

Before It's Too Late...You Have to Be Carefully Taught!

In 1946, as the death toll from World War II was still being counted and before Israel received its United Nations charter, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein wrote a musical called "*South Pacific*". One of the songs was extremely controversial. The ironic lyrics:

<i>You've got to be taught to hate and fear, It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear, You've got to be taught to be afraid, And people whose skin is a diff'rent shade, You've got to be taught before it's too late, To hate all the people your relatives hate,</i>	<i>You've got to be taught from year to year, You've got to be carefully taught. Of people whose eyes are oddly made, You've got to be carefully taught. Before you are six or seven or eight, You've got to be carefully taught!</i>
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These words sting all the more when I read them while thinking of the situation in the Middle East today. It's hard to see how it can get any worse. When our biblical foe, Egypt, tries to broker a cease fire – just "stop the killing" – and Hamas refuses to stop sending bombs even for a few hours, what choices are there?

Every time things begin to look a little hopeful, Hamas seems to come up with a new atrocity, tunnel, rocket, kidnapping, murder, or inflaming statement.

How can it stop and what hope is there? So much comes from teaching, and unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation around. When children in the Palestinian territories are taught that Jews are inhuman, oppressive animals, they believe it. I shudder when I hear of parents who glorify their children who die while committing a terrorist act. Mariam Faraht, who passed away last year at the age of 64, was elected to the Hamas government in 2006. She was a mother of six boys, three of whom died while attempting terrorist acts. She attracted attention when she was filmed teaching her teenage son that killing Israelis is a sacred task. That son died while delivering a grenade that killed 5 students and wounded 23 others, and Mrs. Faraht said "I am proud. I wish I had more sons to offer."

Former Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, was quoted as saying, "Peace will come when the Arabs love their own children more than they hate us."

The ruling government in Gaza, Hamas, has a primary mission, to destroy Israel and continue to teach that hatred and violence are acceptable. What hope can there be? It has to come from those who learn differently.

Yes, I continue to be an optimist when I hear of other efforts that begin with children's education. One Example is "Hand in Hand" a school program in Israel, in which pre-school children through grade 12 learn together. 50 percent of the student body and faculty are Jewish Israelis; the other half are Arab. Each class is taught bilingually in both Hebrew and Arabic. The children learn, not through propaganda, but through actual experiences, that human beings are all the same. The children form friendships as they struggle to be the seed that teaches the world about peaceful coexistence. It's hard to hate people with whom you grew up, played on the playground and shared homework assignments.

While we hear inflaming news of violence, we rarely hear of the efforts of those who dedicate their lives to creating another kind of world. While the world is watching victims of war, some Arabs and Jews march peacefully together, demonstrating with their actions that, as the Hand in Hand website states "THERE IS ANOTHER WAY."

Is war the only way? With cease fire efforts stalling and constant rockets flying, it's hard to imagine another way. But, children learning can make the difference. It will take time – it's hopefully not too late. It will be worth it.

Can we re-write Rodgers and Hammerstein? Maybe a new song can be sung:

*You have to be taught, while there's still time
Before you're seven or eight or nine
To remember G-d's children are all from the Divine
You have to be carefully taught.*

With prayers that 5775 is a year we learn more about peace,

L'shalom,

Dan Gordon