

November 9, 2016

# Election 2016: What Now?

Dear Friends,

Election 2016 (and the years of escalating acrimony that preceded it) has shaken our core beliefs about ourselves and our country. Across our nation, we've lost a sense of shared values about what it means to be an American, to live in the United States, and how to be great in the 21st century. **Political leaders defined opponents as the "other" while touting fallacies as truths.** We heard them, and we believed them. Why? Because we don't talk with each other.

Now, we are left with a fractured American identity, fictionalized realities that breed stereotypes—and tribalism that is too often rooted in our religious, ethnic and social differences. **But there is an antidote: listening to one another.**

We haven't been doing much of that lately. Instead, we've heard people talking over one another, loudly declaring their truths and demonizing those who are different. The result was predictable. Right now, we find ourselves in separate camps – women and workers; Hispanics, Blacks and whites; Jews, Christians and Muslims; the alt-right, the passionate populists and the progressives.

**So this is a moment of choice.** We can remain among our tribal comrades and view others as a threat. Or, we can find our way out of the pit.

One place to start is with dialogue. **All too often dismissed, engaging in deep exploration with someone of opposing beliefs can be a more courageous act than taking up arms.** It can arouse deep-seated issues of identity, vulnerability, and a sense of being wronged. And it can also open up possibilities for understanding.

This election has left our nation battered. Now, we need to find ways to move forward, to find ways to cooperate and, at the very least, to practice tolerance of one another. One way is to adopt listening as our civic duty – not necessarily to agree, but to hear others and reject dehumanization. **Really hearing one another can be an act of compassion, and a practical and potent weapon for change.** It is a way back to respect.

At Tanenbaum we think of it this way. Tolerance is our bare minimum. **Respect for the humanity in each of us is our vision.** And if "we the people" take the first step, start talking with each other and recognize our shared humanity, perhaps our leaders will follow.

With ears open,

Joyce S. Dubensky  
CEO, Tanenbaum

*Tanenbaum is a secular, non-sectarian nonprofit that systematically dismantles religious violence and hatred through Peacemakers in armed conflicts and by tackling religious bullying of students, harassment in workplaces and disparate health treatment for people based on their beliefs.*

*More information about Tanenbaum's offerings can be found here: <https://tanenbaum.org/>*