

James L. Holly, M.D.

Mental and Spiritual Health Require Our Standing for Goodness

By James L. Holly, MD

Your Life Your Health

The Examiner

September 15, 2011

On September 11, 2011, like all Americans, I remembered where I was and what I was doing on September 11, 2001. I was in a meeting when my wife called and said that a plane had crashed into the first of the Twin Towers. Who could have known that a partial date could become a new vocabulary word? Almost anywhere in the world, the phrase “9/11” requires no further explanation. Everyone knows to what it refers.

This past Sunday, I wrote a note to those in the meeting with me on “9/11”, and said:

“I shall never forget that we shared this day ten years ago and I thank God that from the Phoenix of that disaster has risen all over America symbols of the nobility, virtue and resilience of The United States of America.

Today we remember and we celebrate the Spirit of America, a nation the likes of which has never been seen before in history. A nation which need offer no apology to any other nation and to which the world owes homage for blessings received from this great nation.

“Today, I thank God and the Lord Jesus Christ for the gift of having been born an American and I acknowledge and embrace the weight of responsibility which accompanies that blessing.”

My memories of “9/11” include the call which I received from *The Examiner* editor asking if I would like to write a response to the events of that day. He said, “I need it in thirty minutes.” Parts of that response appear below. After watching some of the memorial services, I saw that the movie schedule included *Cry Freedom*. The movie is about Steve Biko’s life and I always watch it, whenever it plays.

As I remembered “9/11” and as I remembered Steve Biko, I realized that both are about terror. “9/11” is about the terrorism of Islamic Extremism and *Cry Freedom* is about the terrorism of a racist regime in South African that in 1976 murdered 700 harmless, innocent, unarmed, school children and wounded over 4,000 others. We must never forget those who were lost on “9/11” and we must never wane in our awareness that there are still terrorists and extremists of many types who wish to kill us. But, we also must never forget the murder of one man who died on September 12, 1977 at the hands of a terrorist government.

The date of Steve Biko’s death, “9/12” will never become a vocabulary word, but it must never be forgotten that the murder of a single person for an evil purpose is as terrible as the murder of 3,000. Many do not know Steve Biko and will not appreciate the importance of his life and death. The “9/11” victims were murdered because they were Americans; the “9/12” victim was murdered because he was black.

Donald Woods was Stephen Biko's friend and biographer. He said:

“...Steve Biko was the greatest man I ever met...He was a statesman, in that sense of the word in which it is applied to Abraham Lincoln, having that breath of vision and that wider comprehension of the affairs of men and nations that is conveyed to the listener through more than mere words.” (*Biko*, Donald Woods, Paddington Press, distributed by Grosset & Dunlap, New York & London, 1978, p.60)

Stephen's message was called “Black Consciousness.” His philosophy rejected the premise of South African society that Blacks were inferior emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. “Black Consciousness” included the rejection of “black” as a designation for evil, and the embracing of “Black” as lovely and desirable. In one humorous, but telling, exchange in *Cry Freedom*, a judge asked Stephen, “Why do you people call yourself black, you're more brown than black?” Denzel Washington, who masterfully portrays Steve Biko, rejoined, “Why do you call yourself white, you're more pink than white?” To which the judge responded, “Precisely!”

Anyone who understands the biochemistry of skin pigmentation knows the absurdity of making judgments of character on the basis of such a superficial trait. The words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. echo in one's mind, “I long for the day when my son will be judged by his character rather than by the color of his skin.”

This anniversary of the death of Stephen Biko causes me to hope that another generation of American youth will not grow up not knowing this great man. His life teaches a great lesson. As I look upon the face of each African-American child in my office and community, I hope that I am looking into the face of an American Steve Biko.

The evil of prejudice and racism must stop; anger must be replaced with forgiveness. Regrettably, it is those who have been hurt the most, who alone have the capacity to stop the madness. It is those who deserve it the least, who will be the greatest beneficiaries of the end of the madness.

Perhaps though, as we remember these great men, those of us who are not great, can act with greatness, as we forgive one another, and as we make sure that we don't forget Bantu Stephen Biko. Perhaps we can only help in small ways, but we must try. One way is to make certain that all of our children know the story of Steve Biko; to make certain that we know that what is portrayed in the movie *Cry Freedom* really happened, and to know that the only hope for it not happening again is for us to harbor no prejudice, no hatred and no anger in our own hearts toward anyone simply because they are different from us whether in skin pigmentation, culture, religion or national origin.

For me, remembering 2001, “9/11,” on 2011, “9/11,” included re-reading the thoughts which were hurriedly written the night of that terrible day. In part that article stated:

“...great opportunities must not be squandered. The American people are justly angry, but justice requires that that anger not be the pretext for a cathartic act of vengeance, which squanders the world's favor toward us. Great leadership -- statesmanship kind of leadership -- will take this opportunity to coalesce the emotional energy of the world into

resolve to oppose terrorism anywhere in the world. The coalescence of that energy will take Solomonic wisdom, which is beyond the capacity of any one man or woman. But, it is a capacity which is available to a person who cares more for the future of mankind than for his or her own political future.

“...this is not the time for silence. All over America, there have been ‘moments of silence.’ While the motive is noble, the effect is temporary. If our tragic loss can be the catalyst for a world united against terrorism, it will partially be because all of us have been motivated to return energetically to the faith of our fathers. Several years ago, I was asked by a Hindu friend whom I greatly admire to offer the invocation at the annual Indian celebration in Southeast Texas. As a Christian, there was no doubt that I would not offer a moment of silence and there was no doubt that I would pray as my faith dictates, which is to and in the Name of Jesus Christ. As I began, I invited everyone to pray as they had been taught, as I would pray as I have been taught.

“A ‘moment of silence’ implies that we are silent because no one is listening. To pray as we have been taught is to celebrate truth and faith and to respect the faith of others, even as I practice my faith. Let America, let the world, pray, but let us not pray silently. Let the Hindu listen respectfully as the Muslim prays. Let the Jew listen quietly while the Christian prays. Let the Jew call upon God as he has been taught, as we all listen. And, as we listen, not in contemptuous silence, but in gratitude for others who believe, even when they do not believe as we do, let us celebrate faith. Each of us should, when allowed by others, declare to them what and why we believe as we do, and when the opportunity is not afforded, let us practice our faith in such a manner that its vitality will be seen by our acts.

“In his review of Norman Rose's Churchill, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger contrasted the hero with the superstar. He said:

‘Our age finds it difficult to come to grips with figures like Winston Churchill. The political leaders with whom we are familiar generally aspire to be superstars rather than heroes. Superstars strive for approbation; heroes walk alone. Superstars crave consensus; heroes define themselves by the judgment of a future they see it as their task to bring about. Superstars seek success in a technique for eliciting support; heroes pursue success as the outgrowth of inner values.

‘The ultimate test of statesmanship is a combination of insight and courage. Insight leads to assessments that define a society's freedom of action, while courage enables the statesman to act on his convictions before they are generally understood. Great statesman operate on the outer margin of their society's capabilities; weak statesman tend to be overwhelmed by events.’ (“With Faint Praise”, Henry A Kissinger, The New York Times Book Review, July 16, 1995, p. 7)

“It is only the hero who will successfully attract to his standard a world desperate for leadership, which transcends geographic borders. We need men and women who will move beyond the rhetoric of “smoking then out of their hole” to statement-like pronouncements which we associate with Lincoln, Roosevelt and Churchill.

“Politicians typically tell people what they want to hear and take them where they want to go. They lead in appearance only, for, in reality, they only run ahead of the crowd without giving it direction. Prophets -- and heroes -- tell people what they need to hear and take them where they need to go. The prophet rarely deals in religious dogma, but addresses the logical implications of the faith espoused by his or her individual listeners.

“We have a great opportunity; I pray that we will not squander it. We must all pray that our President will look past the obvious and temporary to that which is visionary and permanent. In the end, the greatest and the most lasting memorial which we can build to those whose lives were lost September 11th, is to be able to say, "Terrorism is no longer acceptable on the face of the earth and it is effectively opposed by Muslim, Christian, Jew and Hindu." If (America's leaders are) able to lead us to build that kind of memorial, coming generations will speak their names with the reverence associated with Lincoln, Roosevelt and Churchill.”

Today (“9/12”) is the anniversary of the death of Steve Biko. Yesterday, (“9/11”) was the anniversary of the death of 3,000 of my fellow citizens. I did not know Steve and I did not know anyone killed on “9/11,” but today, I will celebrate their lives and memories with a memorial of treating every man, woman and child with dignity, respect and with the estimation of the value possessed by every human being. And, selfishly, in doing so, I will afford myself the same dignity, respect and value.