**Responding to the Psychology of Hate**

Among all human emotions, hate is among the most powerful. It can easily bring out our worst with great harm to others. The Great World Wars, the Holocaust, the apartheid system in South Africa, genocidal massacres such as those in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Haiti, the tit-for-tat policy of the Middle East, terrorism which is on the increase here in Europe and elsewhere – the list seems never ending. A hate record that keeps mounting, and that increasingly frustrates, angers and often depresses many individuals, families and nations. Closer to home, one can mention other instances which directly or indirectly relate to hate: (hate) crimes against minorities, bullying at workplace, instilling division and provoking others through social media, hate blogs, and others.

People are not born evil. But they surely can become so, when certain factors are present.

An old Buddhist saying likens hatred to a burning hot stone you want to hurl at someone; the longer you hold onto it, the more you will get burned. The irony is that few dare to let the stone go. Why is that? By associating the emotions of anger and hatred with strength and morality, we create an impasse to ourselves. Anger and hatred are powerful emotions. They can instill fear and anxiety. Let that go, and what power do we have left?

Precisely we are left with the power to heal. Because we have reason to hate, does not mean that doing so will make us any stronger or wiser. The more we hold onto our hatred, the more we blind ourselves to the reality beyond our rage. Cling more to the injustices you may have suffered, and you are doomed to find no peace, let alone justice.

Hate is a human emotion. It is part of our survival to hate those we perceive as threating our safety. As such, it could be part of our genetic survival instinct against real or perceived threats. However, it should never be the guiding force of our lives. That’s when we can slip into problems.

Does this necessarily mean forgiveness? Maybe. The process of healing is complex, long and arduous. It is never meant to be easy. It cannot be faked, nor hurried. Above all, healing may take a lifetime and still not reach its fullness. In fact, I prefer to view it as a process, rather than a stage at any given point in time of life. It remains important to think the injury you experienced, feel it through, and then, try letting it go. We all have experienced hate at some point in time due to injuries against us. We all know very well that by holding on to hate, we reach no noble goal for us. We just prolong the inner brokenness and suffering. Above all, we choose to let ourselves be enslaved to hate.

Letting go of hatred is not easy. In a way, it is a movement against our inner instinct. However, hate is never an asset, neither to us, nor to those around us. On the other hand, letting go of hate does not imply turning a blind eye to injustice, abuse or violence. What is evil, remains evil, and needs to be addressed and dealt with as such.

‘Rot in hell’ may be the first desire we wish onto the other party. However, the truth lies elsewhere. It all depends whether we want to rectify things for the long term, and find some kind of reasonable peace ensuing this process albeit hard, or try to patch things aiming for just short term solutions, in which we could end up in a damage control situation, while creating more long term problems for us.

The renowned social psychologist Philip Zimbardo struggles with the dilemma of what makes people go or do wrong, because it seems there is a fine line between good and evil. Our world is full of both. Stories about the despicable abuses at the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq by US soldiers in 2003, shocked the world. If anything, it taught us many lessons, including how deep such evil can permeate and spread out. According to Zimbardo, to change a person, one has to change the situation or environment in which one lives in, and to change that, one has to address the system itself that creates the situation. Changing political systems, and other systems of power, is no easy task of course!

Zimbardo is famous for the Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971, which had to be cancelled due to its stark success that risked harming participants. What basically ensued can be summed up in this: any good apple can turn bad. If people are given power without oversight, that power risks abuse, which easily could become violent against others, born out of hate. The line between good and evil lies in my life’s choices, and is a fine line indeed. That is why the choices I do show the person I am.

Another area that increasingly is being researched on the reasons that make a person becoming violent and full of hate against others, regards one’s personality. Psychologists have long described three dark areas of personality, which may further contribute to this enigma: narcissism (Me = the center of the world), Machiavellianism (I consider this as many people’s 11th commandment: what suits me!), and psychopathy, where a person is inclined toward antisocial behavior and lack of empathy and remorse for others’ sufferings and tribulation.

Surely, embarking on the road towards healing is not easy, nor cheap. However, it is the most honorable and human dignified way to take. Because some others do not opt for it, is not an excuse for us to follow suit. Gandhi summed it up succinctly, but challengingly, that if the world lives by the principle ‘eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth’, it can soon become blind and toothless. The choice is obviously ours!

Michael Galea, PhD

Clinical Psychologist & Senior Lecturer

University of Malta

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