# Don’t Let Them Get You to Hate Them

How did we become so filled with hate? This is not who we are. Hate is the worst emotion of all, second only to acute jealously.

 Certain special people of late have caused a majority of us to experience derangement. Some of us have developed hunchbacks, or tics in our eyelids. Even my Buddhist friends have been feeling despair, and when they go bad, you know the end is nigh. Booker T. Washington said, “I shall allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him,” and this is the most awful thing about it. Yet part of me sort of likes it, too, for the flush of righteousness, the bond to half of the electorate. Who would we be without hate? In politics, breakups, custody disputes, hate turns us into them, with a hangover to boot, the brown-bottle flu of the spirit.

 *Hate* is such an ugly word. How about loathe for the verb, *abhorrence* for the noun?

 A friend once said that at the end of his drinking, he was deteriorating faster than he could lower his standards, and this began happening to me recently with hate. Some of my wise, more evolved friends say that loathing certain people, henceforth referred to as Them, is not worth the effort, that they are too thin as human forms to actually hate. I say, “Not for me, baby.” Others remind us they are all children of God, loved just as deeply as my grandson.

 I say, That is very nice.

 Hate, on the one hand, is comforting, but regrettably, on the other, it’s malignant. I loathe certain public individuals with great wriggling discomfort, and it steadies me. It’s not white-hot hate, as I can’t afford to be ignited and let it consume my life, but there is a lot of heat in there, a combination of sickness and fire. The fever makes me into a war zone of blasts, rubble, mission creep, and the ministrations of my own private USO. It steals me from what one might call my better angels, my higher self, my center; *c’est la gueere*. I have been one of the walking wounded for a year or so—actually more like the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead*, because we are fused with people when we hate them. We’re not us anymore. We become like them. They—Them—are really not doing anything to us. To some extent, I am doing it to myself—the zombification is complete. I’m all parts: the host, the carrier, the new victim.

 I can’t change them. So I pray. Bless them with nice retirement opportunities, and change me, but while You’re at it, help them not to blow up the entire world. Thanks.

 When I finally got to the point that I couldn’t take it anymore, I decided to put down my weapons briefly. Maybe I would end up on the winning side, calmer, or at least less deranged. So, as is my habit, I asked God for help with the mess of me. God immediately sent in two people. The first was Martin Luther King, quoted on Twitter, that hate cannot drive out hate, only love can. That sucks. Yet it was enough for me to realize that I needed palliative care. The second was an eight-year old boy.

 I asked one of my Sunday school kids if he believed God was with him, helping him. He thought about this for a moment and replied, “Maybe forty percent.”

 Forty percent! What if I could reduce my viral load by forty-percent?

 Awareness helped me make progress in my evolution, like going from finger paints to potato prints. I began to hear people who busted me. One morning recently at the beginning of her sermon, my pastor cited the same Dr. King quotation I’d just come upon, that hate cannot drive out hate, only love can, and I thought, “I heard it the first time.” Then at the end of the sermon, wrapping up, she said, sighing, “Just don’t let them get you to hate them.”

 I have not been the same. She ruined hate for me.

 Everyone with whom I shared my pastor’s words experience something similar. Haters want us to hate them, because hate is incapacitating. When we hate, we can’t operate from our real selves, which is our strength. Now that I think of it, this is such a great reason to give up our hate—as revenge, to deprive the haters of what they want.

 Some people are able to distance themselves from the people they can’t stand by simply not watching the news. Not me. Also avoiding the news sometimes just suppresses the angry, scared feelings, which can do damage internally, and unconsciously. I had always been more apt to fixate and spew, until recently when the hate started kicking my butt.

 Something that helps is to look at our adversaries as people who are helping you do a kind of emotional weight training. Nautilus for your character. They may have been assigned to you, to annoy or exhaust you. They are actually caseworkers. When my pastor calls the most difficult, annoying people in her life her grace-builders, I want to jump out the window. I am so not there yet, but I understand what she’s talking about.

 Awareness spritzes us awake. Being awake means that we have taken off the blinders. We can choose to see or to squinch our eyes shut like a child, which looks silly on people over eighty pounds. Awareness means showing up, availing oneself of the world, so there is the chance that empathy will step up to bat, even in this lifetime. If we work hard and are lucky, we may come to see everyone as precious, struggling souls.

 God is better at this than I am.

 In my defense, it is my understanding that God is both here and on another, gentler plane, and does not have my sensitive digestive system. Frederick Buechner addresses this: “And then there is the love for the enemy—love for the one who does not love you but mocks, threatens, and inflicts pain. The tortured’s love for the torturer. This is God’s love. It conquers the world.”

 I know that if I saw a child hurt an animal, God would agree with me that it wouldn’t be a good idea to buy that child a gun when he becomes a teenager. While my tea with hate helped me to see my rage toward rabid gun lobbyists, it also allowed me to notice love and compassion for that screwed up little child who must have been so violated to want to hurt animals. He must have been nearly destroyed, and thus he destroys. (Remind you of anyone?) But I am also sure there are precious, indissolubly good parts in him. The right teacher could work miracles. I was snatched off the path of self-loathing by teachers who were on the ball and saw ways to redirect my fear into creation. That would be my prayer for this child---one amazing teacher.

 Ah, prayer. In all the excitement, I’d sort of forgotten to pray. Make me a channel of Thy peace, that where there is hatred, let me sow love, or at least not fertilize the hate with my dainty bullshit.

Empathy begins when we realize how much alike we all are. My focus on hate made me notice I’m too much like certain politicians. The main politician I’m thinking of and I are always right. I, too, can be a blowhard, a hoarder, needing constant approval and acknowledgment, needing to feel powerful. This politician had an abusive father, but he managed to stay alive, unlike his brother. I don’t think he meant to grow up to be a racist who debased women. But he was raised afraid and came to believe that all he needed was a perfect woman, a lot of money, and maybe a few atomic weapons. He must be the loneliest, emptiest man on earth, while I am part of a great We, motley old us. We show up, as in the folktale about stone soup, and we bring and give and put what we can into the pot, and this pot fills up, and we know it.

No one can take this hatred off me. I have to surrender it every time I become aware of it. This will not go well, I know. But I don’t want my life’ ending to be that I was toxic and self-righteous, and I don’t know if my last day here will be next Thursday or in twenty years. …Maybe insanity will not change to wisdom and a focus on the common good anytime soon, but I can bring less hate to the pot of stone soup, the common well, less of my unbaked cake batter. More rosemary, more carrots. (That is not a bad mantra.)

 Hating the way I was feeling helped me give up Camel cigarettes thirty-two years ago, and then alcohol. It is good to surrender things that poison us and our world. Am I free of such toxicity now? Well, about forty percent, and that is a pretty good deal. I’ll take it.

 Hate weighed me down and muddled my thinking. It isolated me and caused my shoulders to hunch, the opposite of sticking together and lifting our hands and eyes to the sky. The hunch changes our posture, because our shoulders slump, and it changes our vision, as we scowl and paw the ground. So as a radical act we give up hate and the hunch the best we can. We square our shoulders and lift our gaze.