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“Advice for Living”

December 1958
Chicago, Ill.

Maude Ballou sent Ebony a draft of this column, King's last for the magazine, on 28 October. King discontinued "Advice for Living" after doctors advised him to limit his commitments following his stabbing.¹

Question: *I was shocked by the recent attack on you. What are your current plans? What can I do to help you and the work to which you have dedicated your life?*

Answer: I am very happy to know of your deep concern over the unfortunate incident that I recently experienced in New York City. Such expressions of genuine concern are of inestimable value in giving me the strength and courage to face the ordeal of this trying period. My future plans include a few more weeks of convalescing which my physicians strongly urge. After that, I plan to rejoin the ranks of those who are working ceaselessly for the realization of the ideal of freedom and justice for all men. I do not have the slightest intention of turning back at this point. There are several ways that you can help in this struggle—a struggle that may well determine the destiny of our nation. First, the struggle ahead will entail tremendous financial responsibilities. This means that all of the financial aid that you can possibly give to civil rights organizations will be extremely helpful. Also, your moral support will be needed. And above all, you can help by taking a nonviolent, yet determined stand against segregation and discrimination wherever you find it in your local community.

Question: *Reporters say you demonstrated unusual grace after the attack. How can one reach the peace and inner certainty you seem to have? And what are your feelings about the repeated attacks on you and your family, despite your oft-proclaimed message of love and nonviolence?*

Answer: If I demonstrated unusual calm during the recent attempt on my life, it was certainly not due to any extraordinary powers that I possess. Rather, it was due to the power of God working through me. Throughout this struggle for racial justice I have constantly asked God to remove all bitterness from my heart and to give me the strength and courage to face any disaster that came my way. This constant prayer life and feeling of dependence on God have given me the feeling that I have divine companionship in the struggle. I know no other way to explain it. It is the fact that in the midst of external tension, God can give an inner peace. As far as the repeated attacks on me and my family, I must say that here again God gives one the strength to adjust to such acts of violence. None of these attacks came as a total surprise to me, because I counted the cost early in the struggle. To believe in nonviolence does not mean that violence will not be inflicted upon you. The believer in nonviolence is the person who will willingly allow himself to

540 1. Ballou to Hazel A. Henry, 14 July 1959. Plans for King to write an opinion column for *Ebony* beginning in early 1959 never materialized (Lerone Bennett, Jr. to King, 17 November 1958).

be the victim of violence, but he will never inflict it upon another. He lives by the conviction that through his suffering and cross bearing, the social situation may be redeemed.

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Question: *Some liberal whites blame Negro leaders for the present integration crisis. They say the Negro should stop filing law suits and give up some of his constitutional rights in order to live at peace with his white neighbors. Do you agree?*

Answer: The present integration crisis has not been brought about by Negro leaders. The crisis has been brought about by individuals who are using all types of subversive methods to resist the law of the land. If this resistance did not exist, there would be no crisis in race relations. I do not agree that Negroes should stop filing law suits and give up some of their constitutional rights in order to live at peace with their white neighbors. To do this would be purchasing peace at too great a price. It would not bring true peace. It would mean a negative, undesirable peace. It would also mean that the Negro allows himself to cooperate with evil. This would be both immoral and unchristian. It is not enough to cooperate with good; we must refuse to cooperate with evil.

Question: *I am the butt of all my husband's jokes. He seems to receive pleasure from degrading me in company. He always makes cracks about my family. Some of them are true, but they always hurt. What can I do?*

Answer: I think there are two ways to approach this problem. First, you should sit down with your husband and in a calm dispassionate manner have a heart to heart talk with him concerning the displeasure and embarrassment that his public jokes are causing you. Maybe he is not aware of the damage growing out of such actions. You should also point out to him that he is not only hurting you, but in a real sense he is hurting himself. He will begin to show up before people in a bad light. Secondly, you should examine yourself and ask the question of whether there is anything in your personality that precipitates this type of action from your husband. Sometimes individuals embarrass other individuals in public in an attempt to pay them back for being humiliated in private. Ask yourself whether you are doing anything, even unconsciously, to arouse a resentful attitude on the part of your husband. This type of thorough self-examination might well be the solution to your problem.

Question: *Are there any similarities between the recent bombings of Jewish Temples and the bombings of Negro churches in Montgomery? Is there a close connection between racial and religious bigotry?*

Answer: There is definitely a similarity between the bombings of Jewish Temples and the bombings of Negro churches in Montgomery. They are similar in the sense that both grow out of hate, bitterness, prejudice and misunderstanding. These bombings reveal to us that hate never limits itself to the object that it starts out hating, but it ends up hating everything in its path. The tragedy of hate is that it can never be limited to controllable boundaries. If a white person starts out hating the Negro, he will end up hating members of other minority groups and even other white persons. Start out with racial hatred and you will end up with religious bigotry. Hate, like wildfire, continues to spread and spread until it touches everything in its path.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

3 Dec **Question:** *It is often said that you can't change deep-seated customs by passing laws.*
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Answer: This is not entirely true. It is true that laws cannot change internal prejudiced attitudes, but they can control the external effects of bad attitudes. While a law cannot make an employer have compassion for an employee, it can keep him from refusing to hire individuals because of the color of their skin. Laws do not change attitudes, but at least they control behavior. We need laws to change the habits of men while we wait on religion and education to change their hearts.

PD. *Ebony*, December 1958, p. 154.