

## Indivisibly One

On July 3, 2018, the literal eve of our great country's Independence Day, I had an interesting conversation with a friend who is an immigrant from Brazil. She was reflecting on how our two nations were formed; things like what was the same and what was different about the process of forming a nation. This got me thinking about differences, and commonalities. That has led me to a few small thoughts that I hope you will consider.

You will recognize: "*I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation [under God], **indivisible**, with liberty and justice for all.*"

Are we indivisible; **indivisibly one**?

There is not one Presidential primary or election (and mostly true of the interim elections as well) since I turned 18 for which I have not cast a vote. So much has changed since my first election! Sometimes my preferred candidate won, sometimes they did not. Whoever ended up in the Oval Office or Congress [or the Supreme Court], no exceptions, put forth directions of policy, law and vision that I agreed with, and disagreed with. When I agreed with them, I did not **deify** them. And when we disagreed, I did not **demonize** them. They are, after all, just imperfect humans, like me and you, with varied ideologies and strategies and abilities. Still, it has become popular to deify and demonize. Why?

It is a testimony to our current cultural climate that we as a society not only tend to prefer focusing on labels instead of persons, we *assign* those labels to persons without careful dialog. There have been times when others *assigned* particular political positions to me purely on the basis of their presumption as to my political affiliations without ever having a conversation with me on the specific positions they so quickly assigned to me. If they had, they may find their labels don't easily fit. That is the magic of dialog with a *person* - you get to know *them*, not a label.

Once upon a time, a majority of white people presumed to assign to non-white people a whole assortment of (primarily negative) attributes without ever speaking with those people individually about those things. To *assign* a **preconceived attribute** to all persons of a common color, sex, height, origin, religion, shape of their cranium, even political leaning, etc. without personal knowledge of that person - is the very definition of prejudice. This great advancement of the civil rights movement is a point of commonality: we all agree that *prejudice is not constructive*. And yet, "political prejudice" is apparently the one remaining "politically correct" prejudice.

Modern psychology has taught us that if two parties in a relationship do nothing but focus on the differences, the relationship weakens because the differences grow. Conversely, by focusing on the commonalities, the relationship strengthens because the commonalities grow, despite the differences. I call these, respectively, a **difference-focused mindset** and a **commonality-focused mindset**.

With a commonality-focused mindset comes strength that empowers us to constructively deal with our differences. The reverse is rarely, if ever, true. Difference-focused mindsets *never* empower us to constructively deal with our differences, never mind grow our commonalities. **Both mindsets are one-way arrows; one strengthens, the other weakens.** Which would you choose? As this goes for relationships, so goes our society as well.

Like many others have said, our society is acrimonious; that we have lost civility. There is a part of me that reluctantly acknowledges this, but there is a bigger part of me that is absolutely convinced that there is more that unites us than divides us... if we just **listen** to each other.

One of those things is that we all care about our nation. If we didn't, we wouldn't be so invested and acrimonious. The opposite of love is not hate, it is apathy. We all **love** our nation. But perhaps each of us, in different ways, fear that it is slowly (or quickly) becoming a nation we don't **like**. To say that is actually a difference-focused mindset. A commonality-focused mindset says it is a nation we both still love and like, but there are *specific things* about it that each of us don't like. Again, the more we focus on the *don't-like* parts, the more those parts grow and divide us. The more we focus on the *do-love* part, the more we will constructively deal with the don't-like parts. Which mindset makes more sense?

Let me ask you: do we really think that the Russians only sowed seeds of division in the 2016 election? Do we not think they are sowing other seeds of division? And why not; they know that a nation divided is weakened. They use our differences to divide us because they know we've lost our commonality-focused mindset. Let us find it again.

These attacks on our oneness are our real enemies, not each other. We **are** stronger than that and we **are** more one than that - if we choose to focus on what we have in common.

*Our strength is not in our differences per se, it is in our ability to be one in spite of them by staying focused on the greater things we have in common.* That is a commonality-focused mindset. I think that is how our nation of immigrants with pervasive differences born of many cultures, became so great. Because in spite of the differences, they shared a commonality-focused mindset.

This is not to say that we should ignore those differences we truly observe (versus preconceive and then assign) in others. Sure, we can and should talk about them, but always, *always*, within the greater context of oneness. The oneness that is **indivisible** and flows from a commonality-focused mindset.

I ask you to think about what you have in common with everyone else, including those you don't *think* share some of your views (you might be surprised). **Search** for those commonalities. Talk about them. Celebrate them.

For years I've said "community" looks and sounds a lot like "common unity." But put a simple "un" on the front of both respectively and you get "uncommunity" vs. "uncommon unity." Two things that were once the same have become two things that are opposite, because that little "un" focuses on difference. See how much a little difference divides?

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You might wonder why I've placed the part "under God" in brackets (a common tool to mean 'optional') while emphasizing the "indivisible" word. I do this deliberately because I respect that some object to the particular inclusion, and some prefer it. I emphasize that the vast, vast majority of that pledge - particularly the indivisible part - is what we have in common. That is a commonality-focused mindset.

Tweet what you think makes us **indivisibly one** with the hashtag: **#IndivisiblyOne**. Share what you find in common with others, even those with whom you have differences. Have a commonality-focused mindset and you'll help others have one too. Our nation *needs* it.