

Dear Sarah,
dear John,
dear members and friends of the Rossing Center,
dear friends of INTRA,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honor for me to give the laudatory speech for the “Healing Hatred” project, a project of the interfaith Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue. I must confess that I did not have the Rossing Center in my focus during the first years of my involvement in the Middle East. I was all the more impressed by the Rossing Center and its work when Sarah Bernstein and Daoud Nassar from Tent of Nations stood together on the podium at the Deutsche Evangelische Kirchentag / German Protestant Church Congress in 2019. This was followed in the years after by meetings with Ophir Yarden, Sarah Bernstein and John Munayer. Some of them face to face, others via Zoom. A visit to Jerusalem last April was prevented by the rocket fire from Iran, but hopefully it has only been postponed, not canceled. Of the many interfaith projects of the Rossing Center – all worth to award prizes - one project takes center stage today, the “Healing Hatred” project. Today it is being awarded the INTRA Project Prize, which is endowed with 5000 euros and is awarded annually to innovative projects for interreligious understanding.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
dear friends

A well-known biblical text contrasts love and hate on almost the same level. I am talking about the Book of Ecclesiastes, also known as Kohelet. Traditionally, this book is attributed to King Solomon. Historically, this cannot be upheld. Either way, it is a piece of world literature. In this book, the author reflects on coming into being and passing away and he states, also with a certain resignation: “There is a time for every matter under the heaven.” Alongside many of the things he lists, love and hate are also mentioned: “There is a time for love and a time for hate; there is a time for war and a time for peace.”

The text is well-known and has been very influential. However, I would like to take issue with three points, to intervene and to shout a big and loud “but”. I would like to contradict, to add or at least to question this simple sentence.

1. are the time of love and the time of hate really balanced? My impression is that we are living in a time in which hate occupies a much larger space in politics and society than love. The latter, on the other hand, is relegated to private life. Love is allowed in soap operas, however: hate is allowed on social media.
2. one might have the impression that love simply turns into hate and that hate by itself is transferred to love after a while. But that is a deceptive impression. Anger fades, but hatred bites deep; hatred spreads. Therefore: It takes effort, enormous effort, to defeat hatred.
3. love is constructive, hate is destructive. What love has built up over a long period of time, will be destroyed by hate in a very few moments. And vice versa: what hate has destroyed does not heal by itself; it has to be built up over a long period of time. Hate destroys trust. It takes time, patience and repeated conversations and encounters to build new trust.

The “healing hatred” project addresses precisely these issues. It affirms that trust and loving coexistence cannot be taken for granted. In Israel in particular, the coexistence of religions, nations and cultures is overlaid with mistrust, pain and hurt. Jews and Palestinians alike are traumatized, that is reality in the Middle East. It is perhaps less about love for one another, but always about constructive coexistence, in which justice and peace can be increasingly realized.

“Healing hatred” is aware that the hatred and the injuries will not go away by themselves. According to the initiators of “healing hatred”, it requires a reflective method. First and foremost, it requires moments of self examination and spiritual counseling. In this request, the questionnaire that the participants of healing hatred receive and complete is very important. I was particularly moved by the questions about who my angel is who accompanies me and what my demons are. If you want to heal hatred, you also need an image of love. The questionnaire from “healing hatred” also asks this question.

In the current situation, in which so many people in Israel and Palestine are increasingly isolated and embittered, healing hatred focuses on the spiritual and religious roots. The religious roots of individual people and thus also the religious roots and dilemmas of the conflict. I can only be open to others if I am aware of my own roots. Healing hatred is therefore first and foremost an encounter with myself, with my hatred, my suffering, but also with my hope.

The Rossing Center's “healing hatred” project is a way of combating our own hatred and protecting the seed of hope. I am delighted that this initiative has been awarded the INTRA Project Prize today. It is a good choice.

Thank you very much for your attention.