

How Not To Become a Hater

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Surely the news few years ago about Stephen Tyrone Johns, the 39 year-old man who died while working at the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C, caught your attention. Johns, a security guard for the museum was known to greet museum visitors with a smile. His colleagues called him “Big John” and they said he was an easy-going person. On Wednesday June 10, 2009 he was the target of a ‘trigger happy’, self-proclaimed white supremacist. A few minutes before the assault, Johns had greeted the man with a smile even opening the door for the senior citizen. Once inside the door, the assailant took aim with his rifle and proceeded to shoot. The quick thinking John and his fellow security guards interrupted the attack and saved the lives of many people that day. Undoubtedly, Johns sacrificed his life in the line of duty.

Notwithstanding the heroism displayed by Johns and the tragedy of his death, this incident also serves to open our eyes to the reality of the hatred that still lies within our own borders. Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, we’ve seemingly become obsessed with the enemy that is beyond our borders not realizing that we live with another enemy right at home.

This recent case, however, is a classic example of hatred that is long, profound, and persistent. Johns’ killer is 88 years old. The name of this assassin, however, will remain unmentioned in this column and further details or information about his life will be avoided. As the writer of this column, I refuse to validate this troubled soul even with one line of this space. Instead our deepest sympathies go out to Johns’ family and friends, in particular his 11-year-old son. May his son grow up surrounded by love and may he be comforted in the knowledge that his father was a hero.

However, one thing is clearly true; the assassin had 88 years of life to rectify his hateful beliefs. He chose instead to saturate his soul in hate for more than eight decades and tragically acted on these beliefs. Hate is a treacherous emotion that can undoubtedly linger in the human heart and mind for a very long time. While you and I may have a certain disdain for this particular murderer and perhaps consider him a chief hater, we also need to recognize that he is just one amongst many. And while we might find his type of hate deeply offensive, we also need to recognize that hate, hating and haters come from many other races and also belong to other religious, political and social persuasions.

There are also many other issues surrounding hate and haters that we need to take into account. Haters are hard to recognize just by observation. On the outside, everything might seem fine but on the inside lays a soul filled with anger, resentment and bitterness. Hate can cause haters to see and create enemies that are non-existent. Hate is so pervasive that it can shut down the mind of a hater to the point of ignorance. Hate does this and more and haters are

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rampant in our society today. Haters can belong to many schools of hate. There are haters who hate to see others succeed – even if these people are friends and family. There are haters who hate others for what they believe. There are haters who hate others for what they represent. There are haters who hate others who are different from them in any way, shape or form. There can be no doubt that hate is an infectious disease that troubles the minds, hearts and souls of too many.

Haters are usually deep containers for lack of knowledge. Thus, they are empty. They hate because they do not understand. They hate because they are not exposed. They hate because they are ignorant. While ignorance can be a sign of hatred, ignorance is also a sign of deep misery. Haters are unhappy people.

But, where does hate come from? A main source of hate is childhood observations. We are taught to hate, we were not born that way. Another source is personal experiences. We have an unsavory encounter with someone who is different and our pain as a result of this encounter leads us to hate. And then there is also the ignorance of the major influencers in our lives. Not only can we be deeply influenced by the people we commune with but we are also impacted by what we contemplate. Thus movies, magazines, video games etc. that promote hate can teach us to hate.

Can we eradicate hate from this world? No. This is a tough answer but it is the truth. What we can and should all do, is seek to create environments, around and within ourselves, that are hate-free. This means that our hate-free zones must begin internally and become such a natural part of who we are that wherever we go we take peace with us. Living in peace is very different from speaking of peace. A person who speaks of peace cannot guarantee that he or she lives in peace.

The beautiful thing about taking the decision to create hate-free zones within and around us can generate a domino-effect. Our hate-free zones can teach and influence those around us. Choosing to live a life that is devoid of hate is probably the most effective way of fighting hate. This means that even in our families we need to willfully choose to make our homes hate-free zones. Here are some simple ways in which we can begin to create hate-free zones that will prevent us from becoming haters:

1. Do not allow people to use derogatory words while talking about others around you
2. Give respect to get respect. We cannot demand what we don't give.
3. Stop using stereotypes that lead to generalizations – Making negative declarations about people of a certain group is a generalization.
4. Don't take hard-line positions on any given issue. Every circumstance is different.
5. Try to be open-minded about issues. Not every thing is black and white
6. Put yourself in situations where you can explore with new cultures, foods, sounds, and ideas.
7. When someone speaks, writes or acts in hateful ways around you, say something.

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