

If hate is the problem, how can hate be the solution?

Written by Anya Cordell

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ANYA CORDELL, OCT 10 2011



Hatred is a current 'cool' fad – but a terribly dangerous one.

Four days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, three innocent men, (Sikh, Muslim and Egyptian Christian) were murdered. The killer of the Sikh victim vowed to “kill the ragheads,” shooting the first person he saw wearing a turban. A Hindu man was murdered October 4, 2001, and we just marked the 10th anniversary of the day an extraordinary young Muslim, Rais Bhuiyan, was blinded in one eye and left for dead.

Even now, articles mentioning Muslims continue to elicit strings of comments, many of which genocidally proclaim, “Kill them all.” The anti-Muslim cloud permeates our atmosphere; coloring perceptions, inciting bullying, assaults and policies.

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Rais Bhuiyan worked arduously, though unsuccessfully, to prevent the execution of his would-be killer, Mark Stroman, a swaggering self-avowed “red-neck patriot.” At his trial, Stroman raised his middle finger at the two grieving widows, whose husbands he had slain. But Bhuiyan’s compassion, transformed the murderer. “At that time here in America everybody was saying ‘let’s get them’—we didn’t know who to get, we were just stereotyping,” Stroman told a reporter. “I stereotyped all Muslims as terrorists and that was wrong.” Moments before being executed, Stroman said. “Hate is going on in this world, and it has to stop. Hate causes a lifetime of pain.”

I wish Stroman were alive to preach his epiphany to those who are writing, yelling, garnering votes and cashing in on the ongoing smear campaign against all Muslims. Like Stroman, their commentary targets without care for the true nature of those they would harm, or inspire others to harm. Their victims are considered guilty by virtue of being born Muslim.

Last month, I was the only Jewish speaker at a predominantly Muslim conference (United for Change). Every speaker condemned 9/11 and all attacks on innocents. Each acknowledged atrocities by some who have falsely usurped Islam and distanced themselves from those criminals. This is something that Christians and Jews do not seem to need to do when members of their faith commit crimes. At the closing, we read the Charter for Compassion. The other woman on the podium was wearing a headscarf. Some clerics were wearing long robes and the dome-shaped turbans routinely caricatured in anti-Muslim cartoons. The image was made for Islamophobes, who rail against all things Muslim.

Yet the woman looked like Mother Theresa or Mary, and the clerics were dressed no more strangely than the Pope.

A young woman at the conference told me that if one were devout, it would seem as if there was an air-conditioner under one’s scarf on hot days. I think the same magic device must be under Sikhs’ turbans, the anachronistic black coats and fur-trimmed hats of orthodox Jewish men and orthodox Jewish women’s wigs and the Pope’s mitre. Maybe the Dalai Lama has a magic heater under his saffron cotton for cold climates, and clothing challenges, including looking “different,” are something around which this unlikely group could form an alliance.

We have to be allies for one another. I received the Spirit of Anne Frank Award for my programs and work as an ally, post 9/11. I credit the non-Jewish friends who hid and supported Anne’s family for inspiring me to espouse the necessity of crossing gulfs on behalf of people of other religions, ethnicities, etc. I know Rais and the families of the hate-crime victims would be my ally if the tables were turned.

If those who are invested in smearing Muslims took a break from yelling and judiciously listened, I believe they would no longer be knee-jerk anti-Muslim. Islamophobes, however, deny Islamophobia while they foment it. And they seem untroubled by violence, unless it is perpetrated by Muslims.

Those whom the perpetrator of the Norway massacre credited for inspiring his vicious attacks dismissed any influence, casting aspersions instead on the victims, smearing them as Muslims and “multi-culturalists”. (A site that tracks anti-Muslim attacks, daily, is www.IslamophobiaToday.com).

As with Holocaust deniers, evidence does not deter those who smear all Muslims. But just because many people scream something does not make it true. Similar smear campaigns by intellectuals, social and political leaders targeted Native Americans, African Americans, Jews and Japanese Americans. These cases wrought untold destruction, until they were revealed as false and horrifying in the extreme. In the wake of racism, murder and genocide, profound lessons have often been realized, but too late to reverse the irreversible.

Though I continue to hold hope, logic seems lost to Islamophobes. Since Muslims are roughly 1/5 of the world’s population, they would be wrecking massive havoc, worldwide, if their nefarious goal was domination and destruction of all non-Muslims. It clearly isn’t. At the aforementioned conference, I heard absolutely no evidence of hatred directed at anyone. Yet, Muslims are chronically impugned as haters, and, therefore, worthy of hate, according to Islamophobes.

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The Charter for Compassion reminds us what makes the most sense in this crazy world: That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. I cannot top the Golden Rule, but I would also ask this question:

If hate is the problem – as it was on 9/11 – how can hate be the solution?

Anya Cordell is the author of *RACE: An OPEN & SHUT Case*. Following 9/11 Anya founded *The Campaign for Collateral Compassion* to raise awareness of the backlash against Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and others. This article was first published on *WashingtonPost.com*.