

**After 911 in a Parallel Universe**  
**Reflections on What Might Have Been**

By

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Greetings Earthlings. I apologize, but I just arrived from a parallel universe and have “warped” sense of humor. Seriously folks, I know I look and sound like the same Todd Eklof you know, and, no doubt, adore. I admit, I have the same corny sense of humor, and my name is, in fact, Todd Eklof. And I did actually live in this world until about seven years ago, and do know some of you, but many of you here today have never seen me before. Let me explain; for those of you who know a little something about Multiverse theory—which posits that there are countless parallel universes similar to this one that exist in other dimensions—suffice it to say that I have beamed in this morning from one of those other universes. In your world you’re still struggling just to explore this universe, but in my universe we’ve discovered the technology to explore universes other than our own through interdimensional space travel. I know this is probably difficult for many of you to believe, but the truth is there are countless other worlds very similar to yours that occupy the same region of space as your own. You cannot see them, however, because they exist in various dimensions beyond the reach of your senses.

Although I’m not permitted to give the actual technology away, interdimensional travel is really simpler than you might imagine, and is, in fact, something all of us do quite naturally every day without even realizing it. This is so because most universes in the multiverse are pretty much the same, which is why I’m virtually indistinguishable from the Todd Eklof you know, and who has probably come and gone a number of times right before your eyes without you ever realizing it. This is so because when you leap from world to world most people and places are essentially the same. In fact, since two positive forces can’t occupy the same space, it has been necessary for me to trade places with your Todd, who, unbeknownst to him, is speaking before the Clifton UU Church in my world. There may be a few of your doubles who chose not to come to church in my world today, and few who are present there this morning that aren’t here today. That’s really the biggest difference between worlds—the choices we make. In fact, it’s the choices we make that transport us into new universes.

You see, all of us are constantly faced with numerous possibilities, but each time we choose one possibility, we move into its potential and into a new universe, while other versions of ourselves choose the other possibilities and branch off into other universes. It’s just like cells that reproduce by continually dividing into other cells so identical that it’s impossible to tell which is the original. The truth is, each of them is the original cell. It’s the same with us, each individual makes it’s own choice, creating a specific future, but each of our countless doppelgangers comes from the same past. But I digress; the simplest way to put it is to point out that the decisions we make create the world we live in.

But my time here is limited today because I choose not to stay in your reality very long. So let's not get any further bogged down in the theory of interdimensional space travel. The real reason I'm here today is to tell you about some of the different choices we've made in my universe that have changed our world for the better during the past few years. I have to admit, until September 11, 2001, our worlds were one and the same. As you will recall, George W. Bush had been elected President in a controversial election just the year before and had relatively low approval ratings. But then came 9-11, and, as he so often likes to say, "everything changed."

Word about an airplane crashing into the first tower spread like wildfire across the country, and people the world over turned on their TV sets to watch live coverage of the inexplicable disaster. Millions were shocked and confused when a short time later they watched a live image of yet another plane smashing through the second building. Not having had the time to think it through, one of my coworkers blurted out a telling question for which he was later rather embarrassed, "Boy, has someone at traffic control really screwed up or what?" I responded simply by saying, "It's intentional." But his question belies the ignorance and the innocence through which so many Americans at the time understood our relation to the rest of the world. We simply could not comprehend that anyone out there could hate us so badly they would orchestrate such violence and be willing to take so many innocent lives.

Our kneejerk reaction, like any threatened animal, was our instinct for fight or flight, both of which became satisfied in the almost immediate emergence of national pride. This allowed us to both puff ourselves up, and to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. I knew a rather liberal couple at the time that had never owned an American flag in their lives, yet even they purchased one and placed it in their front yard. We were all shocked, scared, and angry, and were ready for a fight—in part to take our revenge, and, in part, to prove to ourselves that we were still king of the mountain. But this is about the time our two worlds began to diverge, giving birth to my universe, which, as similar as they are, is quite different from yours in many ways.

In my world we never went to war with Iraq, although Saddam Hussein was ousted from power a couple of years ago by his own people. An international coalition led by the United Nations was able to successfully and permanently remove the Taliban from power in Afghanistan. Members of the Syrian militia captured Osama bin Laden less than three months after 9-11. Syria, like many Muslim nations around the world, has grown more sympathetic toward the U.S. since the attacks. Although the Islamic religion is on the rise just about everywhere, Islamic extremism, like Christian fundamentalism, has taken a global nosedive. After 9-11 people began to realize there's no place in a globalized world for black and white thinking. We've realized that if we're going to get along we have to make room for our differences. So in my world Muslims generally promote themselves as the religion of tolerance, and Christians have largely renewed their commitment to the principle of "love thy neighbor." I'm also happy to report that since July of 2006, when, in your world, Israel began bombing Beirut to retaliate against Hezbollah, the Palestinians have been enjoying their own fledgling State in the Middle East. Since then, though things are still tense at times, there has been no violence

between Israel and Palestine. And three years ago Mahmoud Ahmadinejad lost his bid for the presidency in Iran, and was soundly defeated by a much more progressive candidate. In China, the Dali Lama has been allowed to return from exile, and though the government still claims Tibet, it has become a source of national pride, and the Tibetan way of life is now being restored and protected as a national treasure. And in my world, although we acted too late to stop the horrors in Rwanda that began in 1994, the UN acted hastily in 2004 to prevent the same kind of violence from taking hold in Sudan. And since the U.S. finally signed onto the Kyoto Protocol, it seems more and more that environmental concerns, as well as the rights of workers around the world, are taking precedence over corporations. And here at home, at least here at home in my world, gas still costs just over a dollar a gallon and the economy and housing market are in relatively good shape since we haven't spent the past five years throwing nearly a trillion dollars into an unnecessary war.

I don't mean to paint too rosy a picture. Things are far from perfect in my world. We still have a millions in our nation that are without healthcare, and we haven't figured out a way to lessen our dependence on oil, or dramatically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. But the good news is these are the top issues candidates are talking about during this election season. Just as in your world, John McCain will be the Republican nominee in my world, and Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are in a tight race for the Democratic nomination. But in my world McCain is having trouble finding a meaningful platform to stand on since the war doesn't exist and terrorism is no longer much of a threat. And Obama has a slight advantage because he's lucky enough to have the middle name, Hussein. There's been such goodwill between the U.S. and the Islamic world ever since 9-11 that many Americans feel electing someone with an Islamic name would be a nice way to say thanks. This happened when, instead of dodging the question, "Why would anyone do this to us?" we faced it and realized a lot of people around the world are suffering because of our country's economic policies. Now I realize a name is no reason to elect a President, but at least our illogic is based on kindness instead of fear. I guess that's the biggest difference between my world and yours—the global goodwill and unprecedented feeling of hope so many of us now share.

But, again, I'm not here to boast about how good we have it in my version of reality. Rather, as a concerned citizen of the Multiverse, I'm here to let you know about the choices we made that made all the difference in the world. Of course it really comes down to only one choice, the choice between love and fear. I know that seems cliché and oversimplified, but it's true nonetheless. Before my split from your reality, all of us were made afraid by the terrible events of 9-11, the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and also the delivery of anthrax laden envelopes to government offices. It was truly terrifying! And that was one of the choices we faced, to go with our fear, to let it guides us and dictate our actions and decisions from then on.

But at the same time you may recall an equally powerful sentiment that permeated the national and international mood immediately following those grievous events. Perhaps this sentiment was expressed best the very next day, on September 12, 2001, in

the French paper, *Le Monde* (The World), in an article entitled, “We’re All Americans Now.” In it, its author, Jean Marie Colombani wrote;

In this tragic moment, when words seem so inadequate to express the shock people feel, the first thing that comes to mind is this: We are all Americans! We are all New Yorkers, just as surely as John F. Kennedy declared himself to be a Berliner in 1962 when he visited Berlin. Indeed, just as in the gravest moments of our own history, how can we not feel profound solidarity with those people, that country, the United States, to whom we are so close and to whom we owe our freedom, and therefore our solidarity?

Sure our TV news stations showed us video of some Islamic youth dancing in the streets over the attacks, but this was not the feeling at large. As the article went on to say, “None of those who had a hand in this operation can claim they intend the good of humanity. Actually, they have no interest in a better world. They simply want to wipe ours off the face of the Earth.” And in the case of your world, they succeeded in doing just that. By giving into your collective fear, your way of life has become greatly diminished because of your deadly and costly war, along with the diminishment of the civil liberties you claim to value so highly. How soon you forgot this gesture of goodwill and solidarity from the rest of the world, expressed so well by the French, who you so quickly turned against when they refused to support your unwarranted war against the innocent people of Iraq; a betrayal expressed most amusingly by the childish effort to rename French fries “freedom fries.”

Yet the empathy for America was not restricted to the French, or Europe, or even Canada at our border. Most of the Muslim world, including Iraq and Iran, also denounced the terrorist attacks and vowed to help capture those responsible. And few Muslims mourned the fall of the Taliban when the U.S. responded to the attacks by overthrowing them in Afghanistan. Tragically, the decision to go with fear squandered this unprecedented good will and directed your world toward the place it is today, where the threat of terrorism, along with ill-will and mistrust toward the U.S. have greatly increased.

Again, I’m not here to berate you, or make you feel bad about the situation your world is in. My objective, rather, is to help you make the connection between the choices you make and the reality you create. Hopefully you can understand that so many of the problems you face today are connected—the war in Iraq, the cost of gasoline, the housing crisis, the declining economy, inflation, the election of extremists in Iran and other places, renewed tension between the U.S. and Russia, the violence in Darfur, global warming and climate change, poverty, inadequate healthcare and education, collapsing bridges and crumbling interstates, are all related to each other, and stem from our initial decision to “stay the course” of fear and aggression.

The good news is that you don’t have to stay here. You can’t come with me today, but you can decide anew to make your world a better place by moving into a new potentiality based on love instead of fear. That’s right, the choice before you today is the

same choice you faced on 9-11, between love and fear, which is really the ultimate decision that is always before us, regardless of where we live in the Multiverse. If you choose kindness, and understanding, and trust, and forgiveness, and humility, all the good things that stem from love will come your way. You can stay here, in this world, continuing along this same timeline, or you can decide to move on, to branch out in a new direction. It won't be easy, making the right choice seldom is, but I know this community is enough like my own to realize it's really what you want, and if you want it bad enough you can help make it happen by making good choices.

That's it. That's all I came to say. And now my time is up and I need to return to my own reality. Thanks for letting me intrude upon your service today. It's been good to be with you and good to see some of you again. In closing, let me just assure you that I have full confidence that each and everyone of you has the wisdom and the fortitude to help make your world a better place. So go forth and make it so!

I now return you to your regularly scheduled minister. ...Hmm, you ever have a déjà vu, that feeling like you've been here before?