

## Beyond Fear -- My Recollections of 9-11

On the morning of September 11th, 2001, I was in my office in the Pentagon. I was typing a memo to my front office on my unclassified laptop. My office was on the E-ring, the outside ring, only a few hundred feet from where the terrorists attacked.

Before I continue, I should tell you that I grew up in fear. I grew up as a Jew in Cairo, Egypt. Born in 1949, I was forced out of Egypt in 1967, after the Six-Day War, at age 18. I joined the ranks of the 850,000 Jews from Arab countries who were also harassed, persecuted, dispossessed, and finally forced out.

When I came to this country as a refugee, ready to start a new life, I vowed that I would never again live in fear of what others might do to me. I was not going to do anything reckless, I was going to take reasonable precautions, but I was going to live my life and speak my mind without feeling apprehension. Now, one can SAY that, but fear is an emotion that you either feel or you don't. You can resolve whatever you want, but you don't control it. So did I succeed in my resolve or not?

9-11 proved to me that I did. Let me recount the events. I heard a very loud noise. I knew that the twin towers of New York had been hit. People around me were saying "Evacuate! Evacuate!" I calmly followed regulations. I powered down my other computer, the main one, took out the hard disk, put it in my safe, closed the safe, spun the dial, then walked out. I was engulfed with smoke and managed to find my way home by a combination of walking, taking the subway, and getting a ride with a colleague. I learned later that day that another colleague, with whom I had worked for 20 years, had been killed.

The next day I was heartened by the fact that half the Pentagon was back at work. They didn't have to come. They could have called in sick, but they didn't. The other half, including my office, was too close to the site of

the attack and was put in temporary quarters in Crystal City. Three days later we got the "all clear" signal and went back.

I went back without feeling the least bit of apprehension. My laptop was still open to my memo. I sat down and typed the words, "As I was saying when I was so rudely interrupted...", finished my memo and sent it off.

The Pentagon concourse was filled with psychologists, each with a small table and chair in front of them, giving advice and comfort to employees who felt psychologically distressed. I did not feel I needed any advice myself. I recognize that many did, but I must confess that my first thought when I saw this scene was the Peanuts comic strip, where Lucy is sitting under a sign that says "Psychiatrist, 5 cents", ready to give psychiatric advice to all and sundry.

I did not even feel I was doing this to avoid giving the terrorists the satisfaction of seeing us cower in fear. I did it because it felt natural. I was happy to observe that I had succeeded in my resolve.

A few weeks later my paycheck was a little larger than usual. The extra pay was labeled "Combat Pay". I was hoping it would continue indefinitely, but no, it was only a one-time thing.

A great sage, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, once said:

-Kol ha'olam kullo gesher tsar me-od, vecha-'ikar lo lefached klal.

The whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the main thing is not to be afraid.

A great president, Franklin Roosevelt, once said:

-The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

It's a great feeling to live free of fear. I recommend it.