Six Views: Were the 9/11 Terrorists Cowards or Courageous?

1. Ruth R. Wisse:

"Courage and cowardice are culturally determined, and God cannot help the society that confuses its values with those of its rivals."

We attribute courage to men and women who defend our values in the face of adversity. Facing adversity in itself may be either bold or reckless; upholding values may be noble in some cases and effortless in others. It's the combination of the two — upholding values and facing adversity — that earns the tribute of "courage." America sets great store by its freedoms, its constitutional culture and integrity as a nation. We call courageous those who protect and advance these when they come under attack.

I understand the *IC* symposium to be asking whether multiculturalism has taken us to the point of no longer having the confidence to distinguish our values from those of our assailants. Undoubtedly, some of my university colleagues have reached that tipping point. At a Harvard literature colloquium I attended shortly after the September 11 attacks, a young professor delivered a paper protesting the American academy's failure to present the platform of Osama bin Laden from *his* point of view. The chairman politely thanked the speaker for her interesting presentation. A visiting professor from abroad asked me whether we were completely insane. He was unprepared for a relativism that did not take the country's elemental security into account. But many of my colleagues balk at the notion that they are expected to uphold American values, and some applaud those who "dare" to present al Qaeda's opposing point of view.

It goes without saying that one man's courage will be another's cowardice. Why else did Judaism and Christianity defy the militaristic cultures of the pagan and Roman world? Far from extolling the courage of King David, who was a spectacular combatant, the Bible subjects him to the moral censure of the prophet Nathan and to the exacting judgment of God. Judaism honors Moses the stammerer, its exceedingly fallible leader, far beyond Judah the Maccabee, its intrepid guerilla fighter. The Hebrew word for courage, *gvura*, shares its root with the term for hero, *gibor*. The Talmud asks, *eyzehu gibor?* — Who is a hero? — and replies, *hakovesh et yitzro*, He who conquers his urge, what Freud would have called his libido. Yiddish wits redacted this to read, "He who conquers his urge ... to wisecrack." The longer Judaism persisted in the face of adversity, the more its understanding of "courage" and "heroism" came to differ from that of neighboring societies.

Jewish experience may be valuable as the extreme case of a people that tried to maintain independent moral and ethical standards among peoples with different and sometimes contrary standards and beliefs. In effect, Judaism traded in the value of conquest for that of self-conquest, something it shares with constitutional democracy that is likewise turned inward, toward its own self-perfection. The benefits of such civilization are manifest in all that Jews achieved, individually and collectively. Yet the inability of Jews to protect those benefits made them the all-too-easy prey of aggressors who became more certain of their prey and more determined in their pursuit with each successive expulsion, inquisition, massacre, or pogrom. The courage of the teacher Mira Bernstein, who continued to instruct her dwindling class of schoolchildren in secret bunkers in the Vilna Ghetto, proved no match for the "courage" of the Nazi predators determined to purify the continent by cleansing it of Jews.

Other cultures and societies nurture hegemonic ideals and dreams of conquest with accompanying martial notions of courage. It is hard for those who have abandoned such priorities to remain morally confident in the face of hostility and to maintain the military forces necessary not only to defeat but also to discourage their foes. In truth, many more Jews through the ages fell away from Judaism than wanted or were able to withstand the pressures against them. America may appear to have incomparable advantages of population, resources, and a fighting tradition embodied in its national anthem, but if a significant portion of its elites no longer recognize and advocate the values that separate them from Islamists, the country will be overtaken by those with stronger convictions — from within and from without.

The Japanese honored their kamikaze pilots, and Islamists honor the suicide attackers on Israel and America. Courage and cowardice are culturally determined, and God cannot help the society that confuses its values with those of its rivals.

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2. James Bowman:

"It is this now almost-vanished honor culture which is speaking when terrorists are called 'cowardly.' In its view, they are cowardly because they are sneaky."

If it doesn't take courage to immolate oneself along with a crowd of strangers by flying an airplane into the side of a building, then what does it take? Surely it must be something that resembles courage, as we ordinarily understand the term, so closely as to be indistinguishable from it. Former president Bush and others sometimes referred to this and similar terrorist acts as "cowardly" because, I think, of the social class to which they belong. The forty-third president may well be the last that we shall ever have whose birth and breeding put him in the American patrician class — mainly centered on the East Coast and the New England states — which once provided so many of our national leaders and to which the vestiges of the old Victorian honor culture even today still (just about) cling.

It is this now almost-vanished honor culture which is speaking when terrorists are called "cowardly." In its view, they are cowardly because they are sneaky. They do not announce their deeds to the world in advance but sneak around so as to catch their victims unaware. They hit you when your back is turned. In a fair fight, between equals, this seems unmanly and dishonorable to the Anglo-American honor culture, though few would suppose that a boxer's or a general's feint to draw off his opponent's guard in order to give himself an opening to strike an undefended place was an illegitimate move. But the "asymmetrical warfare" of terrorist and suicide bombings is predicated on the assumption of inequality. The terrorist's killing of unarmed civilians in the West is a frank admission that he is too weak to attack us with any effectiveness where we are capable of defending ourselves. That seems unfair and ungentlemanly, the work of a *dastard* — which, by etymology, probably originally meant an uncouth person.

You don't hear the words *dastard* or *dastardly* much anymore, except jokingly. The same for *honor*, and *virtue* in its sexual sense, which also came out of the now obsolete honor culture from which we inherit our ideas of "fair" and "unfair" fighting. This honor culture was the product of a Victorian public school ethos largely derived from the novels of Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. These and similar books helped to transplant the schoolboy ethos to America, where a comparable literature once existed in, for example, Owen Johnson's Lawrenceville stories. No "decent chap" would ever do what those suicide bombers did. But, of course, the suicide bombers never aspired to be "decent chaps" in the first place. Their honor code dates back much further than a mere couple of centuries and has little or nothing to do with Victorian notions of chivalry, gentlemanliness, truthfulness, gallantry toward women, fair play, or doing the square thing.

In my view, there was much to be said for the old honor culture, which also showed signs, back in the days of

the British Empire, of being translatable to quite alien societies. But there's no getting away from the fact that today it has been pretty comprehensively repudiated by the official culture of America and other Western countries, except where a severely modified version of it is kept, like a once-wild creature in a zoo, for the use of their armed services. For the rest of us, long since liberated from the demands of honor, courage has increasingly become, in the word used by William Ian Miller to describe it in one of the best recent books on the subject, a "mystery." We all recognize that there are degrees of courage. It is common to speak of the courage with which the sufferer of a fatal disease faces his or her sufferings and the prospect of death, but we also instinctively recognize the difference between such courage and that of the soldier on the battlefield, who at some point has had a choice to avoid the dangers he faces and has chosen to face them anyway.

This would seem to most people a higher order of courage than that for which no other option is possible. But then we must also ask ourselves, how far *does* the soldier really have a choice? At a recent memorial service for my friend Peter Rodman, Henry Kissinger spoke, saying that "For Peter, the question of courage never arose, since he never saw any alternative to doing his duty." He, too, as it happens, had faced his fatal illness with courage, but presumably such courage was for him as much the only conceivable way of facing up to contingencies and crises of health as it had been, according to Secretary Kissinger, in the Pentagon. This points up the extent to which courage, like honor, is not merely individual and emotional but also possesses an all-important social dimension. Courage is a response to some social expectation, and without that social expectation it really is a mystery.

With it, there's no mystery at all. In a particular honor culture, including that of any military organization that is not a mere mob or rabble, courage is the chief requirement for membership. Therefore, those whose membership in that culture is bound up with their identity would suffer a loss of some or all of the sense of who they are without it. For them, courage is not a really a choice but rather a necessary condition of their chosen identity. This kind of courage is also possessed by Islamic terrorists. They value their membership in what they see as the Islamic faithful and, to its jihadist faction in particular, as the defining, self-identifying fact of their lives. They also see that honor group as demanding of them some such act of courage and sacrifice as they displayed on September 11 if their membership is to be confirmed. In this sense, and making allowances for cultural differences, to deny them their claim to courage might almost seem ungentlemanly.

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3. Paul McHugh:

"[W]e do not find courage with Atta and his team who sought death but with Beamer, Glick, Green, and others on Flight 93 who fought for life."

Psychiatrists like me have occasionally been asked whether, given their knowledge of human mental life, they would hold that the September 11 suicide bombers were as courageous as the firemen who died in the Twin Towers, or the passengers on Flight 93 such as Todd Beamer, Jeremy Glick, and Don Green who fought back. I've learned that two things are usually assumed by that question.

The first assumption is that when in the course of some plan or action a person gives up his life, then the act is

courageous by definition. Thus, so the argument goes, courage is the capacity or disposition to overcome natural fears and put aside personal concerns in the pursuit of some aim or goal. Thus Mohammed Atta and Todd Beamer were equally courageous, just fighting for different aims. And, after all, each is celebrated as a hero by his family.

The second assumption is that psychiatrists have some special way of identifying the deeper, authentic mindsets advancing human behavior and thus, knowing more, can appreciate and even admire more. Under this assumption, psychiatrists should understand and even salute the saying "One man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter."

I've come to appreciate that the initial question on courage derives from a misapprehension of just how psychiatrists draw conclusions and make sense of human behavior. And perhaps describing how at least this psychiatrist approaches these issues might help dispel such misapprehensions and bring light to what counts as evidence for any judgment in our field.

Psychiatrists, in looking to make sense of a human behavior, begin not with some assumptions about meaning in general but at the actions themselves, and then at what is known about the mental state motivating the actors. Judgments about the value and virtues displayed in the behavior, what can be lauded as coherent and honorable in the circumstances, and especially whether a psychiatrist would encourage similar actions, all follow such assessments.

So, would this psychiatrist see Mohammed Atta as a man who in a bad cause behaved heroically even as Todd Beamer and Jeremy Glick did in their efforts? Following the rule, looking first at the behavior itself, psychiatrists would lay out the details distinguishing the behavior of the protagonists.

Atta, along with several knife-wielding, muscular accomplices, implemented a studied and practiced plan of deception that took advantage of the trust of airline personnel to slip disguised as innocent travelers onto aircraft filled with men, women, and children. Soon into the flight they sprang upon these defenseless people, commandeered the aircraft by cutting the throats of stewardesses and pilots, and then deceived those remaining into believing that a non-deadly plan was in place. This was so that without interference they could pilot them all to their deaths by plowing the planes into buildings also filled with unsuspecting people going about their morning business.

What I'll call the Beamer group, on the other hand, had that day no thought of needing their skills and energies for any purpose other than to travel quietly to their destinations. The events they confronted were thrust upon them with little information other than cell phone communications informing them of the likely deadly aims of their captors. With little time to think, with no more weaponry than their own physical endowments, and with the realization that their chances of living through the efforts were small, these men fought their armed captors for the control of the aircraft and brought it crashing down in an empty field rather than into a populated city building.

Certainly at the level of description — the story level, let's call it — there is not much difficulty in identifying important and meaningful distinctions in these stories. One group used deception and vicious, concealed weaponry to waylay the unsuspecting; the other used open opposition and bare knuckles to fight what amounted to an ambush. The first group intended to kill as many people as they could (including themselves); the other intended to rescue as many people as they could (including themselves). When one puts deception, disguise, and indiscriminate slaughter beside vigorous retaliation by unprepared men, the rightful place of heroism and courage is easy to discern.

What about the ideas motivating the Atta group? Those men did, after all, put their lives at forfeit for them. Does not commitment to death for an idea count as courage?

Of course, psychiatrists do not customarily affirm that something like courage and vigorous virtue is active in suicidal behaviors of any kind. Rather, we note that suicidal behaviors customarily are actions resting upon incoherent views and derive from influences on the subject in the form of mental disease or illusory social influence.

The best example recorded of the suicidal state of mind promoted by illusory influence was the mass suicides at Jonestown, Guyana, where Jim Jones used several elements of social pressure — isolation, claims on loyalty, predictions of common disaster — to get more than nine hundred people to sacrifice not only their own lives but the lives of their children in a mass act of self-poisoning. They essentially complied with the will of a malevolent leader. The incoherence of their ideas, rather than their calm surrender to them, drew psychiatric attention. Courage was seen amongst the few who strove to escape from the deadly plan and resist the ideas that were killing their friends.

What, then, can be said about the minds of the terrorists who struck on September 11? We know quite a bit about them, especially about Mohammed Atta, their leader. His state of mind was far from that of a devoted Mohammedan eager to begin a just war. Rather, he was an individual with complex emotional responses to the West, where he found both behavioral latitude and economic prosperity. He indulged in drinking and consorting with women and saw that his power of resistance to these temptations was weak. At the same time he noted that the social, economic, and technical achievements of the West far exceeded what would be expected from his world and culture. He feared the power of Western know-how, and he was tempted to enjoy some of its forbidden fruits.

These conflicts of attitude and assumption produced in Atta the mental state that Joseph Epstein in his fine book Envy called resentment. Atta resolved them through an aggressive and pitiless plan that gave him the satisfaction of attacking what he both feared and despised even as it took his life. Psychiatrists have a term for those who take up ideas shared by others and transform them into ruling passions that drive their behaviors: they are victims of an "over-valued" idea, and so are coerced by a kind of insanity that blinds them to the meaning of their behavior and its lack of judgment, proportion, prudence, and value.

Contrast that state of mind — resentment and the coercion from an over-valued passion — with the mind states in the Beamer group. Their aims and actions emerged from the circumstances they faced and their sense of responsibility for its outcome. With little time to plan, they tried to thwart the aims of their opponents. Realistic conceptions and life-sustaining motivations brought them partial success and the gratitude of their countrymen.

Psychiatrists thus bring something more than a "hurrah" to the assessment of behaviors by offering both a full description of them and a consideration of the mental influences that provoke them. When questions concerning virtues such as courage and justice are under consideration, psychiatrists seek to discover how these virtues are expressed in the actions and are represented in the deliberative minds of the actors themselves. In this way we do not find courage with Atta and his team who sought death, but with Beamer, Glick, Green, and others on Flight 93 who fought for life.

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4. Irshad Manji:

"Is it an act of moral courage to promote violent jihad against those whom you consider the enemy? As a reform-minded Muslim, I find myself on the front lines of such questions."

A generation ago, Robert F. Kennedy introduced students to the concept of moral courage. "Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society," he declared at the University of Cape Town. "Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change."

Of course, he meant to apply these words to the fight against segregation in America and apartheid in South Africa. Such is our world now that one has to wonder: is it an act of moral courage to promote violent jihad against those whom you consider the enemy? As a reform-minded Muslim, I find myself on the front lines of such questions.

Recently, a young man named Amin wrote to me with a challenge. He spoke of a European Muslim woman who blogs about Islam's "duty" to destroy the West, through arms if need be. This woman operates within the law of her country, Belgium, and proudly accepts public disapproval for what she believes. "She is speaking truth to power for a greater good," Amin intoned.

Thus his challenge to me: is the female jihadi an agent of moral courage?

In my response, I proposed three basic tests.

First, what "truth" is this woman speaking? More Muslims have been raped, imprisoned, maimed, tortured, and murdered at the hands of other Muslims than by any foreign imperial power. That is not to deny Western colonization, but to insist that imperialism comes in many skin tones.

For example, in Sudan, Arab militias starve, enslave, and slaughter black Muslims with the consent of an "Islamic" government. Where is the jihadi blogger's fury against that oppression? Do Muslim lives count only when snuffed out by non-Muslims?

Second, moral courage requires us not only to speak truth, but to speak it among those who expect uncritical fealty from us — the communities with which we affiliate. Introspection is intimidating in the best of times, and is all the more so in an age of aggressive identity politics, when the pressure to fixate on one label over all others spawns deadly silences about injustices perpetrated by our own.

Naturally, then, it becomes easy to point fingers at the nameless, faceless foes of the outside. Shrewd, too; we can wear our indictments of outsiders as badges of honor. By blaming only Westerners for Muslim malaise, our jihadi blogger effectively tells her readers, "Look at what I'm doing to stand up for Us against Them. I know where I belong." But to exhibit moral courage, the jihadi blogger would have to tell her anti-Western brethren the truth about what Muslims continue to inflict on each other.

She would have no dearth of material to work with. Beyond the genocide in Darfur, Sunnis target Shiites every day in Pakistan; Quran-quoting warlords gang-rape Muslim girls in Afghanistan; Palestinians in Lebanon get by on odd jobs because they are prohibited from buying property, let alone becoming professionals; Katyusha rockets launched by Hezbollah rip through the homes of Arab Muslims in Israel; and in Egypt, the riot police of President Hosni Mubarak regularly bludgeon Muslim democracy activists. The list

continues.

Moral courage demands exposing the repression within. That is when the security blanket of instant belonging disappears. Our jihadi blogger has chosen otherwise.

Finally, what "greater good" is she striving to achieve? Clearly it is not the defense of Muslims worldwide. The $1,100 monthly welfare check that she receives from Belgium's government hints at another missed opportunity to serve a common purpose: if this woman cared at all about fellow believers, she would donate part of her dole to Iraqi war widows.

Many of Iraq's women have been left without husbands thanks to Muslim insurgents, the very people our blogger is encouraging in her posts. According to news stories, Iraqi widows collect a maximum of $41 per month. Surely they could use the help of a sister.

Perhaps the blogger should learn from Scott McClellan, author of *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception*. In June 2008, McClellan pledged to contribute a portion of his royalties to the families of the Iraq war victims, whom he said he had harmed with half-truths as communications director for President George W. Bush.

By definition, agents of moral courage refuse to be muzzled by tribal conformity. The jihadi blogger fails every test of this principle. So do the September 11 hijackers, who conveniently neglected chapter 13, verse 11 of the Quran: "God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." Think of moral courage as a 13:11 kind of solution to a 9/11 kind of problem.

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5. Robert Royal:

"From the ancient world until the reductive views of human beings that started to become dominant in the eighteenth century, courage, like every other virtue, had certain intrinsic characteristics, but was also related to other virtues without which its good qualities might quite literally go bad."

The visionary and poet William Blake wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth." Sounds deep if you don't look too close. But there is no marriage of Heaven and Hell, any more than of yes and no. And people have found it possible to believe many things that, on any but the maddest view, have led them beyond the point of no return into the badlands of untruth. It is only with the help of such sharp and salutary preliminaries that we can safely approach the subject at hand.

Of course, you can debase the meaning of the term *courage* by equating it with merely braving physical dangers that most people could not. But that is a colloquial way of speaking that has never been part of any serious thinking about the virtue of courage. It's a bit like telling someone, "At least you're honest," when he has casually admitted to some deeply shameful act. Yes, he may have just told the truth, but unless he's repenting or asking for pardon, it would be difficult to say there's anything much good about it. In some

circumstances, quite the opposite may be true.

In the case of the September 11 hijackers, we have no way of knowing what their souls were like. They may have all had a kind of brave resoluteness — or a foolhardy fanaticism. My guess is the latter. When Aristotle situates the virtue of courage between cowardice and rashness, he does so not because he wants a neat intellectual symmetry. In fact, he says that there is no common term (and therefore little awareness of the fact) that certain ways of facing dangers and even of giving up our lives are vices, not virtues: by the very definition, not courage.

In the modern world, we are particularly vulnerable to false claims of virtue because, clearly, we have little common notion of what a fully virtuous human life would look like. From the ancient world until the reductive views of human beings that started to become dominant in the eighteenth century, courage, like every other virtue, had certain intrinsic characteristics, but was also related to other virtues without which its good qualities might quite literally go bad.

Presidents, prime ministers, UN dignitaries, television anchors, editorial writers, and a host of other commentators have only clouded the issue by calling people like the September 11 perpetrators who attacked civilians "cowards." It's true that they do not observe just war rules, which specify that only enemy combatants, who can hit back, are legitimate targets. But the vice in question here has nothing to do with the ability or inability to face danger. And our unwillingness to use the proper terms to describe what they did reflects several deficiencies on our own part.

What the September 11 terrorists did was improper, inappropriate, self-indulgent — in non-modern parlance, wrong, because un-just, im-prudent, in-temperate. Various theories clashed in the ancient debates about real virtue, but the most coherent accounts of what any true virtue requires are grouped around the view that without all of them to some degree, you won't really have any of them. One way of thinking about the virtues is that they provide a template for a good human life. To be able to act with self-mastery, we of course need the kind of cool rational assessment provided by prudence and directed toward doing what is just. But in moving from the one to the other, how do we stay on the straight and narrow without being able to resist the blandishments of pleasure and the distortions of fear? That's why all four cardinal virtues were understood to be correlated with one another.

The September 11 terrorists could become a textbook case of missing virtues, but probably won't, for obvious reasons. We have a very hard time attributing human acts to anything but external, material causes. Hence, we believe that poverty, or disrespect, or geopolitics have caused Islamic terrorism, not distorted religious views or simply immoral judgments. But it is a form of respect on our part to credit the reasons that the attackers themselves have provided, as contemptible as they are. People who think that it is right to engage in armed jihad against civilians in New York and Washington, Madrid and London, Baghdad and Mumbai, have justifications of a sort for such acts. These can be examined for their justness and prudence — and ought to be found wanting without quibbling.

Similarly, we can look at how their notions of nobility, daring, and courage measure up. Experts in Arabic, for example, will have to determine whether the expression in that language translated as "martyrs" is justly rendered. What we can say from our side of the question is that our Western tradition regards martyrs as people, both secular and religious, who suffer and die at the hands of others for what is true and good. For us, "martyr" recalls Socrates, Jesus, the early Christians, Thomas More, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many more unjustly killed as witnesses (Greek *martyroi*) for the truth. Some regarded these figures as fanatics, quasi-suicides when simple compromises could have saved their lives. But we can see in retrospect that it took real conviction and courage to suffer death for the reasons they did. And none of them were doing the killing.

All this is miles away from the kind of suicidal terrorists who are often today applauded in various quarters

and spoken of as manifesting some sort of courage. There's nothing noble about walking into a pizza parlor in Israel and blowing up yourself and a bunch of civilians. There's nothing elevating in shooting up a Mumbai hotel, attacking Westerners, and dying in the process. And even in the marriage of Heaven and Hell, to which the modern world sometimes desperately seeks to aspire, it takes great credulity to believe that there was anything in the September 11 murderers worthy of the exalted name of courage.

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Robert Royal is president of the Faith & Reason Institute. His books include *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century: A Comprehensive World History* (The Crossroad Publishing Company) and *The God That Did Not Fail: How Religion Built and Sustains the West* (Encounter Books).

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6. Dennis Wholey:

"Who really knows the what and the why of why we do what we do? Human motivation, similar to the iceberg, may be nine-tenths below the surface. I'll set the question aside, march off in a different direction if I may, and simplify."

Earlier this year, a man whom I'd known for more than thirty years committed suicide. It was a sad, horrible, and tragic event. His death was and continues to be a huge loss for so many of us who loved him so. Trying to understand his possible motivations was so far beyond me that I sought out the expertise and counsel of two therapists whom I greatly respect.

What I was able to grab hold of — at least a little bit — was their collective thinking that a person who commits such a self-destructive act is at a crossroads where rational thinking, predictable emotional response, and normal behavior are no longer applicable. It was, they agreed, as if his brain, emotions, and subsequent action had "flatlined" at that critical time.

The question posed to elicit this essay seems crafted to stir up the pot; it's far too complex for me to address.

Who can get inside the mind and emotions of another? Who really knows the what and the why of why we do what we do? Human motivation, similar to the iceberg, may be nine-tenths below the surface.

I'll set the question aside, march off in a different direction if I may, and simplify. It is what I can do with enthusiasm.

While there may be different definitions of "courage," I've grown fond of this one: "Courage is action in the face of fear."

Courage always seems to always be associated with change, the major kind of change, which knocks us out of our comfort zone.

Change is a difficult proposition for all of us; if the change we face is big enough and thrust upon us unexpectedly, most of us go kicking and screaming into the night.

Stress, anxiety, and fear are normal — and very human — emotional reactions to negative events such as the death of a loved one, a divorce or the breakup of a significant relationship, a traumatic health diagnosis, and

these days, the loss of a job, a home foreclosure, or bankruptcy.

We may, however, encounter similar stress, anxiety, or fear when we come face-to-face with positive things such as marriage, the birth of a child, a new job or promotion, quitting smoking, losing fifteen pounds, moving to a new city, buying a house or condo, or even winning the lottery.

It's interesting to discover that the changes we bring about ourselves often require more courage than the ones forced upon us. Either way, to plow through the uncomfortable feelings that accompany those situations requires great courage: taking "action in the face of fear."

Some years ago I put together the book *The Courage to Change: Personal Conversations about Alcoholism.* The book featured interviews with well-known and recovered alcoholics such as Doc Severinsen, Billy Carter, Jason Robards, Gale Storm, Grace Slick, Elmore Leonard, and Pete Townshend, who talk about their own successful struggles to overcome alcohol and drug addiction.

While there was no similar book available at the time, perhaps the most important reason the book ended up on the *New York Times* best-seller list for six months was that ordinary people — the general public — needed hope, help, and courage to understand and navigate through the pain and disease of addiction.

My book's title, *The Courage to Change*, comes, of course, from the famous prayer attributed to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Its lines are well known to most of us: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Examining the prayer closely, we see quickly and once again that courage seems to be tied up with change and sorting out our actions and feelings around some significant event or circumstance. The anxiety we experience dealing with the change usually revolves around the fear of failure, the fear of being judged critically by others, the fear of the unknown, and, believe it or not, the fear of success and happiness.

All change requires "courage." Yet some of the very toughest challenges we face require a different kind of action — perhaps we can call it passive action or "acceptance."

The sequel to *The Courage to Change*, which I put together some years later, was titled *The Miracle of Change: The Path to Self-Discovery and Spiritual Growth.*

The thesis of *The Miracle of Change* is that while it may indeed require courage to change, it is the big events in life — good and bad — that allow us to know ourselves, accept ourselves, love ourselves, and then forget about ourselves, in service to others and God.

The remedy for fear is faith, and faith itself requires the greatest courage of all.

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