

Your Right. Your Duty.

“They hate us. They want to destroy us. They have valuable resources. We must take their resources away and prevent them from doing us harm!”

When I heard this stunning sound bite, I was absolutely aghast. It struck a deep discord.

When you hear commentary from “authorities” who sound impressive and convincing, do you buy it hook, line, and sinker? Please don’t do that. Stop. Think. Use your own judgment. Be your own person. When you have a gut reaction of something that does not ring true, examine the words, follow the logic, and use your imagination

Examine the words

Precisely who are “they” who are out to do us harm? Are “they”

- All persons with the same religion or nationality; ethnic group or political party?
- All persons with the same first name or last name; with the same income bracket or zip code?
- All persons who are members of the same club?

Though individuals within each of these groups have some common characteristics, they also have real differences. There is variation within every group, just as there are common characteristics across groups.

For example, Nobel Prize winners and Olympic champions cross religious, national, ethnic, political, and other lines as do crooks, liars, bullies, and other less than admirable individuals.

Beware of generalizations and stereotypes that depersonalize others.

What gives “us” the entitlement to take “their” resources? Whether the resources are natural products that come from the land and sea; riches that are part of others’ intellectual capital; or others’ homes, families, employees, or armies; what makes it acceptable to take their treasure as our own?

The Old Testament speaks of “justice, justice.” The first utterance refers to “justice as the means to an end”; the second utterance refers to “justice as the end.” Taking others’ resources is not a just means regardless of the desired outcome.

Beware of the means used to reach the end. If the means is not just, the result will not be just.

Follow the logic

In addition to examining the words that do not ring true, use logic to follow an argument to its conclusion.

Assuming that “they” are out to harm us and we help ourselves to “their” resources, we create others who are damaged, defeated, demoralized, wounded, and angry. We become rich, strong, powerful, and “safe”—or do we? What kind of relationship can such disparate groups ever have that will be meaningful and good?

Logic tells me that diminishing others robs them of the opportunity to grow, develop, achieve, and prosper. It tells me that taking what is not ours impoverishes the taker, maybe not in monetary ways, but in other ways that really matter!

Beware of what you take from others. Those who are truly rich are the givers of this world.

Use your imagination

To challenge the sound bite or commentary for its flaws, use your imagination and write a story. Here's a story that I imagined:

“They” are all of the members of a fishing community. The fish have wonderful medicinal qualities that cure life-threatening diseases. Some of “them” don't like their neighbors who pollute the waters and poison their fish. Some of “them” in the fishing community scream and protest and fill the news with dissent in order to stop this pollution. Their inland neighbors—some of them rich and powerful—say, “We must stop them. We will take over their fisheries. They are profitable. They should not use their profits to criticize and challenge us.”

The powerful, mighty inland neighbors took over the fisheries. In time, the fish no longer had medicinal properties. The fishing community became sicker. Their inland neighbors did, too.

Challenge what you hear, what you read, what you see. Take time to think for yourself.

Summary

When you hear melodic words that are sorely off key, examine the words, follow the logic, and use your imagination

Stop. Think. It is your right. It is your duty!