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## 9/11 as Anything, Something, or Nothing: One Year After

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**Abstract.** This article describes political psychological issues bearing on the first anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks within the United States.

The very existence of significant public discourse bearing on the appropriate stance or stances towards the day that falls one year after the 9/11 terrorist attacks within the United States (US) suggests that little if anything has changed as a result of the attacks.

Constructs such as the 9/11 anniversary or 9/11 commemoration exhibit the age-old human penchant for ritual and magic as means to manage the terror of the awareness of a universe that otherwise might be without meaning. The condensation of ritual and magic can be observed in the engagement of numerology as commemoration, e.g., one year after the attacks as more special than one year and one day after or 62 days before. Another such condensation is the omnipresent, temporal anchoring of commemoration, anniversary, legacy, and so on.

So, too, has little seemed to change in the seizing upon catastrophe, be it natural or human-made disaster, for the pursuit of satisfying instrumental needs. Television will feature so-called specials. Publishing houses are disgorging piles of books, while magazine publishers have readied special editions. Politicians and various special interest groups are riding 9/11 as a child might ride and hang on to a fast-moving and fast-rocking hobbyhorse towards achievement of ideological and material victories.

On a more psychological note, conscious and unconscious conflicts are being mediated through one-year-after-9/11 responses. People who find it very difficult to tolerate differences within themselves or with themselves are seizing on The Alien Other as the embodiment of differences not to tolerate. People who find themselves impelled to accept anything about themselves and, thus, to trumpet toleration are earnestly pushing a toleration theme and finding the most atrocious of behaviors as but further impelling toleration's clarion call.

In all of the above, competing truths are but competing narratives. Each of all such truths can easily find data - data that reflect but ever changing constructions of constructions - that seem to be as convergently and divergently supportive as they are unsupportive of all other truths. Yet there are still several other matters that need explication in the marketing, negotiation, and arbitration of truths.

Both the constructs of diversity acceptance and tolerance must be appraised in the paradoxical context of limitation and constraint. That is, the full and conscious acceptance of all diversities and all tolerances must address the legitimacy of asserting parity among all behaviors, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Even if there are people who sincerely assert a pan-diversity or pan-tolerance stance, such people do not seem to live their lives in this manner. Instead, they make at least implicit choices based on larger and smaller truths and untruths and engage in requisite approach and avoidance behaviors.

The many constructs bearing on intolerance of differences must also be appraised in the paradoxical context of limitation and constraint, so that with intolerance it is limitation and constraint that are the

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seeds of its self-contradiction. As sameness must be constructed for a difference construction and difference for sameness, one soon must become aware that there is nothing that is the same for anyone beyond that anyone. The something or anything that constitutes this nothing may actually impel a self-hatred in that intolerance of differences necessarily must construct the difference of anyone who asserts sameness with anyone else.

The explication of such secular matters also may have varied sacred implications. That political violence, in a political arena that is red in tooth and claw, can be fueled by both diversity acceptance and tolerance adherents on the one hand and also intolerance adherents on the other may support the notion that God as Supreme Being or as limitless spirit never was or is dead or never was living. It also may suggest God as a macabre and lugubrious humorist, if not a surrealist.

Ultimately, 9/11 may be not just about perpetrators or victims but also about each of us. If the first 9/11 yielded a mirror image of potential not being, the one-year-after image may be closer to business as usual, a being that should not be. (See Keinan, G. (2002). The effects of stress and desire for control on superstitious behavior. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 102-108; Klavir, R., & Leiser, D. (2002). When astronomy, biology, and culture converge: Children's conceptions about birthdays. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 163, 239-253; Shvetsov, I. (1999). Magic, tension and ritual and their relationship to gambling. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 29, 64-72; Zernike, K. (August 31, 2002). Lesson plans for Sept. 11 offer a study in discord. *The New York Times*, pp. A1; A9.)(Keywords: Political Violence, Terrorism.)