

**April 29, 2022**

**Rabbi Edwin Goldberg**

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Psalms are a great source of inspiration and enlightenment.

Psalms 1 speaks of two and only two kinds of people: the righteous and the wicked. It declares that “the Eternal watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

We might wonder how God deals with people who don't fit neatly into either category — those who are neither altogether righteous nor altogether wicked, which probably includes most of us — but this psalm doesn't tell us. Of course, because God is God, he can view us however he wants to, and we trust him to deal with each of us appropriately.

**We get into trouble, however, when we start thinking we are God and start assigning other mortals to the way of the righteous or the way of the wicked.**

Consider, for example, a column that appeared in the Los Angeles Times after Donald Trump was no longer in office. The columnist, Virginia Heffernan, clearly not a Trump supporter, seemed confused by the fact that a neighbor whom she called a “Trumpite” had just plowed her driveway without being asked and had done a great job.

In trying to understand this act, which she described as “aggressive niceness,” Heffernan theorized that this generous deed was freely done because both she and her neighbors were white people in an all-white neighborhood.

Okay. But is there any reason not to believe that a black neighbor with a snowplow might have just as generously plowed Heffernan's drive?

Heffernan went on to acknowledge that she owed her neighbor thanks, but it was a stingy admission: “It really looks like the guy back-dragged the driveway like a pro,” she said. But she wondered “how much thanks” she was willing to give someone on the other side of the political divide.

It was an act of kindness but seemed to be fraught with background.

Eventually, Heffernan cited a comment from Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) following the January 6 Capitol attack: The United States, Sasse said, “isn't Hatfields and McCoys, this blood feud forever.” And, he added, “You can't hate someone who shovels your driveway.”

“So, here's my response to my plowed driveway, for now,” Heffernan wrote. “Politely, but not profusely, I'll acknowledge the Sassenian move. With a wave and a thanks, a minimal start on building back trust. I'm not ready to knock on the door with a covered dish yet.”

I am so tired of a partisan divide in our country.

Not that it is new.

Back in 2002, the late columnist Charles Krauthammer, who self-identified as a conservative but was often hard to nail down to any one ideology and was widely read by liberals as well, posted a column in which he said, “To understand the workings of American politics, you have to understand this fundamental law: *Conservatives think liberals are stupid. Liberals think conservatives are evil.*”

Krauthammer’s point was that both groups see the other as caricatures. A caricature is when certain characteristics of a person or a group are exaggerated to a comic or grotesque effect. *But the trouble, as Krauthammer suggested, is that both groups treat the other as though the caricature is an accurate portrayal.*

He said, for example, that when conservatives say liberals are stupid, they mean this “in the nicest way. Liberals tend to be nice, and they believe — here is where they go stupid — that most everybody else is nice, too. Deep down, that is. Sure, you’ve got your multiple felon and your occasional war criminal, but they’re undoubtedly depraved ‘cause they’re deprived. If only we could get social conditions right — eliminate poverty, teach anger management, restore the ozone ... everyone would be holding hands smiley-faced, rocking back and forth to ‘We Shall Overcome.’”

Regarding liberals’ view of conservatives, Krauthammer said, “Liberals are not quite as reciprocally charitable. It is natural. They think conservatives are mean. How can conservatives believe in the things they do — self-reliance, self-discipline, competition, military power — without being soulless? How to understand the conservative desire to actually abolish welfare, if it is not to punish the poor? The argument that it would increase self-reliance and thus ultimately reduce poverty is dismissed as meanness rationalized.”

Years later the notion still holds. Krauthammer’s primary point remains the same: that we pigeonhole people who see things differently from us and assign them motivations that may be inaccurate or overstated. Using the vocabulary of Psalm 1, we are assuming our way is the way of the righteous, and the others’ way is the way of the wicked.

Admittedly, we may not be able to do much about the state of the political scene, but Heffernan was talking about her neighborhood. And for her, the neighbor plowing snow from her driveway was an incongruity that didn’t fit with the caricatures she had formed about people who voted for the candidate she didn’t support, and she was having trouble getting past it.

Let’s go back to Psalm 1 and remind ourselves that its division of life lived in one of two ways — righteous or wicked — is not based on politics. Psalm 1 is not a description of what our political views should be. Rather, the psalm is a meditation on what happiness is. The underlying thought in Psalm 1 is that the truly blessed have values that are God-centered, whereas those who are not blessed are self-centered.

**Psalm 1’s use of the word “way,” as in “the way of the righteous” and “the way of the wicked,” tells us that the psalm is not about a political position or a social action, but a course of life.** The Hebrew word underlying “way” is *derekh*, which refers to a path worn by constant walking. So, delighting in the teaching of God is not an occasional meander, but a chosen route for one’s journey through life. We can still point out things we see as clearly wrong, but in the

realms of politics and social issues, we often agree on the ultimate goals. The struggle is more about how to get there than about right and wrong.

There are two ways, says Psalm 1, but we humans get over our heads when we make ourselves judges of who fits into which category. One thing we can do is work on seeing our neighbors as whole people rather than representatives of a monolithic stupidity or a conspiracy of meanness. In doing so, we can build respect for one another — whether they've plowed our driveway or not.