

Perspective

On a seemingly perfect September morning, I got off the train at Ruggles, walked toward the Museum of Fine Arts, then down Huntington Avenue to Longwood and continued toward the Fenway and Temple Israel where I had a temporary gig helping out with the logistics of the High Holiday services.

I was the first to arrive. Instead of immediately turning on my computer, as was my ritual, I began to sort through the accumulation of papers that covered my desk. Suddenly, the head rabbi burst into the office. He appeared terrified. Before I could ask what was wrong, he said,

“You haven’t heard the news, have you?”

“No.”

My brain did a brief data search of what possibly could have happened, while my computer searched for a reliable data source.

The picture that came onto the screen was terrifying. “Oh my god!”

“Yes,” the rabbi said. “We have to reach out to our Muslim brothers and sisters.”

That was not the reaction I expected, and for a brief moment, I thought *why?* Then I understood. This was a good man – a caring man capable of compassion and empathy. He saw the whole picture of this tragic incident. He was his religion.

Following his direction, I spent the morning finding Muslim congregations while he put together a service that would educate and provide comfort to a community of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Around noon, desperately needing fresh air and a change of scene, I took my lunch and walked down to the Fenway. It was a beautiful day. The birds, unaware of what was happening in the humans’ world, were letting their world know how great it was to be alive. A street person, seemingly unaware of the tragedy the United States was experiencing, was leaning on a shopping cart filled with his worldly belongings. He was humming a happy little tune that was being assembled in his mind as he hummed.

He doesn’t know. I thought. For him the planes crashing into a building don’t exist. Should I tell him? I wondered. What would be the point? Does everyone always need to know everything?

I must confess I was jealous of his ignorance. Unlike the victims of this incident, I still had my life, but the planes flying into the twin towers had changed my perspective on this life.

When I was six, I told my mother I hated someone.

“Hate means you wish them dead. Do you wish them dead?”

“Yes.” I said. Now I’m not so sure.

In the end, our memories are all we have. Does some good come out of everything? Do we have the power to sort out memories and keep only the good ones? That memory of the man and his shopping cart has settled into my stock of memories. It’s stored in the same compartment as the rabbi. I can’t remember that tragic morning without also remembering the kindness of the rabbi and the innocence of the man with the shopping cart.