it is you've done or who you've impacted. Perhaps the most widely read book to come out of World War II was the *Diary of Anne Frank*. Anne never lived to see that millions of people all over the world were impacted by the years she spent hidden away from the world in an attic in Amsterdam. Yet they were. You may never be aware of the outcome of your own private evolution and you may never know whose life you have touched, but we are all connected now more than ever and whatever you put out in the world has its consequences.

We believe that every bit of consciousness counts. We believe that the impact of an Aware Ego process is powerful and that the gifts it brings are priceless. May we all continue to open to all of our selves, may we savor life each day, may we keep our songs and our souls alive, and may we move through the open door to the next level of human consciousness.