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Japan's Earthquake/Tsunami Nightmare

As I think about the unfolding earthquake and resulting tsunami crisis in Japan, my heart's first response to the incredible amount of suffering of hundreds of thousands of my fellow human beings, is pain. I know, having never experienced anything even close to this tragedy, that I cannot imagine their pain, their fear. My thoughts as I see the pictures of homes, of large ships, of buildings, of trains, of entire towns being literally swallowed by the ocean, defy verbal expression.

In addition to the utter sympathy that I feel for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami, I'm also struck by just how helpless we human beings are in the face of them. I'm painfully aware that today, at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, some forty-one years after we first put human beings on the moon and returned them safely to the Earth, we are utterly unable to do three things which would have saved countless lives in Japan: First, we are unable to predict earthquakes; second, we are unable to build structures capable of withstanding earthquakes; and, third, we are unable to build structures capable of withstanding tsunamis. Indeed, based upon our current technology, the capability to do any of those three things feels so far-fetched, that it seems more like science fiction than anything that is even remotely possible in the near future.

Evolving our technology to the point at which we can predict earthquakes and build structures that can withstand earthquakes and tsunamis will require thousands and thousands of hours of human creative thought, ingenuity and most importantly, an unequivocal desire to do so, and that desire must be accompanied by an unshakeable confidence that we can and indeed ultimately will succeed.

As I think about the tremendous human effort of accomplishing any one, two, or all three of those efforts in which as a species, we could have been engaged for many years, I deeply mourn that as human beings, we have not ever had as a priority, the goal of becoming wiser. We have, instead, been on a constant quest for knowledge., i.e., for facts and understanding, but not of becoming wiser, of trying, among other things, to transform our emotional nature in order to live in peace and love across the planet. As a result, we have over the past century, spent millions of our human hours pursuing World War I, World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War, The Vietnam War, the First Iraq/Iran War, the second Iraq War, the war in Afghanistan, the 27-year war fought between Northern Ireland's Catholics and Protestants, and the now 62-year old war between the Israelis and the Palestinians, among many other violent conflicts. I mourn the millions of human hours devoted to the Manhattan Project and the resulting nuclear arsenal of our nation and those of other nations, arsenals capable of destroying humanity thousands of times over.

I just wonder had we not devoted so much of our mental energy, so much of our emotional focus, to those and to other forms of violence, whether we would today,

have a cure for many human diseases that continue to plague us - for the many varieties of cancers that kill tens of thousands of us each year, for Alzheimer's disease, for conjunctive heart failure, for Tay Sachs disease, for hypertension, arthritis, diabetes, for sickle cell disease, anemia, Crohn's disease, Lou Gehrig's disease, and AIDS, among many others. I wonder whether we'd now be able to turn off the genes in our bodies that cause illness, that maim us and cause tremendous suffering. I wonder if growing our own limbs and other body parts to replace those lost through either accident or disease, would now be commonplace.

I wonder whether our societies around the planet would at this point, be fully powered by the energy from wind, water and the never ending power of our sun. I wonder whether in 2010, we would from Minnesota to Miami, still be protecting houses from flooding --- with sand bags. I wonder whether we would have by now figured out how to build levees strong enough to save a city of jazz, beignets, Mardi Gras parades, and shrimp po boys - whether fire in our western states would still be a danger to millions of lives and homes for several months of every year. I wonder whether at this point, more than 100 years into the Industrial Age, we would still be utterly unable to predict an earthquake and whether we'd still be building structures that are no more than mere toothpicks in the face of tsunamis.

Well, the reality is that over the past 100 years, we have indeed wasted millions upon millions of our human hours. We've wasted millions of hours of our creativity, of our ingenuity, of our God-given brilliance. We've devoted that precious time and that divinely inspired creativity to war, and to the pursuit of other forms of violence, to name only one of our many, many human follies to which we've devoted countless human hours. The result is that now, in 2010, we are no more able to predict earthquakes and to protect ourselves from tsunamis than we were a thousand years ago.

To my brothers and sisters of Japan, of New Zealand, of South Asia, of Haiti, of New Orleans, to my sister and brother human beings around the world whose lives have been ruined by the inability of our science and technology to protect you from earthquakes and floods, on behalf of our species, I offer you my deepest and heartfelt apology. We have been utterly foolish. We owed you so much more.

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