

Be Not Dismayed

Written by U.S Immigration News
Wednesday, 11 December 2013 03:09 -

It seems like barely a few months have passed since we were celebrating the initiation of a brand new year. With this year almost over, it is unbelievable that we are about to begin the process again. And, yet while the days, weeks and months of 2013 sped by, they did not go by without leaving their bruises and scars. In the midst of our traditional yearly celebrations of birthdays, baby arrivals, weddings, promotions, graduations etc. we have each had to face dark days of personal grief and discouragement. Besides our personal highs and lows we have also had to deal with the relentless fluctuations of a world filled with religious, political, and social dichotomies and turmoil.

2013 brought us:

1. o The first resignation of a Pope and the first appointment of a Jesuit Pope who seems unapologetically humanistic;
2. o The tragic Boston Marathon bombings on Patriot's Day, maneuvered by two Russian brothers who could pass for the boys next door;
3. o Edward Snowden became a fugitive of the state and revealed our seemingly non-existent privacy;
4. o Natural disasters in India and the Philippines of such titanic proportions it took days for any form of manageable rescue to begin;
5. o Mass political unrests in Egypt and Syria that kept the world's super powers on pins and needles;
6. o The massacre of unsuspecting shoppers in a mall in Nairobi, Kenya taught us that evil breathes in the least expected areas;
7. o Olympian Oscar Pistorious in South Africa and Pro-footballer Aaron Hernandez the USA both accused of murder in separate cases taught us that not even the discipline of sports and its resulting fame and fortune is immune to violence;
8. o The horse meat scandal across Europe that left us with the unsettling feeling that we are clueless as to what is really in our food;
9. o The Kiss Nightclub fire in Brazil killing hundreds of young people, most of who were trying to claw their way to safety through a bathroom window;
10. o The Navy Yard Shooting once again revealing that as a nation we must come to terms with our penchant for violence and guns, and the need for required long-term PTSD care and intervention for all our vets;
11. o The non-guilty verdict of George Zimmerman for the shooting of Trayvon Martin that gave rise to a new generation of Civil Rights Activists and the awakening realization that all men are not "treated" as equal under the law;
12. o The Obamacare debacle, and how a failed government web site became incitement for the most historic piece of healthcare legislation in the United States to be scorned and scoffed;
13. o An end-of-year nuclear pact with Iran that has the entire world conjecturing about its intent and its proposed outcomes.

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In the face of 2013's unrest and despair, we have kept on living, surviving and thriving but how do we continue to do so without losing hope? How do we comfort our children when they express their fear about the evil that surrounds them? How do we maintain mental strength in the midst of the madness that tugs away at our peace and sanity?

We have been socialized to continue living our lives, "business as usual", this in itself is a coping mechanism. We watch the nightly news and are scandalized or horrified for a few seconds. Unless the images are replayed in heightened detail, gruesome gut-wrenching details, before us we can walk away and eat dinner without a second thought. Marketing experts will tell you that to be able to get a response to their message they must bombard you with it, using all available mediums, and in an appealing way otherwise they will never gain or quickly lose your interest. This is one of the reasons why we demonstrate a lack of necessary sensitivity to the plight of others. Pain must be depicted in 3D and HD to elicit a human response.

Nevertheless, there is much more to be added to the idea of our need for heightened detail to provoke response. While it is not the most emotionally healthy, fortunately it is also not the only response we are capable of. It has been proven that when we can connect with a victim at an emotional level we begin to feel and assimilate their pain. This connection is necessary for us not only to understand the victim but it assists us in building our own arsenal of emotional resilience and hope. When we are able to empathize with the plights of others it becomes much easier for us to deal with our pain when it comes.

Another emotionally healthy response is linked to our spiritual health. It has to do with our faith. Your level of faith will determine your emotional resilience in the face of challenging times. This is the reason why developing spiritual health is critical to handling life's uncertainties and despairs. Learning to trust in God, one who is above everyone and everything, provides us with hope and security. In the midst of the relentless fluctuations of a world filled with religious, political, and social dichotomies and turmoil, hope and trust in God can make it easier to experience peace and sanity.

As we face 2014, I wish to encourage you to begin connecting with others. Listen to people's stories. Empathize with their struggles. Take the time to show them your support. Above all, I encourage you to build a strong spiritual foundation. Join a community of faith. Read the Bible. Pray with and for your family everyday.

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“Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea’ I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” (KJV Isaiah 41:10)

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