

The blind world

By Bill Kilpatrick

I DON'T KNOW how many times that I had to break up a fight between my kids after one of them came to me and said that their brother or sister hit them and then when I brought the other party in for interrogation and I asked the question, "Why did you hit them?" Their response was almost always they hit me first. This reminded me of The Simpsons episode where Lisa and Bart are arguing whether or not two wrongs make a right and Lisa asks Homer and his response is, "Two wrongs make a right Lisa." There definitely seems to be something within human nature that makes us want to not treat others like we want to be treated, but to treat others like they treat us. This makes me wonder if there are times that it's okay to treat others like they treat us? There definitely is some logic behind the idea of giving people back what we think they deserve, in fact it's even written in the Bible that an "eye for eye" is a perfectly just way to deal with someone who has wronged you. The idea of Karma speaks to the same logic. If you steal from me, I get to steal from you, if you hit me, I get to hit you back, if you murder someone you should lose your own life, but would this actually create a more just world or would it simply escalate violence and negative behaviour? The idea of deterrence plays a big part here, being that if I know I will lose my life by taking someone else's I'm going to be less likely to do so, but we know from statistics that the death penalty does not deter people from killing each other, meaning that the logic does not come full circle. More and more I see memes on Facebook that speak to the belief that what kids need these days is a good kick in the arse to straighten them out because kids have no respect. I've also seen memes that say things like "when I did something wrong as a kid I got a whoopin and I learned respect and to not do it again and I turned out alright." However, since I don't actually know if they are alright or what that even means, it appears that it's just a lame justification to beat your kids because you were abused. My step-father gave me the belt as a child and I'll tell you right now I didn't "learn respect" what I learned was fear and I also learned a very twisted idea of what "love" is. Love in my house was not patient or kind, it was easily angered and constantly kept a record of wrongs, but it had parental authority on its side and that made it right, in the "might is right" sense. What I constantly heard as a child was that this was the way he was raised and he turned out alright. For me someone who hits an eight year old child with a belt is not "alright." Physical punishment is not a teaching tool, it speaks to a lack of conflict management skills, communication skills, and problem solving skills and is only used to maintain parental authority. Should we treat kids like they treat us, or should we lead by example instead of being the example? Given that humans learn by watching others, the idea of "do as I say and not as I do" is nothing but another lame excuse for parents to maintain authority despite their hypocritical behaviour. One of my other jobs, besides working at the newspaper, is being a facilitator for a program that helps men learn non-violent way to deal with conflict with their spouses and this is an excellent example of why an "eye for an eye" will never create a just society. Many of the men that I deal with justify their abuse towards their partners using the "she did it first" logic, which is what we call retributive justice which considers proportionate punishment a morally acceptable response to wrongs that have been done to us. So, when a woman hits a man should he be able to hit her back and would such a response be considered proportionate? Obviously not, men are inherently stronger than women and therefore to respond in kind would be disproportionate given the different physical make up. The men also almost always say that they called their partner names because she did it first. This, to me anyway, is the sign of someone who does not have their own moral and ethical code and instead basis their behaviour on how others act towards them. They are reactive, not pro-active. Just because something feels right does not make it right. It may feel good to get pay back, or to "teach" someone a lesson, to "teach" your child respect using corporal punishment, but if the pay back just equals more pay back and no one actually learns anything then what has actually been accomplished? The situation in Palestine is a perfect example as there have been atrocities on both sides, and they are constantly invoked by both sides to justify more atrocities, but like the abusive relationship, one party, Israel, is substantially stronger than the other and often abuses that power at the expense of the other. So, whose behaviour is just? The oppressed or the oppressor. If the oppressed commit atrocities does that make them more just? There is an old Chinese proverb that says when you seek revenge you should begin by digging two graves. If we want a more just world then we have to treat our children justly, if we want a kinder, gentler world then we must teach that to our children through our behaviour; it all begins with us. If we are to maintain our "civilization," and I use that word loosely, we cannot base our behaviour on those with the worst behaviour because if we constantly respond in-kind to those people that will only lead us into barbarism, where might is right and we are all blind, as Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye and soon the whole world is blind."