

Rising Above: Kindness, Compassion and Courtesy

A commemoration of Martin Luther King Day

Jan. 21, 2018

MLK, Jr. Somebody's Got To Have Some Sense

I think I mentioned before that sometime ago my brother and I were driving one evening to Chattanooga, Tennessee, from Atlanta. He was driving the car. And for some reason the drivers were very discourteous that night. They didn't dim their lights; hardly any driver that passed by dimmed his lights. And I remember very vividly, my brother A. D. looked over and in a tone of anger said: "I know what I'm going to do. The next car that comes along here and refuses to dim the lights, I'm going to fail to dim mine and pour them on in all of their power." And I looked at him right quick and said: "Oh no, don't do that. There'd be too much light on this highway, and it will end up in mutual destruction for all. Somebody got to have some sense on this highway."

Somebody must have sense enough to dim the lights, and that is the trouble, isn't it? That as all of the civilizations of the world move up the highway of history, so many civilizations, having looked at other civilizations that refused to dim the lights, and they decided to refuse to dim theirs. And Toynbee tells that out of the twenty-two civilizations that have risen up, all but about seven have found themselves in the junkheap of destruction. It is because civilizations fail to have sense enough to dim the lights. And if somebody doesn't have sense enough to turn on the dim and beautiful and powerful lights of love in this world, the whole of our civilization will be plunged into the abyss of destruction. And we will all end up destroyed because nobody had any sense on the highway of history. Somewhere somebody must have some sense. Men must see that force begets force, hate begets hate, toughness begets toughness. And it is all a descending spiral, ultimately ending in destruction for all and everybody. Somebody must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate and the chain of evil in the universe. And you do that by love.

Excerpt from: *Loving Your Enemies* a sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, on Nov. 17, 1957.

http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_loving_your_enemies.1.html

MLK Jr. Hate Multiplies Hate

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction.

--Martin Luther King, Jr., *"Loving Your Enemies," Strength to Love*

MLK Jr. The Ultimate Test of Character

The ultimate test of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and moments of convenience, but where he stands in moments of challenge and moments of controversy. --Martin Luther King, Jr., 27 January 1965

MLK, III Work on His Heart

In Wahington, King's eldest son, Martin Luther King III, criticized Trump, saying, "when a president insists that our nation needs more citizens from white states like Norway, I don't even think we need to spend any time even talking about what it says and what it is." He added, "we got to find a way to work on this man's heart." Referring to former Alabama Gov. George Wallace, King added: "George Wallace was a staunch racist and we worked on his heart and ultimately George Wallace transformed." King's daughter, the Rev. Bernice King, keynote speaker at the Atlanta service, also criticized Trump. "We cannot allow the nations of the world to embrace the words that come from our president as a reflection of the true spirit of America," she said. "We are one people, one nation, one blood, one destiny . . . All of civilization and humanity originated from the soils of Africa," Bernice King said. "Our collective voice this hour must always be louder than the one who sometimes does not reflect the legacy of my father."

Associated Press Jan. 15, 2018

Michelle Obama When They Go Low, We Go High

Every president and first lady face vicious criticism; most of them, however, have not had to explain it to small children. "That is what Barack and I think about every day," Obama said, "as we try to guide and protect our girls through the challenges of this unusual life in the spotlight. How we urge them to ignore those who question their father's citizenship or faith. How we insist that the hateful language that they hear from public figures on TV does not represent the true spirit of this country. How we explain that when someone is cruel or acts like a bully, you don't stoop to their level. No, our motto is, when they go low, we go high". Robin Abcarian, LA Times, July 25, 2016

Be A Mensch:

Hillel said, ". . . in a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." Pirke Avot 2:6 [Hebrew is 'ish': man, human being; Yiddish 'mensch': an honorable, decent person].

Noah, Righteous In His Generation

This is the line of Noah – Noah was a righteous man [tzaddik]; he was blameless [tamim] in his age; Noah walked with God. . . The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness. Genesis 9 & 11. [underlining added, indicates commentary]. Commentary: These cardinal terms of biblical Hebrew, **tzaddik** and **tamim**, are used here for the first time without definition, thus presupposing a clearly recognizable quality of virtue favored by God. . . [and] describes one whose conduct is found to be beyond reproach . . . As applied to human beings, **tamim** acquired a moral dimension connoting . . . a person of unimpeachable integrity." **In his age** – "In the face of universal corruption, he maintained civilized standards of behavior."

Text and Commentary from Nahum Sarna, The JPS Torah Commentary

Biblical quotes

1. Let not kindness and truth forsake you! Proverbs, 3:3
2. As mischief is the sport for the fool, so is wisdom for the man of understanding. Proverbs 10:23
3. The mouth of the righteous produces wisdom, but the treacherous tongue shall be cut off. The lips of the righteous know what is pleasing; the mouth of the wicked [knows] duplicity. Proverbs 10:31 - 32
4. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you, too, be like him! Proverbs 26:4
5. Rejoice not when your enemy falls and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles. Proverbs 16:7

Quotes from Pirkei Avot [Ethics of Our Ancestors]

1. Simeon the Just was one of the last survivors of the Great Assembly. He used to say: The world is based on three principles: Torah, worship [service], and kindness. 1:2
2. Be cautious of the ruling authorities, for they befriend a man only for their own interests; they appear as friends when it is to their own advantage, but they do not stand by a man when he is in distress. 2:3
3. Rabbi Chaninah, the deputy high-priest, said: Pray for the welfare of the government, since were it not for the fear of it men would swallow each other alive. 3:2
4. Rabbi Mattithyah ben Cheres said: Meet every man with a friendly greeting; be the tail among lions rather than the head among foxes. 4:20
5. Whoever has a generous eye, a humble spirit and a simple soul is a disciple of Abraham. . . An evil eye, a haughty mind and a proud soul are the marks of a disciple of the wicked Balaam. 5:22

Words of the Wise: An Anthology of Proverbs and Practical Axioms

Compiled by Reuven Alcalay, Massada Press, 1970

1. Humor matters a great deal, because it means both understanding and self-criticism. Wherever humour is lacking, you find narrow-mindedness. Y. Fichman, poet, 1881-1958
2. When there is no truth, there is no kindness. Nachman of Bratzlav
3. A causeless curse will rebound on its utterer in the end. Rashi
4. Dissension is a self-supporting thing, full of energy, nourished out of itself; it needs not the causes that produced it. David Remez, Israeli politician, d. 1951
5. If you are afraid, hope will be lost. Solomon ben Gabirol, Poet [Spain] d. 1070
6. Panic is like a whistle, it whistles for trouble to come. Eliezer Steinman, d. 1970
7. Do as much good as you can and not as much ill as you can. Shmuel Hanagid, d. 1056; Spanish Talmudic Scholar

8. I hope always, I long for much and expect little. V. Jabotinsky; writer d. 1940
9. Who wishes to be friendly with people should cling to good manners. Solomon ben Gabirol, Poet [Spain] d. 1070