

## **AS WE LIVE AND WORK**

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### **Bouncing Back from a Terrifying Week**

*No one can possibly know what is about to happen. It is a happening each time, for the first time, for the only time.*

*--James Baldwin*

April 15, 2013, the 117th running of the Boston Marathon, started off with excitement and hope, and ended with anguish and despair. The unforeseen and cold-hearted terrorist act ripped away the security of the city and reverberated around the world. Two young men, possessed by a virulent strain of evil, lurked in the shadows with the intent of decimating the perceived shield of safety of the runners and their cheering onlookers.

The blasts they detonated killed three people, maimed an indeterminate number of others both physically and psychologically, and created profound collateral damage (particularly among children) of those far from the actual race. But the carnage did not stop at the finish line. For

the next four days, there was a car chase, gunfights, a manhunt, the assassination of a campus police officer, and the eerie silence of cities in which one million people were sheltered in their homes. We have been left with surreal memories, fear, uncertainty, and potential long-term alarming flashbacks.

During shaky times, there's a natural tendency to feel emotionally flooded. We temporarily lose perspective and quickly grab onto reflexive solutions that promise to free us from our fears. Although short-term fixes have a certain appeal, they generally miss the mark, because our challenges are usually more daunting than we can readily recognize and articulate at the time of such a traumatic event.

The Boston Marathon is a metaphor for life. It taps into our endurance, resilience, optimism, humility, and courage. But like life itself, the race is uncertain and unpredictable as to whether our bodies and minds can survive the grueling demands and painful after-events.

It was an exhausting and terrifying week. But we have traveled tough roads before and we will traverse them again. Our resilience is born out

of experience, rich in ways that have taught us to overcome ambiguity, fear and adversity. We have learned that dealing with catastrophic events requires that we capitalize on all of our assets: body, mind, emotional, and spiritual. And we have been reminded that there is a strong value in connecting with others to facilitate healing.

As Boston exhales, the immediate nightmare appears over. What can we learn from these five terrifying days?

1. What lies in front of us and what lies in back of us are not as important as what lies within us. Fill your mind with productive thoughts, creative energy and purposeful action.
2. As much as possible, keep your perspective. We are all vulnerable, but not naïve. Do a quick assessment of your immediate priorities during difficult times.

*Ambrose "Amby" Burfoot, winner of the 1968 Boston Marathon, describes the event as the holy grail. He runs the Boston marathon every five years. This year, a bomb blast stopped Burfoot just 7/10 of a mile from the finish*

*line. Re-routed from his destination, Burfoot was initially confused and angry until he grasped what had happened and realized that every mile he ran was a gift.*

3. The combination of a well-thought-out question and quick action can turn a series of rigid "can'ts" into fluid "can dos."

4. To be born is to be at risk. Risk is the ability to understand the laws of probability. Risk is not the opposite of security. The opposite of security is insecurity. And the only way to overcome insecurity is to take risks.

5. Uncertainty is pervasive. It can not be made to disappear. It can only be managed.

6. Do not let your fears be defined by your enemies. When that happens, we put ourselves in a vice that constricts our sense of joy and activity. When we allow malevolent forces to win, we lose. Remember: a ship in the harbor is safe, but that's not what a ship is for.

7. Acknowledge and give vent to your feelings. Chronic anger and

pervasive fear is a boomerang with a long memory. When you harbor bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere. Communicate your feelings with friends, spiritual leaders, and healing professionals. Gain, loss, and repair are intertwined.

8. One person can make a difference. Think of the iconic picture of the former football player attending to a woman who lost her legs and was seriously bleeding. His selfless act saved her life. And remember the fans of the New York Yankees who vigorously sang Sweet Caroline, who put rivalries of “the game” behind them and acknowledged that we are one community, one nation.

9. During times of uncertainty, despite the intent of destructive forces to drive us apart, we will find our greatest strength in the healing presence of others.

10. Cover all your bases. We have learned that dealing with catastrophic events requires that we capitalize on all our assets: body, mind, social, emotional, and spiritual.

No matter how well-crafted are our plans and expectations, an unexpected detour can dramatically alter, in a moment, the anticipated outcome. There isn't a neat formula to deal with reckless acts and serious uncertainty perpetuated by irrational minds.

The process of prevention and healing requires continual sculpting. We need to use our unique skills, idiosyncrasies, and talents to adapt to the ever-present world of ambiguity and insecurity. Maintaining perspective, exercising flexibility and wisdom, and building resilience are the essential bedrocks of a strong society.

Our choices are: Give in. Give up. Or give all you can.

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