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CHESED – LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

This Rosh Hashanah, I had the pleasure of attending a presentation in the lovely Learning Center at Beth El Synagogue. The title of the class was “Chesed”, kindness, and was taught by Julie Dean, a friend and colleague. Julie took the first Kabbalah class that I taught at the Sabes JCC five years ago, and I was honored to learn from her on this occasion.

Julie referred to the injunction to love our neighbor as ourselves. “But how much do we love ourselves,” she questioned? We too often judge ourselves harshly and don’t give ourselves enough credit for who we are and what we have accomplished. Julie talked about the negative voice inside us that berates and diminishes us.

I teach Kabbalah and am also always learning. My teacher, Shifra Hendrie, speaks about the Little Voice inside each of us that can be viewed as the Snake from the Garden of Eden. It told Adam and Eve that they were not enough, that if they could see more and know of good and evil that they would be more like G-d. The Snake thus convinced them to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. How often do we feel that we are not enough, do not know enough or need to be other than what we are?

How empowering it is for us to recognize that Little Voice and to choose not to listen to it. Instead we could decide to focus on the fact that we are created in the image of G-d - אלוהים בצלם – “b’tzelem Elohim”. Each one of us is created with a spark of the Divine, with unique qualities to contribute to the world that no one else is able to do in the same way. It is incumbent upon us to discover our gifts and use them for our own growth as well as for the betterment of society.

A gentleman in the group spoke about having a son on the autism spectrum and wished for greater acceptance of his son by others. Interestingly, I had just read an article in the latest Hadassah Magazine about a program of the Israeli Defense Force called *Roim Rachok*, (Seeing Far) that is training and utilizing the unique skills of those on the autism spectrum. Some of these individuals possess

exceptional visual acuity and excel at detail-oriented work - a skill that is highly valued by the army, particularly in aerial reconnaissance.

Judaism affirms the importance of valuing each individual. Saving a life supersedes any commandments. When we shame or embarrass another, it is as if one had stolen some of their aliveness. Of gossip, the Talmud tells us: "Evil gossip kills three: the one who says it, the one who listens, and the subject of the gossip." Respect for the individual is seen as basic to the strength of the fabric of the community. So, let's have compassion for ourselves as well for others. We each have our unique contribution to make and the world needs every one of us to fulfill our potential to make this world a better place for us all.

Joy Gordon
joy@joyofkabbalah.com

This Yom Kippur, try confessing the good things you've done.

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

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