

The Delray Democrat

Hate Cannot Drive Out Hate, Only Love Can Do That¹

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I begin this first article of the New Year with a quote from Congressman Alcee Hastings, who often begins a speech by intoning “If I offend anyone, I assure you it was purely intentional.” Another hero of mine, the brilliant essayist and outspoken atheist Christopher Hitchens, observed that many people use the words “I am offended” as an argument, as if being offended means that the other person must be wrong.

Let us make a resolution this year to get over ourselves and stop being so offended by opinions that differ from our own. I appreciate the time that someone takes to send me hate mail after each article I write, if I dare to question the actions of an autocratic bully and climate denier, who bragged that he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue and his followers would still support him. Such boasting is a horrible thing to say about oneself and an even worse indictment of his cultish followers, especially if they are Jewish, since we are the people of Moses and Mordechai who defied Pharaoh and refused to bend the knee to Haman.

Let us resolve in 2021 to reunite with friends and family from whom we may have become estranged, and place Jewish unity and American patriotism above partisanship. We can emerge from the swamp into which our nation has descended over the past four years and overcome the pandemic of ignorance, arrogance, and incompetence in our land with the vaccine of reason, dialogue and kindness.

By standing on the shoulders of giants, we can rise above the fog to see the dawn of a new day. Great leaders like John Lewis and Dr. Martin Luther King, whose birthday we celebrated last month, teach us to love all people, even our adversaries. As Dr. King said, “Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” Dr. King and the Jews marched together for civil rights and Israel, which Dr. King recognized as the eternal homeland of the Jewish people. Dr. King said he was inspired by Moses to lead his people to the Promised Land of justice and love, even if he could not enter.

Respectful dialogue is part of our Jewish Talmudic tradition as earlier reflected in the words of Isaiah who said “Come let us reason together.” The watchword of the Jewish faith, the Shema, like the motto of America, e pluribus unum (out of many, one), reminds us that unity is our strength and our legacy.

Great minds of the past help us to learn from history such as H.L. Mencken who observed “The men the American people admire most extravagantly are the most daring liars; the men they detest most violently are those who try to tell them the truth,” George Orwell noted “In times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act,” and Albert Einstein declared “Great spirits have always encountered opposition from mediocre minds. The mediocre mind is incapable of

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understanding the man who refuses to bow blindly to conventional prejudices and chooses instead to express his opinions courageously and honestly.” Socrates was condemned for asking too many questions, especially about the gods, which was viewed as corrupting the youth. As Jefferson observed, “if there is a God, he would prefer honest inquiry and reason to slavish belief.” Thus, teaching children to ask questions, as we do each Passover, is a great gift to our youth and helps inoculate our people from the disease of ignorance.

If anyone knows how to get us out of “jeopardy” it is Alex Trebek. For over 37 years and over 8000 episodes he encouraged us to ask questions and to seek the right answer in his iconic game show, Jeopardy. In his final farewell episode, one week before his death, with his body ravaged by cancer but with an indomitable spirit that could not be subdued, he posed a question about whether humanity could be saved from itself and in effect told us, “The answer is..... Yes, if we unite and work together.” May his love, courage, zest for life, thirst for knowledge and his memory be a blessing and help lead us to a brighter tomorrow when all humanity will sing together “Hiney Mah Tov U’Manayim Shevet Achim Gam Yachad“ (How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity).

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