

The High Cost of Hate
Yom Kippur
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I have a confession to make. I begin this Yom Kippur sermon with an honest confession. On the one hand it's a tad funny, but on the other hand it's very serious. Sometimes, I cannot control my anger when I'm on the phone pushing buttons trying to speak to a customer service rep. The recorded message tells me repeatedly that they value my time. But they are lying. I compliantly push all the button, giving them the last four digits of my social and my home zip code and then when I get to a real person, they ask me the question all over again. And it fills my heart with, I'm sorry to say, rage. Can any of you relate to this?

A few weeks ago, I found myself waiting for over half an hour, dutifully pushing the buttons, to speak to the right person, only to be disconnected not once but twice. Once reconnected, listening to that saccharine sweet voice saying, "I'm sorry, that option is not available," I found myself bellowing into the phone, "Customer Service." It was embarrassing. A machine had rendered my insane.

So I confess this human sin before you. The sin of Sinat Chinam, baseless hatred. My confession has liberated me.

Seriously, hate is everywhere. We saw two Presidential candidates so filled with hate for each other that they couldn't even shake hands. Their faces turned red, they paced back and forth, and they scowled and pursed their lips. This is the generation of rage.

A recent "Times magazine" had as its title, "Why we are losing the Internet to hate." More and more hate groups from ISIS to Neo-Fascist groups here in the US are recruiting disenfranchised people to their philosophy of hate. What was once hailed as an instrument to bring people together and a vehicle for knowledge sharing is rapidly become a tool to disseminate hatred.

This morning I want to talk about hate and how we can confront it.

Sadly, hatred can destroy the hated. I often tell Rabbi stories to inspire, but not all stories lift us up. Consider the story of Rabbi Israel Zolli – the Chief Rabbi of Rome.

In June 1944 Rabbi Zolli officiated at a Shabbat ceremony held in the central synagogue to commemorate the war dead and to celebrate the liberation of Rome from German occupation. Zolli delivered a message of hope, moving of the thousand survivors to tears. Seven months later, in February 1945, to be exact, an even larger crowd gathered in that very same synagogue to sit shiva and to mourn for him. But he had not died. You see,

the Chief Rabbi of Rome, just after liberation, had just announced his conversion to Christianity. And to top it off, at his Baptism in the chapel of Santa Maria Degli Angeli, he took on the first name Eugenio, in honor of Pope Pius XII ... referred to by some as “Hitler’s Pope.”

There have been countless explanations for his conversion: he had a vision; he was ashamed and ridiculed for having gone into hiding with a Catholic family in the Vatican. I believe that his conversion was not of the heart but came from external pressure. Perhaps he saw so much hatred during the war and after it, and being rejected by his community for fleeing and hiding in the Vatican, that he just quit. Hate drove him away from his faith and away from his people. I suspect that he just couldn’t take it anymore and he sought the comfort of the majority faith. Hate destroyed him.

You remember the line of Rabbi Yoda of Star Wars?

“Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”

But hate not only harms the victim of hate, it also destroys the hateful. I have three examples. First, from my alma mater, Oberlin College. Amongst its faculty is a Dr. Joy Karega, a professor of rhetoric and composition. Last year she posted a picture of the Jewish banker, Jacob

Rothschild, on her Facebook page with the words: “Hello there. My name is Jacob Rothschild ... my family is worth \$500 trillion and we own nearly every central bank in the world, we finance both sides of every war since Napoleon. We own the news, the media, your oil and your government.” Around the same time, she posted and endorsed a speech by Louis Farrakhan in which the Nation of Islam leader indicated that Jews were behind 9/11. In another post, Dr. Karega wrote “the same people behind the massacre in Gaza (that’s us) were guilty of downing Malaysia Airlines flight 17 over the Ukraine.” And as if that’s not enough, she also claims the Mossad was behind the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris and that ISIS is a CIA/Mossad operation! She was recently put on paid leave but has not been dismissed from the college. The college, citing academic freedom as the hallmark of all great institutions of higher learning, affirms her right to express her ridiculous statements. I wonder if the college would have tolerated openly gay or black hate speech? I think not. But Oberlin is now in a tale spin. The President has resigned. Jewish alumni support is vanishing and Jewish enrollment is falling off the cliff. And it’s all a shame, for I once was so proud of my alma mater.

Let’s consider for a moment the Black Lives Matter movement. It was formed in response to a number of killings of unarmed black men by police

officers. It is a movement many Jews, including Laurie and I have supported. But then the organization issued a public statement about Israel. It called Israel an **apartheid state**, claimed that Israel is committing **genocide against the Palestinians**, supported the **BDS** (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) movement, and called for the United States to **cut off all aid** to Israel. What does the complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict have to do with the issue of justice for black lives in America? I have heard many of you tell me that you cannot support this cause anymore because it has abandoned us on this key issue. Hate destroys. This worthwhile cause will lose many key Jewish alliances because of their vicious attack on Israel.

Third, An Israeli heavyweight judo master named Or Sasson defeated an Egyptian opponent, Islam El Shehaby in a first-round match at the Rio Olympics. At the conclusion of the match, the Egyptian refused to shake his opponent's extended hand. He earned boos from the crowd and was later expelled from the Olympics. Sasson went on to win a bronze medal for Israel. The Olympics are supposed to be a place for harmony and athletics, not politics, but hate has found its way in.

As I thought about these events, I was filled with disgust, rage and pity, because hate destroys not only the victim, but also the perpetrator. Hatred led to Spain's decline in the 15th century. Spain expelled its Jews with the

Alhambra Decree of 1492. We all know that. But what many do not know is that this launched a serious decline of Spanish power and influence. The Jews fled and Spain's economic power shifted towards the New World and Amsterdam. In czarist Russia, anti-Semitic laws in the late 1880s led to mass Jewish emigration and the eventual collapse of Czarist Russia. The Bolsheviks then came and finished them off. Germany might well have won the race for an atomic bomb if Hitler hadn't sent Albert Einstein, Leo Szilard, Enrico Fermi and Edward Teller into exile in the U.S.

Following the Olympics hateful display, Brett Stevens of the Wall Street Journal opined on the all-consuming anti-Semitism of the Arab world. He wrote, "Over time their anti-Semitism proved fatal: a combination of lost human capital, ruinously expensive wars, misdirected ideological obsessions, and an intellectual life perverted by conspiracy theories and the perpetual search for scapegoats." Today, the Arab world is suffering from a cultural, literary and scientific recession of sorts. In 2015 the U.S. Patent Office reported 3,804 patents from Israel, as compared with 364 from Saudi Arabia, 56 from the United Arab Emirates, and 30 from Egypt. The mistreatment and expulsion of Jews has served as a template for the persecution of Shiites and Sunnis as well as the displacement of other religious minorities: the Christians, Yazidis, and the Baha'i. Instead of

focusing on important economic and cultural issues, they instituted a public policy of hate and they are paying the price for it.

We too, are being distorted by hate. In Dan Ephron's book, "Killing the King," he writes how Rabin, was killed not by the Palestinians, but by a Jew who saw Rabin as a threat to Israel's biblical values and a hold on the land. Right wing rabbis and religious nationalists conspired to kill Rabin and Peres, and in the end they destroyed the very peace prospect that held the possibility for a lasting settlement. Hatred in our community has impoverished Zionism and hurt our chances of reconciliation. I will never forget waking up in 1995 to the terrible news of his assassination.

Eli Wiesel, who passed away this year, once wrote that the opposite of hate is not love. It is indifference. Seeing the world turn away from the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust, he lamented that hate was strengthened by the indifference of the world. I respectfully wish to differ. The opposite of hate is the will to forgive. And this is why we come here today.

Judaism has always encouraged us to do that which is difficult. If it were easy or natural, we wouldn't be commanded to perform it. Hate comes naturally. Forgiveness has to be earned. It requires a determined will.

Major General (Ret) Avigdor Kahalani, one of Israel's greatest war

heroes, a veteran of the Six Day War, The Yom Kippur War and the First Lebanon War, rode out in a jeep to speak to the young soldiers of an IDF unit, preparing to go into Gaza as the ground campaign was about commence.

The young soldiers of the IDF gathered around him, they leaned in close as he spoke in a hushed and somber tone befitting the enormity of the moment on the eve of yet another war, for yet another generation.

The General began:

“We never taught you to hate. Not this army, not the Israel Defense Forces. We never taught you to hate. And there are armies in the world who do that. And maybe it works to a degree; maybe by hating the enemy, you are a fiercer fighter. I don’t know. But we never taught you that. And I’ll tell you why: if we teach you to hate, you can’t undo that. You’ll come back from the war and it won’t be the ‘enemy’; it will be your brother in law, or your neighbor or your former friend. Once you teach people to hate, they’ll find someone to hate. So we never taught you that.”

We desperately need to begin again; to release our national and personal anger and our grudges that fill us with hate. No one wants to go through life with an emotional chip on his or her shoulders. We long to put our baggage

of contempt down and move on. I would like to think that this one of the reasons that we come to Temple on the High Holidays. We come here to release our pains and grudges of the past. We come her to begin again and find forgiveness and atonement.

But what about our own hates? What do we do with the venom that we have? There is hate in our homes, more and more marriages are on the rocks. Here is violence at the work place. We see it on our roads and standing in line at the mall. And it is destroying us.

We need to do three things. First, we need to seek forgiveness. I won't speak about Trump or Clinton but to make my point, I want to entertain you with a few amazing political failures of forgiveness. David Dinkins, then Mayor Of New York, when he was accused of failing to pay his income taxes said, "I didn't commit a crime. All I did was fail to comply with the law." Massachusetts Congressman Joseph Early, at a press conference, when he was asked about his part in the House banking scandal said, "They gave me a book of checks, and they didn't ask for any records. Is that my fault?" How about Richard Darman, when Director of the Budget explaining why the President wasn't following up on his campaign pledges: "He didn't really say that. He was just reading what was given to him to read in a speech."

Two more. Mayor Marion Barry once said, "Outside of the murders,

Washington has one of the lowest crime rates in the country.” And my all time favorite from our own Mayor Frank Rizzo who once amazingly said, “The streets are safe in Philadelphia, it’s only the people who make them unsafe.”

My friends, we need to apologize to those whom we have wronged and admit when we sin. We need to swallow our pride and tell the truth.

Second, we need to forgive when someone atones. The Talmud teaches that if a person seeks atonement three times for a sin and we fail to forgive, then the sin is on us. Isn’t that brilliant. Our failure to forgive is as egregious as the original sin.

And finally, we need to adjust our perspectives. The rabbis believed that one of the most powerful ways to forgive and destroy hate is by judging others favorably.

I try, as hard as I can to give someone else the benefit of the doubt. Maybe the other person acted unintentionally, carelessly or lacked evil intent. Maybe it was all a big misunderstanding. One psychologist once told me, “Have you ever considered that the rude person, who snubs you, may just be shy?” I honestly see people’s behavior completely differently now. Maybe they are shy, and their behavior has less to do with me and more to do with them.

On this sacred day, let's consider an attitude adjustment. Let's do the math; much of life is pretty good when we think about it. Let's say on average we are hurt, betrayed or disappointed by people 25% of the time. Is that fair? So that means that 75% of the time, we are not. Our children, spouses, business associates, neighbors, friends hurt us from time to time, but by focusing on the 25% we only harm ourselves. If we could imagine, even for one moment, what it would feel like refocus our inner lives on the 75%... we could experience a moment of grace, a Yom Kippur moment. A moment when our hearts opens; a moment to feel how our souls truly yearn for reconnection.

I conclude with a story, you may have read about. Over the summer a woman who woke up in Haverford, to find a swastika painted on her garbage bin. What would you do if that happened to you? Too often, hate leads to more hate, but not in this case. She courageously responded with love. Being an artist herself, she painted a flower over the symbol of hate and then encouraged her neighbors and friends to do likewise. Within days, there were rainbows, flowers and clouds painted on trash receptacles all across the neighborhood. Hate could not find its home there.

May this New Year be a year when we are released from hate and reinvigorated through our love and our forgiveness. May we judge others more favorably and give them the benefit of the doubt. May we never forget that hate paralyzes life; forgiveness gives it power. Hate imprisons life; forgiveness releases it. Hate sours life; forgiveness makes it sweet. Hate sickens life; forgiveness heals it. Hate blinds life; forgiveness opens our eyes. Hate separates us one from another; forgiveness unites us in peace.