

Live With Love

This talk is about three words. Three words that I hope will inspire you to leave this sanctuary, go out into the world, and be the best of you. These three four letter words, that's right, four letter words – these three four letter words can make a difference in your life, because these words are, as Rabbi Akiva thought of it, the guiding principal of the entire Torah. And when you hear them, you may think, “Really, that's it?” the more I thought about it, I came to the conclusion: Yes, that is it.

LIVE WITH LOVE

It sounds so simple. LIVE WITH LOVE. “I do that every day,” you're thinking, “I love people.” Some of you might say, “I love my family, my friends, my co-workers, my dog.” Yes, that could be true – but do you? Do you LIVE WITH LOVE as you interact with your family, your friends and co-workers, your dog. It's funny, as I'm writing this, it occurs to me that the only one on that list that I'm pretty certain we all LIVE WITH LOVE towards is the dog. And I would also imagine that some here who don't have family or friends closely around them for so many reasons, but that doesn't matter for the sake of these three words. To LIVE WITH LOVE, it's a disposition, a mind-set, an awareness of every interaction.

It is a difficult endeavor, but as I see it, two things need to happen in order for us to LIVE WITH LOVE:

1. We must allow ourselves to release the negative influences that prevent us from living with love.
2. We must learn how to LIVE WITH LOVE as a natural way of existing.

I will tackle the first today, and on Yom Kippur, the second. This way, it'll give you something to think about next week while we are delving into the negative influences that keep us from being our best selves, and then, we can come out of Yom Kippur inspired to be that best self, armed with a battle cry from within: LIVE WITH LOVE.

This entire theme was cast from the line Rabbi Geller introduced last night, that comes from the Holiness code in Leviticus. “Love your fellow as yourself.” (some translate “neighbor,” but there is a word for neighbor, so I chose fellow to universalize the concept) Last night, Rabbi Geller spoke about the meaning of this verse, and as I mentioned, Rabbi Akiva called it the central principal in all of the Torah. But I want to draw your attention to the fact that this is the 206th *commandment* in the Torah. Not the 206th suggestion or recommendation, or 206th piece of advice. It's a commandment like “do not murder” is a commandment, or “don't steal.” It's one of the have-to dos in the Torah, and yet, it has been relegated to something that might come up in conversation through it's popular name: “The Golden Rule.” But do you think of it as a rule, or a pithy statement that seems right.

You may be thinking that when I said, “Love your fellow as yourself,” is the Golden Rule, that I was mistaken. But that verse is the original. The other versions are basically interpretations of this phrase, and were written hundreds of years later, “Do unto others as you would have them do to you,” is the one you probably thought I was saying. That verse is from Matthew 7:12. Alas, I won’t be interpreting that verse, in synagogue, on Rosh Hashanah. I imagine, however, that almost all of us in this room have heard that phrase. It makes sense that we would hear that phrase often because Christian values and superstitions and idioms are built into American culture. In the Jewish world, around the same era that the Matthew text was written, we find this in the Talmud, Shabbat 31a:

*A Gentile came before Shammai. He said to him, “I will convert on the condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot.” [Shammai] drove him away with the builder’s rod that happened to be in his hand. He came before Hillel. He converted him. He said to him, “**That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.** That is the entire Torah. The rest is its commentary. Go and learn it.”*

We will not examine the last two sentences: “*The rest is its commentary. Go and learn it.*” That is about how Judaism’s core is the conversation of the ancient sacred text over centuries and the power that comes from the interaction of generations – but that’s another sermon.

“*That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.*” What I love about the negative version of this phrase is that if we choose to live by it, it can protect us from being hypocritical. If we don’t like someone’s behavior towards us, then we must never behave that way towards someone else. It forces us to use one lens when judging both others and ourselves.

I ask then, what *is* hateful to you? What do you really dislike when it happens to you? I feel like some dislikes are universal in a free society like ours. I may be wrong, but I believe that no person likes to be singled out, or bullied, or stereotyped. No one likes to be thought of as inferior, or not worthy of participating, or different, or not normal. Would any of you here enjoy having your freedom stripped from you? Who likes to be injured, shot, pushed around, abused, snubbed, ignored, or treated with scorn? And do any of us enjoy people gossiping about us, or making fun of us, or judging us? Who wants to be cheated, stolen from, or paid less than the next person for the same work?

But there people being ripped off, extorted, ignored and taken advantage of. The world is filled with bigotry, racism, persecution, hatred, intolerance, injustice, violence, and war. You all know what I’m talking about, we see it every day on the television and smart devices.

This is why I want us to LIVE WITH LOVE, because we are on this planet for a precious amount of time, and to spend that precious time with hostility, anger, emotional pain and suffering doesn't make sense to me. If we LIVE WITH LOVE, perhaps we make the world a little less painful and hurtful.

The world is changed one person at a time, and I believe that when the Talmud says, "If you save a single life, it is as if you have saved the world," but I also believe it *can* mean, "If you change a single life, it is as if you have changed the world." And so I ask that we all start to LIVE WITH LOVE. And maybe the love that we put out will be accepted and passed through our interactions, from one person to another, and it's imaginable that we can start a little epidemic that helps to make this world better.

So I'd like us to do three things that can be the beginning of the goal to LIVE WITH LOVE. **First**, discover what is hateful to you. Make a list of those behaviors and reflect on whether you do some of them – if you identify those deeds you do that are distasteful to you in general, start to concentrate on those behaviors in you. Frankly, I can't imagine any of us in this room will have a long list of distasteful conduct, which makes concentrating on them more attainable.

Second is to begin with a community effort to curb two behaviors: Being Judgmental and Gossip. These two, because I feel like so many times the road to hatred begins with there. Being Judgmental leads one to Gossip, hearing gossip leads to being judgmental, and both lead to hatred.

I realize that we are constantly making judgments throughout our lives, and much of life is a series of judgments we make towards our betterment. But *to be judgmental* is something different. Dr. Gregg Henriques of James Madison University writes in Psychology Today: "The other meaning of judgmental has to do with being overly critical in an unhelpful way...It is when we make judgments in ways that have harmful or negative consequences that we are being judgmental in ways that are best to avoid." Another way to think of being judgmental is when your judgments have the consequence of making the other person feel problematically diminished.

Now let's talk about Gossip. I don't know if this needs any further explanation. I did spend a good amount of time on this almost a decade ago. But for the purposes of this endeavor just ask yourself one question. Just one: Will what I am about to say cause the person hearing to feel negatively (hate?) towards the person spoken about? It's more complicated than that, but that simple question before you speak could stop 80% of the gossip you say.

Third is to keep a mnemonic device to help you remember to LIVE WITH LOVE. Temple Emanuel can help with that. We have made bracelets that have written on them, "LIVE WITH LOVE," (also have the "ahavah" logo, and our website). These can serve as a reminder to begin to purge ourselves of the negative conduct that keeps us from our goal to LIVE WITH LOVE. (red, white and blue for the election year)

So there it is, the challenge of 5777. LIVE WITH LOVE. We begin with three agreements as it were:

1. Identify what kinds of actions towards you are hateful to you.
2. Stay away from being negatively judgmental and gossiping.
3. Use the bracelet as a reminder to LIVE WITH LOVE.

I know that some of you may be skeptical about this LIVE WITH LOVE. It's a catchy phrase, and the word love can be a little corny. But it's catchy because I want you to remember it, and if it seems corny? Maybe it is, maybe it's me in an ivory tower, maybe I'm not in touch with what's going on in the world, that I believe in love over hate and fear. But as I thought through this whole concept, I always came back to the same idea: Almost three thousand years ago, our ancestors decreed "Love your fellow as yourself," to combat the hatred and violence of their world. Perhaps because of that, we are here, in 2016, trying to be the best version of ourselves.

I'd like to end with these words about love. A friend received this from Rabbi Emeritus Jack Reimer of Valley Beth Shalom, I don't know if he wrote it.

When you love give it everything you've got,
And when you have reached your limit, give it more,
And forget the pain of it, because, as you face your death,
It is only the love that you have given and received
Which will count,
And all the rest----The achievements, the struggles, the fights---
Will be forgotten;
And if you have lived well
Then it will be worth it,
And the joy of it will last you through the end,
But if you have not, then death will always come too soon,
And be too terrible to face.