

July 22, 2015

Hate: What side do you choose?

At the end of July, a 29-year old man got into his pickup truck on a street in Queens, hit the gas pedal and ran over Sandeep Singh, a Sikh. (<http://7online.com/news/father-run-over-outside-queens-office/230925/>) The driver then dragged Mr. Singh 30 feet down the road until his body finally came loose from the truck. Mr. Singh now has 40 stitches that line his chest and scarring blisters from the asphalt (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX-ShjFRqs>).

Two weeks later on Roosevelt Island, a group of younger teens (including several girls) verbally assaulted two Sikhs, Dr. Jaspreet Singh Batra and his mother. They called Dr. Batra “Osama bin Laden.” They called his mother “a bitch with facial hair.” Then, they beat Dr. Batra in the head and back (<http://sikhcoalition.org/documents/pdf/statement-dr-jaspreetsingh.pdf>).

Wake up, America! We have a problem. It’s the disease called “hate.” And it is an epidemic.

The attacks on the Sikh community in two New York City Boroughs within weeks of each other reflect bigotry and hatred leveled against a whole people – simply because they have facial hair, wear turbans and practice a different religion. But the danger of becoming a victim of hate isn’t limited to Sikhs. The truth is that anyone can be targeted as different – because of their religion, color, or their neighborhood.

In California, a police officer brutally attacked woman, allegedly because of her race (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnpT6GLk6a0>) and, on the East Coast, police officers are being accused of racial discrimination and brutality in the homicide of a man on Staten Island (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1ka4oKu1jo>). Not to mention what has been happening in Ferguson (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/22/us/ferguson-police-protesters-and-reporters-in-an-uneasy-cast-for-a-nightly-show-in-ferguson.html>).

The simple reality is that hate against any person is hatred against all of us. I know that it could easily have been me and my mother walking down a street on Roosevelt Island, hearing anti-Jewish epithets. I could have been the one who was beaten, as my mother watched helplessly.

There are only two sides on this issue, and everyone has to choose. Silence/passivity/looking the other way is a choice. But it means that you’re tacitly agreeing to allow hate to fester and destroy. The other choice is to take action. And there are lots of ways to do this.

Just imagine if all police across the country vigorously prosecuted hate crimes and adopted zero tolerance policies for hate.

What if the U.S. media made these events more than routine news stories that intrigue and fade? What if the media helped us to really see one another? And used journalism to explain how the person who hates Sikhs also hates Jews, Muslims and Hindus? And how hate is a debilitating disease affecting our nation today?

Just think how wonderful it would be if school districts provided educators with fair and balanced

resources to help them teach about the different ways people believe and practice their religions. These materials will help kids learn that being different is normal – not something to fear and attack.

In a perfect world, hate crimes would not happen. But this, unfortunately, is the real world. We've got to find more real world solutions for the very real problem of hate. The above are just a few places where we can start.

Police are already working to stop hate crimes. *Now* is the time for zero tolerance.

The media do write about some of the stories. *Now* is the time for them to connect the dots and recognize the larger story: that hate is a disease against each of us and we urgently need a cure.

School districts must make resources available, including free webinars, materials and training opportunities for teachers. Wouldn't it be great if principals handed resources to teachers when they return to school in a few weeks?

I don't have a magic pill. I wish I did. But there are choices we can all make. It's time for you to make *your* choice.

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