

Hate has no home
here



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There's no place in civilized society for hate yet it exists and persists with a furor. Driving through my neighborhood, I still see a few signs that bear that infamous tagline that garnered countrywide acclaim during the 2016 presidential election; one in particular has a prominent location in a front window facing the street. When I see that sign I feel a little sad because it's unfortunate that we need to be reminded not to hate.

What does it mean to hate someone and why does it appear to the norm? There no longer seems to be a middle ground, it's either love and adoration or hate and injustice. People don't agree so they try and hurt each other or worse, kill. It's baffling that there is so much discontent due to ideological differences among certain people that the only perceivable way to resolve issues is with hateful rhetoric, discrimination and violence.

Christianity is or was my religion. Many years ago, I checked off the box in the column of non-believers. It's okay, it feels right to me but my parents aren't happy, although they keep it to themselves. Religion was forced down my throat during my childhood and I rebelled in every way I could think of and when I became old enough to start doing what I wanted, I stopped going and also stopped believing, or rather started trusting what I'd already accepted: there was no God. I've never said that out loud to my parents and I never will; that belongs to me. Despite my feelings toward the Christian religion I felt different when I attended Shir Ami synagogue in Newtown. Perhaps it's because for me, it was new, different yet similar in ways to the Christian faith. Or maybe I welcomed it more because it was my decision, I went because I wanted to and hoped to learn something. Being there that evening, six days after the shooting at Tree of Life was a poignant moment

for me. There were so many people there from different churches and different faiths just offering their support and I realized I would have been there even if it weren't part of an assignment. The original reason I went that Friday night changed the minute I walked through the door and was greeted with Shabbat Shalom. I was a community member, grieving with fellow human beings about the tragedy of hate and how in a single instant, everything that matters in life can be changed forever. Everything about the service was lovely, the singing was beautiful, the accompanying band was energetic and stage-worthy, the Rabbi was gracious and welcoming, the regular members were helpful and friendly, and every single moment of the service from beginning to end was beautiful. Even in the face of insurmountable devastation and loss, the message delivered that night was one of hope. Hope to move forward, hope to rebuild the community, hope for a better future and most important, hope to forgive. During the sermon I reflected to myself about the historical hatred of Jewish people and the horror of the mass murder during WWII. How and why are peaceful people condemned on such a large scale?

Adolf Hitler may have brought notoriety to the term anti-Semitism but he didn't invent the label or the idea. Hate toward those of Jewish faith dates back to ancient times, possibly even as far back as the inception of Jewish history. Jewish people wanted to retain their cultural identity and not succumb to pressure from conquering groups to convert to the dominant religion of the time. There's strong evidence that Protestant reformist Martin Luther fostered a climate of anti-Semitism due to his initial call for acceptance and tolerance of Jews only to then reverse opinion when he saw

they weren't setting aside their Jewish ways and coming to Christ. His supporters will argue that his intolerance of them was theological and not based on race or ethnic standing. In 1543 he wrote a controversial book called *On The Jews & Their Lies* where he charges Germans with the destruction of Jews. Fast-forward to 1941 where Nazi Germany fulfills that charge. It would appear that Martin Luther prophesied the Holocaust or at the very least, laid the foundation for the propaganda that would propel a country to systematically exterminate human beings. While reading some of Luther's words in the book, he comes off as sort of jealous that the Jews regard themselves as the chosen people of God and that they descend from holy patriarchs and do nothing but boast about their place in the divine hierarchy. He talks about how God must endure them in their synagogues, with their prayers and songs and doctrines and how they come and stand before him (God) and plague him grievously (Luther, 9). He advises that their houses be razed and destroyed (Luther, 166). Luther seems bitter and suggests the Jewish people are being blasphemous and distorting the scripture or misinterpreting its meaning. This is interesting because Christianity emerged from Judaism, not the other way around. Jesus was a Rabbi first, his death and resurrection led to the belief that a new covenant had been forged with God and redemption was only possible through accepting him as Lord and savior. It's this disagreement over how to understand words in holy text that encompass both religions that has created such a rift in belief systems.

By the time Hitler rose to power in 1930's Germany, Jewish people all over Medieval Europe had experienced discrimination and were forced to live in

ghettos and in some countries, required to identify themselves as Jewish by wearing a yellow badge or a special hat. They were refused citizenship and other liberties including religious freedom. (History. com, Anti-Semitism 2018). In 1935 with the passing of the Nuremberg Laws, anti-Semitic practices and persecution of Jews became legal. The sad thing about these laws were they didn't take into account how an individual chose to identify, it proved their ancestry by determining how many Jewish grandparents they had and essentially if they had enough Jewish blood in their lineage, they were classified as Jewish. Even Jews that had converted to Christianity were no longer defined as such. Further steps were taken in efforts to render Jewish people helpless and destitute by taking away businesses and removing Jewish workers from companies, a process called Aryanizing (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The Nuremberg Race Laws.). Religiously, it didn't help that for hundreds of years, the Christian church taught people that it was the Jews that killed Jesus when in fact history will tell us it was the Romans. Jews were classified as a separate race and portrayed as weak and uncivilized.

On a November night in 1938 violence against Jewish people swept across Germany, these bouts of rioting, violence and murder were called pogroms. Hundreds of synagogues and schools were burned, Jewish-owned business were pillaged and vandalized and dozens of Jews were massacred in an event that lasted two days and historically would be known as the Kristallnacht or The Night of Broken Glass symbolic of all the shattered glass during the riots. To make the tragedy even more unbearable, the Nazi government fined Jews the equivalent of \$400, 000, 000 in U. S. dollars and

forced them to clean up after the devastation and refusing to allow them insurance payments for damages to property. Following the pogroms, Jews are finally prohibited from all aspects of public life in Germany (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The Night of Broken Glass).

The efforts to eradicate Jews from Germany had been going on for nearly a decade before the Final Solution came into existence. Jews were deported from countries all over Europe to extermination camps in occupied-Poland. During the invasion of the Soviet Union, mobile killing squads shot Jewish men, women and children, effectively extinguishing one million Jews from existence. Vans doubled as gas chambers and people were shuffled to killing centers where it's estimated that approximately six million Jews were murdered. That number doesn't take into account others that perished as a result of Nazi regime. The Jewish Holocaust is considered the worst and most widely recognized acts of genocide in history.

Anti-Semitism didn't commence with the Holocaust nor does it end there. There are still many incidents of racial discrimination against Jewish citizens all over the world, particularly in Western Europe. It affects more than just the intended races; it touches all the nearby residents, challenges beliefs about tolerance and puts democracies at risk. Islamic Extremism and Far-Right Extremism have legs in Anti-Semitic attacks on institutions and humans. Due to the ongoing conflict in Israel, the assumption by certain critics of the policies of the country believe it shouldn't even exist and that they're nothing but a terrorist state and rally to delegitimize them as a country and a people. Holocaust deniers are Anti-Semitic because they refuse to accept that Jews can be victims of something so terrible.

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Governments have long steered clear of getting involved, which sends a message to society that the behavior is okay. Violence and discrimination is on the rise in the U. S., most recently at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA but many other circumstances of hate against Jewish people have occurred at cemeteries, community centers and other Jewish locations. In the news back in October there was a prom photo circulating online of a group of male teenagers in Wisconsin giving what appears to be the Nazi salute. It's as if it's become in vogue to be a racist.

Intolerance in America and the world only seems to be getting worse or maybe it's because the ways we hear about it are 24/7 via Twitter, Facebook, cable news and any other instant-gratification way of accessing the latest must know information. It's grip is strong and shows no sign of slowing down and with the current U. S. president stoking the fires at every turn, it's no wonder people in certain groups have gained a new-found confidence to proudly wave the flag of bigotry. His refusal to denounce the white nationalist groups at the Unite the Right rally in Charleston, SC in August of 2017 stirred up significant controversy and inquiry into where his allegiances lie. Not only did he validate the state of white supremacy in this country, but he went so far as to say there was violence on both sides and that both parties were at fault. A woman named Heather Heyer was killed when a Nazi sympathizer deliberately drove his car into a group of counter protesters killing her and wounding dozens more. Ironically, she almost didn't attend the rally due to warnings of danger but she changed her mind at the last minute because she wanted to take a stand against hate and intolerance.

People must condemn these horrific actions and those that lead and govern need to denounce it as well, with a passion. Just like in Confucianism, members of society will look to their leader for guidance, acceptance and validation. There are many people out there that are vulnerable to hateful philosophies and are just waiting for the right person to give them the okay to behave as such. We, the people, have to change our hearts and our attitudes and come together to defend what's right. We're all humans first and if you're a believer then we're all God's children too.

I enjoyed learning about Judaism, the beliefs are slightly different from Christianity but religious service is quite similar in structure. Everyone I met when I attended Shir Ami was welcoming, kind and hospitable, even those that weren't members. A very nice woman sitting next to me from another synagogue offered some pointers in reading from the prayer book and I didn't even ask her for help. The rabbi was wonderful in his willingness to give a tour and answer as many questions as I had, knowing that congregants were across the hall also waiting to talk with him. He seemed genuinely pleased that I was there that night and invited me to return another time. The sanctuary was lovely, the Torah was amazing and I am so grateful I was able to see it up close. There was no hate there, nothing but love, respect and generosity. I knew more about the Jewish faith when I left that when I arrived and I feel lucky to have been part of their sacred moments. If we were all willing to step outside our own world and into someone else's with an open heart and open mind, we might learn that there is more that unites us than divides us and understanding that it's the

differences in each of us that can make societies stronger and progress us further into the future. Love and hope persist, always.