Dr. Martin Luther King once said “Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” By not realizing our ignorance, we will never be able to find the truth. By not knowing that we have an unwarranted or offending prejudice, we find ourselves stuck with it without realizing how wrong it is. How can we become better and get over these prejudices and misconceptions when we never realize we have them? If we are to become the best people we can be, or rather, the best nation and civilization we can be, we will not only have to identify but also get rid of all our invalid prejudices and purge our ignorance.

These prejudices hold us back, separate us in ways we do not even recognize, and, if we are not careful, they can and will rip us apart. There are many reasons why ignorance and prejudice are so dangerous, especially when they arise at the same time. First of all, any type of ignorance can be extremely harmful since it is based on a lack of knowledge. Basically, ignorance is just being uninformed. Prejudice is something deeper. In fact, prejudice is formed from ignorance. At times, these two can be so closely intertwined that it is hard to tell the difference in action. Prejudice can be based on ignorance because it is born in lies and misconceptions that can quickly become violent and harsh. Not only are they intertwined, they are both highly contagious.

They are a parasite to the mind, a highly advanced infectious disease traveling from one mind to the next. They do this by preying on the young, the weak-minded, and all those without their own ideals searching for something to believe and grasp on to. It can be children, teenagers, adults, the elderly, anyone. Everyone is highly susceptible to prejudice because it is highly believable. A seemingly mundane example of this happened to my mother. As a child, she was one of the only Jewish kids in her class. One day, a little boy came up to her and asked her where she was hiding her horns. That boy did not realize he was being prejudicial and that his comment was offending. He truly believed that it was a valid question. That question was asked out of pure, unadulterated ignorance. After that, he told a few classmates. Ignorant as they were about issues like these, like most children are, they believed him. Though he did not realize it, he had demonstrated exactly what I like to think of as the ripple effect of prejudice.

In modern day, occurrences such as my mom experienced are fewer and farther between than they used to be, but they are not entirely unheard of. I feel that it is my responsibility to speak up if I ever encounter such a situation. As I said, prejudices arise from ignorance. As ignorance is the absence of knowledge, I feel a good first step to take is to speak up against prejudice to try and educate that person on the subject. I will not only try and educate the person right then and there, but I feel that it might also be necessary to educate myself more on the subject and then try to meet up with them later on. For example, if someone in my class came up and asked where my horns were, I would first explain that Jews do not have horns and add that their question derives from an old prejudice that arises from the idea that all Jews are affiliated with the devil. I would then educate myself more on what really led to this statement. I might research the history of it, who started it, where it comes from, and why it was first started. In this way, I will be able to peacefully and effectively help that person overcome their prejudice while simultaneously educating them, and even myself, on the subject.

I feel that in our fight to end prejudice it is not only important to educate one person at a time, but also to have many become aware and educated of the topic at once. One way I can do this is by having a peaceful protest like Dr. King did. The audience might be limited, so I can film it and put it online so that it gets a larger audience. I can also post about the issue online which can be very effective because the internet touches so many people. I can set up posters around my neighborhood to raise awareness, I can go and present about it in school, or I can even start a club. If there is not an organization for the issue, I can start one, and if there already is one, I can join it or donate to it. No matter how big or small, every action is of substantial significance.

As a result of ignorance, prejudice forms, spreads, and affects us all unknowingly. The truth is that the more ignorant we are, the more susceptible we are to prejudice. It is so dangerous because as soon as someone shares it with others, they adopt it as their own. Like a virus, it spreads very quickly because it is so easy to believe. Though it will be hard, seemingly impossible, I truly believe that if we can band together and try our hardest, we can defeat the world’s worst demons once and for all, ignorance and prejudice.

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