



Based on NPR's long-running radio show, THIS I BELIEVE, an eclectic group of City Congregation members offered their own reflections and joined this international conversation. Presentations were shared at Shabbat, Nov. 20, 2009.

I Believe in Humor
Middy Streeter

I believe in the power of humor. Specifically I believe in the power of humor to help solve any and all problems. Although a sense of humor can't solve many problems by itself, what it can do is serve as an essential catalyst to enlightened thinking, which really can settle all major issues.

The difficulty posed by the need for enlightened thinking, of course, is that there is never enough of it. And it's often in short supply at the key moments when discussions are on the verge of breaking down. Something humorous at these times can prove to be a key factor because it can help to ease situations so that participants can better reconsider their positions.

For example, I believe that no matter how much people may disagree with each other when trying to do things like forge peace accords, there is at least one other person in the world that they can all completely agree is extremely annoying, and from there common ground can begin to be constructed. An excellent example of someone who could be very successful at building the kinds of bridges that can grow out of a sense of shared disdain is our very own former president George W. Bush; in fact I believe that the near universal dislike that he managed to foster so effectively could become his greatest legacy for a more harmonious future for mankind.

I believe that we almost always overestimate our capacity for enlightened thinking and often find ourselves at a loss when our good intentions are insufficient for the issue at hand. We need to know that there is always more than one path to any destination, and humor can help us to figuratively take a deep breath so that we can better see alternative solutions.

While I remain convinced of the power of humor, in my own case it's mostly an act of faith because my own very minimal sense of humor regularly deserts me whenever I'm in need of enlightened thinking. In these situations I tend to fall back on my own particular contingency plan which I believe could play a much smaller but still not altogether negligible role in the world of conflict resolution. It may not be as reliable as a good sense of humor, but it's at least worth a try. If every negotiator could learn to do just a little juggling, I'm telling you the world would be a better place!

[I then do a little juggling.]

Over night! Honest to god!