Stop the Hate

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October 20, 2023

This has been a long week, I said to a friend - it was Monday.

Rabbi Brown and I had a rare moment yesterday when we were both in the office and not on a zoom, in a meeting, planning a rally, writing a message about Israel or doing an interview. I stopped by the door to her office and I said - this feels like COVID all over again. Not the virus, but the pandemic, the anxiety, the mad rushing around, the sense that the world as we knew it is over, forever changed. At least during COVID I was in sweat pants and baking bread.

Monday and Tuesday I was in Ottawa at a conference with a thousand Jewish community leaders and supporters planned a year ago to raise awareness about antisemitism. A year ago, that's how certain the organizers

were that there would still be antisemitism and a lack of awareness about it 12 months later.

They didn't expect this terrible war, but really I don't think they had to change much of anything on their agenda - it was all the same message, just more painful. The continued upswing in Anti-Semitism. Universities unable to keep students safe from hateful speech and threats of violence. Social Media terrorists amplifying real life terrorists. Biased media, whataboutism, moral equivalency over the murder, rape, kidnapping of families and children and elderly. It wasn't beyond the imagination, the horrors of 1943 were happening in 2023, Never again was right now. I don't think they had to change a word of what they planned to say before the atrocities in southern Israel - we just heard them differently.

What could I possibly say that you haven't already heard me say? War is terrible? That Israel finds herself on the defensive and then on the offensive and that she has every right to do so? That Palestinian terror groups like

Hamas are an affront to everything we hold dear and need to be denounced every chance we get? That our hearts are breaking at the loss of innocent Israeli lives and communities destroyed? That we can't pray hard nor fast enough for the return of the hostages and the onset of peace? That the plight of innocent civilians in Gaza is awful, and shame on Hamas for putting them in harm's way and not taking care of them? Ok, I'll say them again. It doesn't make me feel better to say it again, nor does it move the global needle toward a different ending.

I share your hurt for what's happening, your sense of helplessness, your worries for family and friends in Israel, your exhaustion of vacillating between worry and fright and anger and joy and your desire to tune all this madness out.

I had no internet on the 5 hour flight home Wednesday afternoon - it was the best five hours I have had in two weeks. I was in a middle seat on Flair Airlines, riding coach, the person behind me was kicking my seat every 5

minutes and still it felt like I was at Scandinave Spa in Whistler - the world was on pause. OK I could have done without the seat kicking.

I suppose there is some comfort in stating what we are feeling, but it's Shabbat, this time when we are supposed to get a glimpse of a future time that is different from the present; better than the present; filled completely with God's blessing of wholeness and holiness. So Shabbat isn't just a time to state the obvious; it's a time to dream of the future and what could be - for us, and for everyone.

With that in mind, channeling my inner John Lennon, I'd like to imagine - imagine a time when the world is without one familiar ingredient. Imagine with me.

The story is told in the Talmud, about the great sage, Hillel, who lived in the land of Israel in the 1st century, who was approached by someone who wished to convert to Judaism. This person said to Hillel, "Teach me everything

there is to know about Judaism, as I stand here on one foot - a euphemism for - quickly. Hillel replied, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. That is the whole Torah. All the rest of the Torah is a commentary on that verse. Now, go and study the commentary."

Hillel understood that this phrasing of the golden rule came out of the Jewish experience of slavery and oppression. If something awful like that happened to us, then we should make sure something awful like that never happens to anyone else. If, because we were subjected to prejudice, violence, hatred, xenophobia, racism, you name it, then there can be no way, we, as Jews can do that, to feel that, to and about anyone else. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks taught, "Jews cannot complain that others have racist attitudes toward them if they hold racist attitudes toward others." Full Stop!

In parashat Ki Teitzei, which contains more commandments and rules than any other portion, there is

one commandment that seems counter-intuitive. In verse 8, of chapter 23, we are commanded, "**Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother. Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land."** Wait, what? Why? Edomites are our brothers? Don't despise the Egyptians after what they did to us? Yes, the Torah seems to say. Edom, was another name for Esau. ***After what they did to us?***

If you remember the story in Genesis, Jacob tricked Esau into giving him the inheritance and the blessings from Jacob, and in turn Esau was angry enough to try and kill Jacob. Shouldn't we hate Edom because Edom hated us? The answer the Torah says is NO. Esau may have hated Jacob, but it does not follow that Jacob has to hate Esau.

Again, as Rabbi Sacks teaches, **"**To answer hate with hate is to be dragged down to the level of your opponent." As Martin Luther King Jr, wrote, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out

hate, only love can do that." Or as Kohelet said, there is "a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace".

But what's the deal with the Egyptians? Surely it's ok to hate them after all they did to our ancestors. ***Surely it's ok to hate the terrorists for all they did to our people!*** The answer, of course from our Torah and our tradition, is no, we are not allowed to hate them either. The reason, the sages say, is because the Egyptians weren't all and weren't always bad.

Prior to the onset of the book of Exodus, Jacob and his family settled in Egypt, Joseph was a prince and the community thrived. It was the new Pharaoh who instigated the problems with the Israelites, not the Egyptians people. 40 years of wandering in the desert, I believe Moses tried to remove this tendency to meet hate with hate. If the people had continued to hate the Egyptians, Moses would have taken the Israelites out of

Egypt but would have failed to take Egypt out of the Israelites. They would have continued to be slaves, not physically but psychologically. They would be slaves to the past, held captive by the chains of resentment, unable to build the future. ***To be free, you have to let go of hate*.** That is a difficult truth but a necessary one.

Modern proverbs abound about this as well…We know, for example:

- **Hate the sin but not the sinner.**
- **Do not forget the past but do not be held captive by it.**
- **Be willing to fight your enemies but never allow yourself to be defined by them or become like them**

Our tradition makes clear, as Hillel tried to say, precisely because something terrible was done to us, we are commanded not to do that to anyone else. Especially when it comes to hatred. Hatred is an easy emotion to mobilize. We see it all around us. Anger, disdain and ill feelings toward another is something that was directed at

us for thousands of years. It is directed at us and others around us to this day. If we don't hear the golden rule as Hillel taught it, we are missing a huge moment to not only stop the hatred, but to create a world filled with shalom. Isn't that what we're trying to do? Isn't that the world we want to live in? Not one without the people who hate us specifically, but a world without hate generally.

Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother. Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." Amazing. You can almost hear Moses saying, "You want to hate the Edomites, the Egyptians? Yeah? Well, don't. Just stop. That's them, that's not us.

We don't have to carry that burden in our hearts and in our spirits any more. Maybe, just maybe, those who continue to hate will see our example and see that they too, don't have to if they actually don't want to.

The primary teaching of every faith tradition essentially boils down to what Hillel taught, “do unto others as they would have then do unto you”, The Golden Rule. Jews phrase it in the negative don’t do unto others. Muslims, phrase it, “as want for others what you want for yourself”.

It’s all the same idea; empathy, put yourself in the shoes of the other, show kindness and seek understanding of the other’s condition.

Maybe that’s too much to ask of the whole world, or even Israelis and Palestinians right now in the midst of a war; but it’s not too much to ask of us here in this room. The reason for the mitzvot is to guide us away from our most animalistic, base instincts toward a higher, holier existence. We saw what hate can do on October 7, 2023, and in 1943 and in the Passover story, and time and time again throughout history. We have so often been on the receiving end, and yes at times hate has emanated from our own midst.

I feel that now, every video, every posting of a smiling Israeli with the epitaph that they were murdered or taken hostage fuels hate inside of me.

But I can't give into that, we can't give in to that, the IDF that is fighting to defend Israel and its people can't give into that - if we do then we are not only no better than those who hate and attack us, maybe we are worse because we of all people should know better.

This is hard stuff I know. I'm not a pacifist, I hope that the IDF wipes Hamas and its hateful ideology off the face of the earth. If I was younger and had better knees I'd fly to Israel right now and join them, I really would. And people should, it must not only be on us as Jews or Israelis to wage this war, all that love life and want to live in peace should fight against those that celebrate death and want only to destroy.

But it is not a war of hatred, it must be a war against hatred, a war to end hatred, it must be a war to wage peace; sadly that is a war worth fighting, it's a war we must win - otherwise we all, Jews, Muslims, the whole world, we lose.

Am Yisrael Chai - the people of Israel live; one day soon may we all live in peace.