

Now is the time for people to build bridges, not walls

MORAL PERSPECTIVES



RABBI IRWIN GRONER

In this month dedicated to the ideals of brotherhood, I reflect upon bridges and walls. They are the most challenging and inspiring symbols of human speech and thought.

Walls have a definite value and purpose in human life, giving us shelter, security and privacy. They enclose us in a manageable world. They define for us beyond doubt and dispute what is ours and what is our neighbor's. They are part of the necessary elements of civilized life.

But there are other walls we erect which serve no such good purpose, but are harmful to the best interests of society. Selfishness is such a wall. When a person barricades himself behind it, it becomes his prison. He fondly believes that this wall of self-centeredness will give him greater strength and security. Actually, it isolates him and shuts him off in loneliness from the great and exciting world around him.

Prejudice and intolerance, racial and group hatred are tragic walls which people build around themselves. Our age has unfortunately witnessed the erection of many such forbidding walls — walls that divide, separate and sunder the peoples of this earth. Robert Frost said it well: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall. Before I build a wall, I ask to

know what I was walling in or walling out, and to whom I was to give offense."

Over the centuries, people have had enough religion to hate each other, but not enough to love each other. Minority groups have found themselves excluded from participation in the social and economic life of the societies in which they lived. The original meaning of the word "ghetto" is a walled-off section of a city, physically separating Jewish inhabitants from contact and commerce with others. Such walls, actual and symbolic, have become symbols of degradation and destruction for all groups that have been forced to be separated and thereby rejected.

The fomenters of group hostility are still active in the world today. Even in our own country, whenever there is unhappiness, discontent or unrest, racial and religious bigots creep over the land and sow the pernicious seeds of suspicion and hate.

There are nations that put their trust and security in strong walls, in iron curtains and man-made fortresses. But they all crumble sooner or later. The mighty walls of Babylonia were utterly overthrown and, in our own age, we have seen the fall of the Soviet empire.

Our shared heritage of faith teaches us to be builders of bridges, rather than of walls. It is good to remember the word of the Prophet Malachi: "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us all? Why then do we

deal treacherously with one another?" We need to build a bridge of tolerance as we affirm the truth that there are many highways to heaven and many rooms in God's mansion.

America is a pluralistic society in which diverse religions, races and nationalities are free to express different points of view. It is almost self-evident that we shall disagree on many things. But it is more important to note that we agree on even more. We collectively believe that American life is built on a common acceptance of the Judeo-Christian ethic as the

foundation of American society and government.

We have vital concerns in American life where we should continue to build bridges. Our joint efforts can make a major contribution, and our common action can change the present and shape the future.

The condition of family life is of primary concern. We are faced with the disintegrating family. The high divorce rate, the decline of standards of sexual morality and the attenuation of parent-child relations have all assumed epidemic proportions. In the past,

standards of ethics and responsibility have been communicated in the family from one generation to another. The challenge to us, all religions, races and creeds, is to restore the quality of family life.

There are many other areas where we have joint concerns. Among them, the problems of the aged, health care, drugs and the ever-rising rate of crime. While the executive and legislative branches of government seek solutions for these problems, we must recognize that such solutions require the collective strength and moral consensus

and shared support of the American people.

We must be builders of bridges rather than of walls. Charity, compassion and magnanimity are such bridges. So are friendship, tolerance and brotherhood. "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself" is the noblest and most enduring of all the bridges ever devised.

Rabbi Irwin Groner is with Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield. If you have a question or comment, call him at 953-2047, mailbox number 1862, on a Touch-Tone phone.

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Conference on raising kids set

A parent education conference called "Raising a Well-Behaved Child" will occur 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 26, at Lahar High School in Bloomfield Hills.

•Registration fee is \$20. Call 433-0885.

James Windell, author of the book "Eight Weeks to a Well-Behaved Child" will speak.

Windell's lecture will focus on children's temperaments and how discipline must be designed to meet each child's means of dealing with the world.

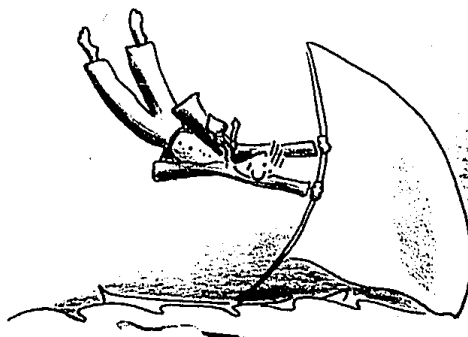
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1. Prevent forest fires.
2. Prevent forest fires.
3. Prevent forest fires.
4. Prevent forest fires.
5. Prevent forest fires.
6. Prevent forest fires.
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