

## Hate or Love?



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Let me introduce you to Václav Havel's speech, the Anatomy of Hate,<sup>i</sup> delivered in Oslo in 1990 and published in his book, "The Art of the Impossible", as Zambia finds herself drawn into a downward spiral of hate.

Havel was a dissident playwright under Czechoslovakia's communist regime who endured years of surveillance and harassment. He eventually became president of an independent Czech Republic.

He was invited by Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust, author and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, to participate in a series of Conferences on The Anatomy of Hate held in America and Norway.

The Oslo conference featured distinguished participants such as Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, François Mitterrand, Nadine Gordimer, and Günter Grass.

Václav Havel's eloquent speech was a tapestry of observation, caring, and wisdom, which only an astute student of human nature could have woven.

His insightful speech resonates today with Zambia and brings to mind a verse in Genesis 6:4.

"There were giants on the earth in those days."

There are giants in our time too who stand out like Vaclav Havel. Our world and Zambia in particular needs more like him: giants of love, empathy, compassion, caring, wisdom, servant leaders, to help us live better lives.

I think Havel's speech is apt in saving Zambia from the pit of hatefulness into which she is rapidly descending as leaders intentionally incite tribalism and threaten to "exterminate and fumigate" citizens engaged in illegal mining.

His speech helps us think deeper about hate and how to avoid its evil consequences. Havel opined that most people think of hate as coming only from the outside and not from within themselves.

He therefore looked at hatred as an observer, whose understanding of it was not profound,

but whose concern about it most definitely was.

Havel perceived that people who hated him personally, shared characteristics which, when analysed, suggested a certain common source of their hatred.

They were never hollow, empty, passive, indifferent, apathetic people. Their hatred always seemed to be the expression of a large and unquenchable longing, a permanently unfulfilled and unfulfillable desire, a kind of desperate ambition.

Havel defined hatred as, "...an active inner capacity that always leads the person to fixate on something, always pushes him in a certain direction, and is in a sense stronger than he is." He believed hatred had "a lot in common with love, chiefly with that self-transcending aspect of love, the fixation on others, the dependence on them, and in fact, the delegation of a piece of one's own identity to them. Just as a lover longs for the loved one and cannot get along without him, the hater longs for the object of his hatred. And like love, hatred is ultimately an expression of longing for the absolute, albeit an expression that has become tragically inverted."

Havel went on to say.

"People who hate ...harbour a permanent, irradicable feeling of injury, a feeling that is, of course, out of all proportion to reality. It is as though these people wanted to be endlessly honoured, loved and respected, as though they suffered from the chronic and painful awareness that others are ungrateful and unforgivably unjust towards them, not only because they don't honour and love them boundlessly, as they ought, but because they even, or so it seems, ignore them.

In the subconsciousness of haters...slumbers a perverse feeling that they alone possess the truth, that they are some kind of superhumans or even gods, and thus deserve the world's complete recognition, even its complete submissiveness and loyalty, if not its blind obedience. They want to be the centre of the universe and are constantly frustrated and irritated because the world does not accept and recognize them as such..."

Havel observed that, "The man who hates does not smile, he merely smirks; he is incapable of making a joke, only of bitter ridicule; he can't be genuinely ironic because he can't be ironic about himself. Only those who can laugh at themselves can laugh authentically. A serious face, quickness to take offence, strong language, shouting, the inability to step outside himself and see his own foolishness, these are typical of one who hates".

"The hater utterly lacks a sense of belonging, of shame, of objectivity. He lacks the capacity to doubt and ask questions, the awareness of his own transience and the transience of all things...a sense of proportion.

The hateful person lacks the measure of things, the measure of his own possibilities, the measure of his rights, the measure of his own existence and the measure of recognition and love that he can expect. He wants the world to belong to him with no strings attached...he wants the world's recognition to be limitless. He does not understand that the right to the

miracle of his own existence and the recognition of that miracle are things he must earn through his actions. He sees them, rather, as a right granted to him endlessly, unlimited and never called into question. In short, he believes that he has something like an unconditional free pass anywhere, even to heaven. Anyone who dares to scrutinize his pass is an enemy who does him wrong.”

Václav Havel’s analysis of individual hatred stretched to collective hatred.

He suggested that, “Group hatred, be it religious, ideological or doctrinal, social, national or any other kind, is a kind of funnel that ultimately draws into itself everyone disposed toward hatred. . . Collective hatred shared, spread and deepened by people capable of hatred has a special magnetic attraction and therefore has the power to draw countless other people into its vortex, people who initially did not seem endowed with the ability to hate. They are merely morally small and weak, selfish people with lazy intellects, incapable of thinking for themselves and therefore susceptible to the suggestive influence of those who hate.

The attraction of collective hatred, infinitely more dangerous than the hatred of individuals for other individuals, derives from several apparent advantages which Havel highlighted in four ways:

One, collective hatred eliminates loneliness, weakness, powerlessness, a sense of being ignored or abandoned. This, of course, helps people deal with lack of recognition, lack of success, because it offers them a sense of togetherness.

Two, the community of those who hate offers a great advantage to its members. They can endlessly reassure one another of their own worth, either through exaggerated expressions of hatred for the chosen group of offenders, or through a cult of symbols and rituals that affirm the worth of the hating community. . .

Three, whereas individual aggressiveness is always risky because it raises the spectre of individual responsibility, a society of hating individuals in a sense legitimizes aggressiveness. Expressing it as a group creates the illusion of legitimacy or at least the sense of a “common cover.” Hidden within a group, a pack or a mob, every potentially violent person can dare to do more; each one eggs the other on, and all of them . . . justify one another.

Four, the principle of group hatred considerably simplifies the lives of all those who hate and all those who are incapable of independent thinking, because it offers them a very simple and immediately recognizable object of hatred.

This was the essence of Václav Havel’s speech. We note from it traits prevalent in Zambia’s political environment evidenced in the hateful voices of leaders lacking in the milk of human kindness. Stripped to its core hatred is the incapacity to love others.

Havel’s speech subtly inspire us to reflect not on selfishness and the toxicity of hate, but on its antidote the love of people. This is what as Zambians we need to fix our attention on. Let us think of it as the competition of loving one another.

The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr., pointed to this when he said:

“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”<sup>ii</sup>

Only love. Let us as Zambians nurture love because it is what defines our humanity or Ubuntu. Let us comprehend that every person in life is precious created in the image and likeness of God who is Love.

The mystery of life is that God who is Love hides in us. It’s a truth acknowledged in one form or another in the world’s philosophies and religions as: “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21)

To be authentic individuals is to be connected to this sacred space within us. It is our connection to God that defines our humanity and disconnected from God we become evil.

Love is the kingdom of God. This is the message of the Gospel summed up in these two great commandments: to love God and to love others as ourselves.

To love our neighbours means in the words of a great Pharisaic teacher of the first century Hillel, “What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbour.”<sup>iii</sup>

In other words what is loving to you do to your neighbour. Zambia’s language should be love not hatred; and Zambia’s politics should be of love, decency, and wholesomeness.

How this is possible is nestled in a verse in the letter to the Philippians 4:8;

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Let us think about such things dear Zambians to become giants of love, of compassion, of empathy, of caring, of unity, of grace, so we can develop Zambia wholesomely.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.muzeuminternetu.cz/offwebs/czech/353.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/knowledge-hub/all-resources/martin-luther-king-quotes-human-civil-rights/>

<sup>iii</sup> "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour" is a famous summary of the Jewish Torah taught by the sage Hillel the Elder (c. 60 BC–AD 9), found in the Talmud (Shabbat 31a). Often called the "Golden Rule" (in its negative formulation), it means: "That is the whole Torah; the rest is interpretation; go and learn"