

A Rabbi's 9/12 Challenge: Why Must Tragedy Be What Brings America Together?

A rabbi is asking why we need a tragedy to bring out our best, and challenging us to reclaim that spirit today.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Mineola rabbi urges Americans to revive post-9/11 unity through annual day of kindness, service, and civility

As the nation prepares to mark the 25th anniversary of September 11, 2001, Rabbi Anchelle Perl of Chabad of Mineola is calling on Americans to also remember what followed the tragedy: a rare moment of national unity on September 12.



Photo Credit: Schneur Perl, November 2001 Taken just weeks after 9/11, this photograph shows two towering structures outside Congregation Chabad in Mineola, draped in enormous American flags.

Rabbi Perl is proposing that September 12 be recognized annually as a "Day of American Friendship and Good Deeds," dedicated to acts of kindness, community service, gratitude, and respectful dialogue across differences.

"Much will rightly be said about September 11," Rabbi Perl said. "But September 12 revealed something powerful about the American spirit. In the aftermath of tragedy, people came together. Strangers comforted one another. Neighbors checked in on neighbors. Differences faded, even if only briefly, in the face of shared humanity."

In the days after the attacks, Americans across the country displayed flags, supported first responders, and reached across social and political divides in unprecedented ways.

"September 11 was a day of unimaginable loss," Rabbi Perl said. "But September 12 showed us what is possible when people see each other first as human beings and fellow Americans."

Rabbi Perl's proposal raises a central question: Why must tragedy be the catalyst for national unity?

The suggested observance would not require formal legislation or large-scale organization. Instead, it would encourage simple, intentional acts of goodwill, including visiting the elderly, donating blood, assisting families in need, thanking veterans and first responders, welcoming neighbors, giving charity, and engaging respectfully with those holding different viewpoints.

"Patriotism is more than symbols," Rabbi Perl said. "It is reflected in how we treat one another in daily life."

He also emphasized the importance of restoring civility in public discourse.

"Democracy depends on disagreement," he said. "But disagreement should not become hostility. We can hold strong views and still maintain respect for one another."

Proposed September 12 activities could include community service projects, neighborhood gatherings, interfaith and intercultural events, food and blood drives, and public expressions of gratitude to emergency responders and military personnel. The day could also encourage more respectful communication in digital spaces, even temporarily replacing divisive rhetoric with appreciation and constructive dialogue.

Rabbi Perl stressed that the initiative is not intended to minimize national divisions or complex challenges.

"This is not about ignoring differences," he said. "It is about remembering that shared citizenship and disagreement can coexist. We are strongest when we remain connected even when we do not agree."

He added that meaningful change does not require government action.

"Friendship cannot be legislated," Rabbi Perl said. "No institution can mandate compassion. It begins with individuals choosing to act differently toward one another."

The concept can be summarized as follows:

September 11: Remember. September 12: Reconnect. September 13: Continue.

"We should not need tragedy to bring out our better selves," Rabbi Perl said. "The question 25 years later is whether we can choose unity without crisis forcing it upon us."

As the United States observes both the 25th anniversary of September 11 and the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding, Rabbi Perl believes September 12 offers an opportunity to

reflect not only on history, but on how Americans responded to one another in its aftermath.

"The memory of September 11 belongs to history," he said. "But the spirit of September 12 still has something to teach us today."

MEDIA CONTACT

Rabbi Anchelle Perl
Chabad of Mineola
Congregation Beth Sholom Chabad
261 Willis Avenue,
Mineola, New York
rabbiperl@chabadmineola.com

Rabbi Anchelle Perl
Chabad Mineola
+1 516-739-3636
rabbiperl@chabadmineola.com

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