

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Harmonizing Despite Differences

*The optimist thinks this is the best of all possible worlds. The pessimist fears it is true.
Attributed to J. Robert Oppenheimer*

I find myself conflicted these days between my optimism and my pessimism. Perhaps I watch too much news. Every day, I watch and listen to discouraging reports. Anti-Semitic actions are happening around the world. Violence in Israel continues at a seemingly never-ending pace. Hateful speech and terrorist actions flood the airwaves. Today's children are subject to daily barrages of world situations that seem to defy hope for the future.

Can this be accurate? Are the loudest headlines the ones that define our existence?

Years ago, I was listening to a group of musicians "jamming" around a campfire. As the musicians played together, the music got louder. The percussionists seemed to be the most enthusiastic, and at one point, a flute player asked for the music to stop. "The drums are so loud," he said, "that nobody can hear the flute, guitar and violin. If the drums could quiet down a little, then all the music can be heard." The drummers took great offense. "You want to silence our drums? No way!" and continued to play even louder.

Sometimes, I feel as if reasonable voices, looking to harmoniously work together for peaceful solutions, are like the softer instruments that can be overwhelmed by the louder ones. When digging deeply beyond the most dramatic events, we find levels of cooperation, caring and love that could overshadow the harshest headlines. We've seen Muslims help restore Jewish cemeteries that were desecrated by anti-Semitism. A school in Israel, "Hand in Hand," teaches Arab and Jewish children side-by-side, breaking the cycle and helping future generations learn that people are people. Palestinians and Israelis get together on land donated by a family of former PLO terrorists to learn about co-existence: "There can be no harmony until we see the humanity of the other side." (Ali Abu Awwad, co-founder of Roots www.friendsofroots.net)

Oppenheimer's quote is particularly striking when you remember that Dr. Oppenheimer was the physicist whose scientific expertise made it possible to develop the atomic bomb. This instrument that caused mass destruction also helped end World War II. It will always be a challenge to balance the strength of our ideals with the wisdom to implement it in positive ways. My uncle, Maestro Joseph Eger (z'l) was a symphony conductor. He said, "My role is to listen to the various instruments and bring them together as one." This is like our most sacred teaching, Deuteronomy 6:4, which begins with Shema/listen and ends with Echad/one. Only by listening to each other can we hope to find true harmony. Do we live in the best of possible worlds? We can, when we listen to each other and find humanity is one.

L'shalom,

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