



# HIGH HOLY DAY SERMONS

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## ***"Strangers & Neighbors: The Golden Rule Today"***

Erev Rosh Hashanah - 5777

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.

In casual parlor discussion about religion in general these days, I often hear two basic opinions. One: all religion is bad. It is the root of evil in the world. Or, Two, all religions basically have the same basic ethical teaching: love your neighbor as yourself, the so called golden rule. The two propositions do not work together very well. If number one is true, then number two can't be attributed to religion and Moses, the Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Jesus and a few others were misquoted. If number two is true and religion ultimately is about loving our neighbor, than number one has to be false and religion, at least in its essence, isn't so bad.

I will readily and sadly admit that religionists often make a mess out of their religion. I once bought a bumper sticker which exclaimed, "Lord, save me from Your followers!" I didn't think it was a good idea to put it on my car. On the other hand, murdering people in the name of God, is not very religious. Nor is destroying cities a good thing. Blowing up 1000 year rock carved statues of the Buddha is not being respectful of others either. The list goes on.

The fact of the matter is, that if you drill down into scripture, all types of scripture, not just Jewish, chances are you are going to find the golden rule stated somewhere, in some form, positive or negative: love your neighbor or "don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you." Either way it says the same thing. But basically in addition to a spiritual path, symbols, holidays, theological concepts, constructs of community and alike, you are going to find somebody in a high place in almost every religious tradition saying, very simply, "love your neighbor as yourself."

In our tradition, it is in the Book of Leviticus. KI likes the Golden Rule so much, we made the golden rule the motto of our congregation, recorded it in our charter of incorporation, carved it on the pillars on Old York Road and most recently, added it to the front of the lower Bimah reading desk in Hebrew: *V'ahavta l'reecha comocha*, just three words in Hebrew, "to love your neighbor as yourself."

Probably the best known illustration of this principle, at least to Americans, is Norman Rockwell's 1961 cover of the Saturday Evening Post. You know the picture. There's a rabbi with a tallis over his head. A German or Norwegian mother with a braid in her hair holding her blond child, an African boy holding a bowl, a Chinese child in a red coat, a Japanese lady in a kimono and several dozen other people with the golden words, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" neatly printed, Rockwell style, in the front.

Interestingly, Rockwell did not have to travel around the world to find models for the people in his picture. In a 1961 interview, indicating the man wearing a wide brimmed hat in the upper right corner, Rockwell said, "He's part Brazilian, part Hungarian, I think. Then there is Choi, a Korean. He's a student at Ohio State University. Here is a Japanese student at Bennington College and here is a Jewish student. He was taking summer school courses at the Indian Hill Museum

School.” Pointing to the rabbi, he continued, “He’s the retired postmaster of Stockbridge. He made a pretty good rabbi [but] in real life, a devout Catholic. I got all my Middle East faces from Abdalla who runs the Elm Street market, just one block from my house.” Seems the whole world was just around the corner from his studio. They were all his neighbors and he loved them all.

The Golden Rule was the subject of considerable debate among the ancient rabbis. Some pointed out that the word “neighbor” might mistakenly be understood too narrowly and mean somebody we already know or who lives next to us or, maybe, or means only other Jewish people. Maybe it means we should love other Jewish people more than we love other people and treat them Jews in a nicer fashion because they are Jewish. Well, to make sure that didn’t happen, the Haftarah the rabbis attached to that Torah portion was from the Book of Amos, Chapter 9 and begins, “Are you not as the children of Ethiopians to me, O Children of Israel? says, the Lord.”

Make no mistake about it. “Neighbor” in the golden rule, “love your neighbor as yourself” means everybody, all our neighbors, the ones who are like us and the ones who are not like us; the ones we like and the ones we don’t necessarily like; all of them, are people, all are the children of God, all are entitled to our neighborly love and respect.

Like Einstein’s famous equation  $E=MC^2$ , the Golden Rule is easy to say, but not so easy to apply in real life when your neighbor is a nut or a louse or noisy or messy.

And what happens when you don’t love yourself? Am I entitled to not love my neighbor? And what about the narcissist? He loves himself so much, there’s no room left to love anybody anyway?

Hence, the variants in how to state the Golden rule, all efforts to anticipate over inflated objections to what is necessarily the basic foundation of human society, “to love one’s neighbor as oneself!”

To make the Golden Rule a living principle, there are many challenges:

We need to respect each other’s rights and property

We need to be mindful of each other’s feelings, needs, shortcomings and failings.

At times, we would need to go beyond ourselves and try to become aware of the reality of others.

We would need to assume some basic shared humanity with other people and we need to act accordingly at least as a starting point before life gets messy, noisy, litigious or, God forbid, violent.

We might even want to share of our material wealth to help strangers just because they are, so to speak, neighbors.

In our society, perhaps no issue involving acceptance of “neighbor” has been more traumatized, over more time, than with the African American community. It is an old and deep issue in this country. America did not invent racism. America did not even invent slavery. But America found a way to institutionalize racism in its own image and to create and destroy its own system of slavery. In my mind, we as a society are actually getting better, that we have abrogated bad laws and instituted new paths to equality. There is a rising middle class in the black community and

we elected a black president, unthinkable as little as 50 years ago. But those paths to acceptance have not always been paved smoothly or directly or completely. We have many successes, as a nation, but we still have a way to go to achieve the Scriptural goal of placing the “Ethiopian” on the same plane as the chosen.

At the height of this summer's tensions between the black community and various community police forces, the Chief of Police of Cheltenham Township approached KI about us serving as the venue for an open community meeting. We were honored by the police's request and opened our building to them and the community at large. The local NAACP and area Pastors joined us as well. Cheltenham residents, young and old, black and white, police and citizens, came and spoke and shared. People were honest and respectful. The police were patient and humble. Democracy was well served. Police community relations were well served. "Love of Neighbor" was well served.

This summer, Liz and I also went to a place, at her suggestion, in Atlanta, GA, called the Center for Human and Civil Rights. It is on the same campus as the World of Coca Cola and the Georgia Aquarium. It is family friendly, but it is also profoundly moving and challenging. The main exhibit is a high tech, interactive series of well lit displays about the Civil Rights movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You can sit at a re-created segregated lunch counter in the south in the 1950s. The bar stool under you shakes. The headphones around your ears relays the cursing and hot breathing of pro-segregation protestors with life like clarity. You feel the heat. You get to see the side of a freedom burnt freedom rider bus. You get to sit in an “all sides,” bigger than life theater, as you listen to Dr. King share his dream.. You get to feel the hate, the resistance, the wall of intolerance, as best as a museum can do.

Across town, we also went to the old Ebenezer Baptist Church and sat in a pew listening to a recording of Black gospel music and a eulogy for Dr. King. Its now a quiet National Historic site. But in that pew, and in those displays, we learned something deep about what it feels like when “love of neighbor” fails but also how strong “love of neighbor” can be when it no longer allows itself to be denied by anybody, no matter how strong or how persistent.

We live in complicated times and we have a complicated history. There are always shades of truth and there are shining truths.

Love of neighbor is a shining truth and an enduring challenge.

It was a challenge in Ancient Israel.

It was a challenge in 1954 in America and it is a challenge today.

Earlier this summer, in the wee hours of June 12, a 29 year old shooter by the name of Omar Mateen, an American of Afghan descent, entered the Pulse Night club in Orlando, FL. At about 2AM, when the last call for drinks was announced, he opened fire with a semi-automatic assault rifle and a Glock handgun. Three hours later, after a wild binge of killing and mayhem, phone calls, texts and Facebook postings, the security forces on the scene reported that the shooter was down. 49 innocent people were dead and even a greater number were wounded, many seriously. Mostly from the LGBT community. Many Hispanic. Some were just kids looking to have a night of dancing and fun.

Mateen's coworkers later reported he was filled with hatred and contempt. He hated gays, blacks, Hispanics, and Jews. The felonies he committed at the Pulse club were classified as hate crimes and acts of terrorism. Wrenching questions about gun control, immigrant screening, domestic terrorism and even American foreign policy began swirling in the media and in society.

But it was the outpouring of "love of neighbor" from across the country and across the land that caught my attention and moved my heart. American flags, public and private, went to half staff. The rainbow flag was unfurled everywhere. Blood drives were held, many sponsored by Muslim groups. Five days after the massacre, 50,000 people gathered in a park in Orlando, the fun capitol of Florida and America, to mourn together and to reaffirm love of neighbor.

Here at KI, we served as the venue for a multi-faith memorial service for the killings in Orlando. We met in the Cook Court Yard in open space, under our pillars with the words of the Golden Rule engraved directly above us. Christians, Jews, Muslims, straight, gay, clergy, lay, public official, old and young participated. We lit 49 candles. We prayed silently for 49 seconds. We listened to a proclamation against terrorism, here, in France, in Israel, by the Board of Rabbis. We posted our pictures on social media and hundreds more added their prayers, their tears and their concerns to ours.

In the Jewish tradition, the Torah supplies us with a rationale for our tradition's ethics. "Love the stranger," we are taught, "because you were once strangers in the land of Egypt." In the Jewish tradition, we have a collective memory of what it means to be the "other," "the outsider," "the marginalized," "the oppressed," and too often, "the victim." Centuries of suffering have informed our ethic as a people, not to oppress, not to hold the whip, but to be a good neighbor, to put down the whip, to respect the body, the person, and the soul of the other.

It is not surprising that in modern times, Jews were among the first to take up the cause of the "other," first in Europe and then in America, combining ancient Jewish teachings with modern sensibilities about human rights for all people. The Reform movement in Judaism, in particular, found its social conscience during the years of the American Civil War and then again in the fight against the exploitation of child labor, the denial of black civil rights and the political, social and economic subjugation of women.

The 2016 June massacre in Orlando brought into focus three streams of animus which challenge us as Americans and as Jews including homophobia, xenophobia and Islamophobia. In 1965, the Women of Reform Judaism passed an historic resolution calling for the decriminalization of homosexuality in the United States and 35 years later, in March 2000, the reform rabbinate became the first clergy organization in the world to sanction same gender officiating. Just one year ago, the Reform movement passed a resolution calling for equality, inclusion and acceptance of all gender identities and expressions. Every one of these issues has a corollary, a household or two or three, in this congregation. We are serious about inclusion at KI in our philosophy and in our practice. Please look at our Museum display on "Gay, Jewish or Both" sometime during this holiday season.

I actually learned the word “xenophobia,” fear of foreigners, from our high holy day prayer book. Its one of the sins we seek to expiate from ourselves and our society on Yom Kippur.

No one knows better than the Jew as to how hurtful xenophobia can be. In the wake of the Civil War, restrictive covenants were increasingly employed in the United States to block unwanted groups like Jews, Italians and other immigrant groups from housing, from social clubs and recreations. Neighborhoods were closed. Beaches were closed. Country clubs were closed.

Quotas were then used to limit Jewish enrollment in ivy schools and, ultimately, Jewish entrance to the united states with the passage of the National Origins Act of 1924 we effectively blocked.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure and honor of speaking before the United States Capitol Historical Society in a Senate Hearing Room in Washington, DC. I was one of a dozen speakers on American immigration policy on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1965 immigration act, co-sponsored by a Jewish congressman from NYC, Emanuel Celler. Celler was the only member of Congress present when the United States closed its doors to north Atlantic immigration in 1924 and then spent the rest of his life trying to reopen the gates. He was the only Congressman to universally receive good marks for consistent rescue efforts during the Holocaust and then was the driving force behind allowing Holocaust survivors to come here in the 1950s. Celler successfully fought for family reunification and special skills allowances in immigration law.

Today, much of his work is under scrutiny again although his legislation did not speak to the long term, purposefully porous and only recently militarized southern border of the United States.

Why did so many Americans want to keep Jews out of this country prior to the 1950s?

Well, obviously, Russian Jews in particular were known to be attracted to dangerous political ideologies, that they were easily radicalized and were often tied to violent, bomb throwing groups, especially anarchists and, later, Bolsheviks. They also took jobs away from native born Americans and then undercut wages by working off the books. Jews were also poor, prone to street crime and had bad morals – working all sides of the nation’s red light districts. Keep them out of the country, the neighborhood and the country club was the cry of the day in 1890, 1920 and 1935.

To this day, American Jews take a leadership role in immigration reform and through HIAS and other agencies, continue the work of the absorption, integration and naturalization of new immigrants. When I was a child, my own father, a native born American, but the son of an immigrant father and the husband of an immigrant wife, spent his evening’s teaching English as a second language. “Love your neighbor as yourself” was the unspoken motto of his community work.

For sure, the most challenging form of social animus for today’s American Jewish community is Islamophobia. Both parts of our identity are in play here. As Americans, we know our country is under attack by Islamic terrorists and extremists looking for the next soft target to hurt us. As Jews, we know that Islamic terrorism includes a deep violent hatred of Jews, Judaism and Israel. They hate us without reservation and will do anything to inflict pain on us and, given the opportunity, kill us, all of us. Jihadism is genocidal and it has been since the days when the Mufti of Jerusalem met with Hitler. Whether Sunni or Shia, Hamas or Hezbollah, there is no question as to their intentions.

We are then left with a series of very difficult issues and challenges. Are all Muslims Jihadists? Is Islam inherently Jihadist? How do we balance our security interests with our democratic principles? How do we respond to Abraham's impassioned challenge to God not to wipe out the wicked of Sodom and Gemorrah along with the innocent? That question alone is significant enough that we display in the very first of our own stained glass windows in the sanctuary.

If you look around the Jewish world, you will find amazing responses to Islamophobia. Israaid, a global Israeli rescue effort on whose North American Board I proudly sit, has operations in Jordan, Iraq and Turkey aiding Syrian refugees by the thousands as well as Yazidis and others. In Germany, despite the backlash, Reform synagogues with the help of the American Jewish Committee, are working directly with Syrian refugees in Berlin and other German cities. In LA, the Hebrew Union College, is spearheading Jewish-Muslim dialogue. And, here at KI, for five years, we have been hosting a Turkish Muslim group for an annual breakfast for Ramadan.

I know there is tremendous skepticism about these efforts. But they are part of a larger whole which seeks to embrace "love of neighbor" as a guiding principle and a source of hope. Reality in America is that many of us have Muslim medical doctors. Reality in America is that there are Muslim military personnel deployed on the front lines serving and dying to defend us. Reality is in Philadelphia, that there are already as many Muslims as there are Jews in this region. We can build moats and castles and increase our security systems or we can find ways to break bread together. The growth of Islam in America, in Europe and around the world, is statistically inevitable. We cannot control it but we can control our response and decide whether we are going to put all our efforts into sandbags or into bridge building. The question is, are we going to live by the golden rule and our higher selves, or are going to become some kind of mirror image of everything our tradition has resisted for 36 centuries.

"Loving one's neighbor as one's self" is not easy. It means going beyond one's safe place. It means reaching out. It means meeting others on the shaky bridge of humanity which spans the roaring waters of hatred and mistrust.

KI has always worked institutionally to enact its belief in the Golden Rule. First, in the struggle against slavery. Later, in its work on behalf of orphans and indigent children in 19th Century Philadelphia. Now, in its expanded HaMotzi Dinner and Lowell School projects. We serve home cooked meals to the food insecure once a month in this building. We have a small army of tutors who go to an elementary school in Logan where 100% of the children live below the poverty line. We plan to build a beautiful playground for those children along with their school and a church in N. Philadelphia.

Thanks to our Cantor, we now have a Tzedek Center for the collection of clothing, food and books in our lobby. We are the founders and host site for the Cheltenham Area Multi-faith Council and we continue our Muslim-Jewish dialogue. We are a giant mitzvah machine trying to achieve the challenge of our congregational motto and our tradition's fundamental principle: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Precisely because we love our tradition so, too, we love our neighbors, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, gay, straight, immigrant, native born, black, white, yellow, red and brown.

Finally, if you want to see love of neighbor, come to a Tot Shabbat here at KI. We have a completely diverse community in our Preschool, every hue, every faith and no faith at all, together, here in this synagogue. Non-Jewish families trust us with their little ones because they know we will love them like our own and share, not impose, our faith. I see it everyday at the ground level of this synagogue. In a world filled with hate, violence, mistrust, anger and despair, it gives me hope that one day the same little kids who sing and dance and hug each other as children here, will be able to do the same as adults wherever they live, however they will pray.

Kain y'hi ratzon. So may this be God's will and so may it be our mandate to love one another. Amen.

## ***"The Fight Against BDS: Israel's Battle For Legitimacy"***

Rosh Hashanah Morning - 5777

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.

Three days ago, on Friday, September 30, 2016 leaders from around the world assembled in Jerusalem to pay their last respects to Shimon Peres. Peres, born in 1923 in Poland, was the last link to the founding generation of the Jewish State and one of Israel's most respected statesman. Peres was one of the major architects of Israel's military, the father of Israel's nuclear program and the visionary of Israel as "start up" state, a world leader in technology. He was also a visionary for peace and a man who believed that through strength, Israel could achieve peace with its neighbors. Peres believed in the two state solution, helped negotiate the Oslo Accords and was a leading figure in creating a peace treaty between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. For his efforts, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994

Brilliant, handsome and worldly, the top leaders of every major country on this planet, from China and Russia to France, the UK and the United States, felt drawn to this man. It is less clear, however, that the respect they had for Peres, is not matched by the respect they have for the State of Israel. Peres represented the mythic Israel to the world. He embodied the ideals of the founders of the State and truly believed in the prophetic purpose of the State of Israel as laid out in Israel's Declaration of Independence. That is the transcendent Israel, the Israel of heaven.

The earthly Israel is another place. A place of stone and conflict. A place of competing nationalisms and, increasingly, a place of clashing religious ideologies. A place where it seems that the plough is beaten into the sword, more often than swords are beaten into ploughshares. Israel was born in fire and by might and by spirit, it has endured. It is an intense mixture of idealism and dreams, and hard realities and bitter challenges. Peres helped remind the world of Israel's aspirations as a new nation. The world, however, has a tough time in allowing those aspirations to become secure realities.

As a nation, Israel can send its delegation to the Olympics. But Israeli athletes are disrespected in Munich and in Rio and the Olympic Committee does virtually nothing. Why? Because the world, the Olympic Committee, has not exorcized the demon of deep anti-Zionism and therefore, anti-Semitism. It is this demon which whispers the old slander that Jews, Judaism and their national aspirations are not fully legitimate, but suspect, in their basic humanity.

Reality is that Israel always has had to fight both for its security and its political legitimacy. In many ways, Israel has had more success in the area of security, as difficult as that has been, than it has in the fight for legitimacy and parity among the nations. This is not to say that the issue of Israel's national security is resolved. The recently concluded 38 billion deal with the United States helps as does increased military cooperation with the US. Opinions are deeply divided as to whether or not the Iran Nuclear deal helps or hurts. Those who favor it, claim the treaty derailed Iran's nuclear program. Those who disapprove, believe the Iranians, no matter what guarantees they may offer, cannot be trusted.

Then there are the very real issues of Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon & Syria. Hezbollah, in particular, although currently caught up in the Syrian civil war, now probably has 200,000 missiles which can fall on Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and even Tel Aviv, a continuing

existential threat. And there is the security threat of terrorism, while not existential, significant nevertheless.

In each case, Israel has military responses ready. In each case, Israelis have the psychological armament to deal with the situation at hand.

But as much as Israel wants and fights for physical security, it also battles and craves for political legitimacy, a less measurable but nevertheless very real national need. Zionism tried to solve the question of global anti-Semitism by offering oppressed Jews a Jewish place to live and offering hostile nations a way of emptying themselves of their Jewish population. But it wasn't enough. In the end, the establishment of Israel only repositioned anti-Semitism as anti-Zionism. Israel was to be the Jewish national home in the family of nations. However, much of the world has yet to accept the proposition that the Jews of Israel constitute a legitimate nation. Instead, Israel, with all its ideals, is called a pariah state, a European colonial enterprise and, worst of all, inherently racist.

In my opinion, Israel continues to meet its burden of self-defense through military preparation, resiliency and tactical and strategic superiority. By contrast, the battle for national legitimacy lags behind. What Israel's enemies can't do with bombs, they do with propaganda, diplomatic ploys and other weapons of de-legitimization.

Perhaps the best known current campaign to de-legitimize Israel at the grass roots level particularly in Europe and the United States is BDS or "Boycott, Divest, Sanction." BDS technically started in July, 2005 and was convened by a BDS National Committee with 170 constituent groups. The failure of the Second Intifada and the beginning of the construction of the West Bank separation fence sparked the organizing of BDS. The first BDS Conference was held in Ramallah in 2007 and has since grown into a organized, world wide operation.

BDS is actually an extension and expansion of the older Arab League economic boycott of all Israeli products and includes cultural and academic boycotts as well as material ones. In this regard, BDS builds on the work of groups like "Students for Justice in Palestine," founded in 1993, and now has over 80 chapters on American campuses. BDS also seeks support among third world trade unions, professional academic groups and university based student organizations.

Highly organized, BDS has three major objectives, which in a coded way, call for the de-legitimization and destruction of Israel as a Jewish State:

1. Ending the occupation and what BDS calls the colonization of all Arab lands including the dismantling of the security fence.
2. Working for the full equality of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel
3. The right of Return of all Palestinian refugees to their homes and properties.

To be clear, BDS is not just an anti-settler campaign and it is not just a campaign against Israeli policies and practices in the territories. BDS is against everything Israeli without differentiation. It this distinction and the attempt to isolate and quarantine everything Israeli, including all its scholars and artists, which makes BDS so nefarious and dangerous. And yet, it is often confused with more limited protests, an objective it founders and operatives work toward. Therefore, clarity on the matter of BDS is particularly important. I personally was confronted with this blurring of the lines several times during the past year in conversations with sophisticated, educated friends and colleagues who insisted that BDS was a righteous struggle against Israel's

activities in the territories. And while I agree that those policies need study and debate, they are not the sum total of Israel as a nation.

By analogy, it is one thing to say that the United States has deep problems. It is another thing to say that the whole country should be destroyed and its population dispersed or destroyed. We should be clear what BDS is really about and that it is not a legitimate prosecutor of the sins of Israel.

In fact, on the global stage, BDS sees itself as the heir to the anti-colonial struggle against apartheid in South Africa and characterizes Israel as an apartheid state despite the political realities of Arabs in Israel proper. To that effect, BDS sponsors an international Israeli Apartheid Week which is usually held in February or March and is now observed in dozens of countries and on scores of college campuses around the world. It has attracted the support of celebrities like Pink Floyd musician Roger Waters, American novelist Alice Walker, Stephen Hawking and Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Teachers unions in England and Quebec have also voted to support BDS.

On the other side of the equation, celebrities like Gene Simmons of KISS are publically opposed to BDS as are Jon Bon Jovi, Celine Dion, Jennifer Lopez, Justin Timberlake, and novelist, Ian McEwan. I mention these names from popular culture for a specific reason. Whereas scholars differ as to the economic effectiveness of BDS, I worry about its cultural impact on students and young adults. Even when it can not win over converts, BDS has the effect of making anti-Israel activity seem benign.

Millennials, in particular, both here and abroad, are susceptible to BDS influence. BDS is particularly active on college campuses and can have a Marrano effect on many Jewish students who shrink from controversy which might adversely affect them both socially and academically. We know from the PEW reports and other places that there is a significant drop off of support for Israel among young American Jews. They did not live through the Holocaust nor did they experience the traumas of the 67 and 73 wars. To young Americans and young American Jews, Israel, though tiny, is a military super power, apparently invincible and often inappropriately heavy handed in its military and police actions. It is, therefore, easily criticized and always suspect of being anti-third world.

BDS and its allies are working relentlessly on shaping the global narrative about Israel. They are arguing that in 1948 the Haganah was militarily superior to the Arab forces and that its commanders were responsible for the mass ethnic cleaning of Palestinian Arabs. They are arguing that the 67 war was a war of aggression and that the Israeli conquest of the territories was illegal. Most of all, they argue that the Occupation of the West Bank is irredentist and seeks to suppress both the national and civil rights of its inhabitants. It claims that Zionism is ultimately a racist and colonialist enterprise and that whatever reactions the residents of the West Bank have, from bombs to knives, they are understandable and forgivable given their life situation. BDS is forgiving of the terrorism and soft on religious extremism of Israel's enemies and tough on Israel in every respect. Its goal is to destroy Israel's image and delegitimize it in every way possible.

As we know, these opinions are present, particularly on college campuses today. Sometimes they are expressed as a matter of free speech. Sometimes they are introduced in courses, not as viewpoints in the conflict, but as the opinion of the instructor, who can take cover behind the veil of academic freedom. And sometimes they are the course itself, as is currently happening at UC Berkeley.

What can be done to fight BDS? First, here at KI, 1/3 of the Confirmation year in 10th grade is spent studying the Arab-Israeli conflict. We are explicit in telling our students and their families we seek to bolster our students so they will be ready to participate in the conversations that await them in College. Second, Birthright Israel is an excellent opportunity for Jewish college kids to go to Israel with their peers to learn about Israel and to bond with Israel. Third, good information is critical. An online resource called JerusalemU.org is particularly effective for college students and young adults.

While BDS is waging an overt propaganda war against Israel and seeks to bring economic pressure on the Jewish State, Israel also faces other forms of de-legitimization. To me, no issue is more important in this regard than the public perception of Israel's borders and what territory Israel can legitimately lay claim to.

While it is true that the United Nations did vote for the establishment of a Jewish State in 1947, a fact many of Israel's enemies conveniently forget, the borders of the actual State of Israel have never been fully defined by the United Nations and the nations of the world, including the United States of America.

Because of hard fought wars in 1948, 1967 and 1973, Israel's borders have changed dramatically. Today, a few countries accept the so-called Green Line of 1967 but do not accept Israel's version of the map when it comes to the Golan Heights, Latrun (that is, the gateway to Jerusalem) and the municipal boundaries of the City of Jerusalem. Others accept the Green Line for Israel but not for Palestinians, who, it is argued have unqualified rights of repatriation on the Israeli side of the Green Line in Israel proper.

In my opinion, with respect to the question of Israeli national legitimacy, the most important of these boundary disputes is Jerusalem. According to international law, the UN, the United States, the Vatican, and others, Jerusalem legally should be a *Corpus Separatum*, an international zone which is neither Israeli nor Palestinian. Hence, from an American perspective, Peres' funeral on Friday was in a stateless place called Jerusalem, not Jerusalem, comma, Israel.

Ultimately, the US and others are saying that with a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, they will eventually support a two Jerusalem solution, that is, an Israeli Jerusalem and an Arab East Jerusalem, although no one knows where the boundaries will be and whether or not this "double Jerusalem of the future" will have a single or a double set of municipal services like the Cold War divided city of Berlin.

By contrast, Israel, and the Zionist movement before it, have always viewed Jerusalem as the political capital of the Jewish state and the spiritual capital of the Jewish world. Already in 1877, when Naphtali Herz Imber wrote *Hatikvah*, he assumed that Jerusalem would be the capital of the future Jewish state. In 1927, the Jewish Agency built its campus on King George St in Jerusalem and it served as the governmental center of the nascent Jewish State except for a brief period during the War of Independence.

Because of the fighting and siege in 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed from a location in Tel Aviv but already in February, 1949, when the Knesset convened for the first time, it did so at the Jewish Agency location in Jerusalem. With the help of the Rothschild family, the current Knesset opened in Jerusalem in August, 1966.

From the earliest dreams about a Jewish State to the founding of the State of Israel, the Zionist movement always held that its capital was Jerusalem as generations of Jews had done before them in their dreams of returning to Zion. Even this morning's Torah portion, the Binding of Isaac, is widely understood that the location of that story, Moriah, the mountain upon which the Temple

was first built, indicates that Jerusalem would be the capital of the Jewish people. By comparison, would anybody still insist that the Philadelphia is the capital of the United States because the Declaration of Independence was written here and Congress did not meet in Washington, DC until 1800?

Today, the situation with respect to Jerusalem is absurd. The government of Israel is in Jerusalem with the important exception of the Defense Ministry which is in Tel Aviv. But then again, the Pentagon is not in Washington, DC, either. On the other hand, all of the Embassies in Israel are in Tel Aviv while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Department of Israel, is in Jerusalem.

From the perspective of the American Diplomats, every time they meet with their counterparts in the Israeli government, they have to get in their cars, leave Israel and go to Jerusalem. Moreover, when Anwar Sadat and King Hussein spoke in the Knesset years ago, they could technically claim they were not speaking in Israel or in Israel's capital city.

A fully legitimate state does not have its capital in disputed territory.

It is time for the US Senate's "Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995" to be enacted, an act which would move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognize "Jerusalem" as the capital of Israel and still affirm our government's commitment to a two state solution. You would think that a country which can pledge \$ 38 billion to a military ally over a ten year period could also respect that nation's self-understanding as to where its capital is located.

What is holding this up? The serious matters of the separation of constitutional authority in the United States and the wider politics of the city of Jerusalem both serve as blockers. There is also the question of Palestinian national rights and custodial rights over the city's sacred places.

The Palestinians side is complicated. Although the so-called two-state solution calls for a Palestinian capital to be in East Jerusalem, there is, in fact, no municipality called East Jerusalem. So, in fact, while there is no State of Palestine and the provisional capital of that State is in nearby Ramallah, the world inherently accepts East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. By contrast, there is a Jewish state and it has a self-designated and historically justified capital but literally, nobody, nobody recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.

The question of the legitimacy of Jerusalem also includes the final status of the old city of Jerusalem and its holy sites including the Islamic Dome of the Rock, Christianity's Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Western Wall. Unfortunately, the question of the guardianship of the Old City of Jerusalem and particularly the Temple Mount, functionally turns Jerusalem into a kind of cosmic hand grenade and makes the Al Aksa mosque, the pin in that dangerous, unstable explosive device.

The political status of the Old City is, in fact, used by the enemies of Israel to block any aspect of normalization with respect to Jerusalem and by extension, to the whole Jewish State. In my opinion, the failure of the world to accept Jewish Jerusalem as the legitimate capital of the Jewish State deeply contributes to the de-legitimization of Israel and the destabilization of the Middle East as a whole.

As Israel enters its post-Rabin, post-Peres era, it does so as a militarily strong country. But there are other battles to be fought for Israel and the Jewish people. Number one on that list is the struggle for political, cultural and social legitimacy. That fight include both counter efforts to neutralize BDS and diplomatic efforts to end the confusion over Jerusalem and make Israel a complete state with the capital of its choice and historic right as its true political center.

Let us resolve to join in these struggles. Israel has plenty of problems and many controversial policies. But deep down, it is a legitimate, sovereign state and a true peer in the family of nations. We are part of Israel's struggle for its existence and even its legitimacy whether we accept that challenge or not. So let us be strong and acknowledge that silence strengthens delegitimization. By contrast, knowledge and informed participation will go a long way toward the defense of Israel and the wellbeing of our people around the world.

Shana Tova.

## ***"The Art of Atonement"***

Erev Yom Kippur - 5777

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

When I was a kid, around third grade, I got in trouble at school.  
Not a big deal, but I still remember it.  
Like a lot of kids, I lost my wallet.  
Mind you, having a wallet in third grade was a new experience for me.  
I probably didn't have much in it.  
Couldn't drive.  
Didn't have much money.  
I think my allowance was about 25cents a week.  
So, I'm not sure what was in my wallet, but I had a wallet.

Well, one day, I went to my locker  
Full length, hall locker, just outside my classroom  
And I couldn't find my wallet.  
I panicked. I knew I was dead if I went home without my new wallet.  
So, I made up a story and went to my teacher and told her my wallet had been stolen.  
My teacher, Mrs. Emerson, was old school.  
Strict, wise but somehow loving.  
She told me to wait and think about it and not to accuse anybody.  
But I was afraid and couldn't calm down.  
I can't remember what happened next but I eventually found my wallet  
And then took it down to the bathroom put in the garbage can, left, came back and happily told my  
teacher, I found the wallet and that the crook had thrown it in the garbage.  
She then asked me if anything was missing  
I said no.  
She said, then why would anybody have taken your wallet  
I don't know, I said  
Did anyone really take your wallet, she asked?  
No, I admitted, and then received a private lesson on telling the truth and was sent to the Principal  
to further explain myself.

Be truthful is not always easy.  
Sometimes making up a story seems easier  
Less embarrassing.  
Less self-accusatory.

I didn't lie very well and I guess I learned my lesson.

Yom Kippur is all about atonement and the process of atonement begins with honest confession  
and then trying to be honest.  
That's why we have so many "Vidduis" or confessional prayers in our holiday liturgy.

We have the alphabetical Ashamnu.  
We have the long, Al Chet, that goes on and on and is punctuated with haunting music.  
We have Avinu Malcheinu and our plea that we have no merit  
And we have Kol Nidrei in which we confess we can't even keep the simple vows or promises we want to.

Of course, Yom Kippur is only about confessing our sins to God.  
As for confessing our wrongs against one another,  
Tradition teaches us we have to take care of that on our own time.  
But, tradition teaches, we also need to get right with ourselves and our Maker and Yom Kippur is the day and the time to do it.

I am not going to take sides here but it is brutally clear that our whole country  
Desperately needs a day of atonement.  
We know how to sin as a nation.  
Our leaders know how to sin as individuals and as our representatives.  
But we don't know how to confess or to atone in a sincere or meaningful fashion as a nation.

The way we behave and the way we talk to one another at the highest level, especially on TV news, is disgraceful.

Some examples: don't admit anything. Stonewall. Deny, Move on. We hear it all the time.

Others say, deflect, block, or change the subject or, in what is the key political term of the moment, PIVOT.

Pivot! My seventh grade basketball coach tried to teach me to pivot, to change directions, to fake the other guy out, to handoff, to spin, to block, to "work it, work it, work it."

Well, I pivoted as well as I lied and earned a place on the bench.

Pivot is the political opposite of confess. Today it means to change the subject. To go the other way. Not to concede. To limit damage. To go on offense.

Its good stuff, right! Its smart! It's the winning way.

Pivot the high price advisors say on TV.

Anything but the truth. Anything but contrition.

If we tried to play by the rules of our national political life in our personal lives or in our businesses or in our schools, we would not get very far.

Our world, the world we live in, would blow up.

Everyone would know that you didn't lose your wallet and that no one stole it and that you just made the whole thing up.

People aren't stupid. They can smell a lie and they don't like it.

Except when it's a political lie.

Then, its smart and the other side is dumb or diabolical or criminal.

Imagine talking to your kids or grandkids and telling them to pivot when your teacher asks if you really studied for that test or if you cheated on an exam or if you were teasing another kid or stole part of their lunch or pushed them on the playground or made fun of their clothes?

Imagine if we pivoted at work when we didn't make our sales goal and blamed it on the support staff? Or we missed a deadline on a report or failed to make an important phonecall because we were afraid?

How long will pivoting or deflecting or lying work? One minute? One day? Or not at all.

Our tradition, the Torah, says repeatedly, don't lie, don't steal, don't gossip, don't mock the deaf or bully the poor or defer to the rich or bribe a judge or oppress a stranger or ignore the orphan. It says try to do the right thing. Not to be afraid. To be patient, forgiving and kind. It doesn't say, pivot, deflect, minimize or deny.

How can a society endure when it is built on the principals of denial, deflection and minimalization of wrong doing.

How long can a society last when it devalues truth, disrespects every opponent and always puts self interest over the common good?

How long can such a society endure?

Today, our whole country needs a Day of Atonement, a moral reset, a fresh start.

Today, our country needs to reconsider not only its founding political principles, but its basic morality as a society.

A house built on lies, like a house divided, cannot and will not endure.

"But Rabbi", some might say, "You are being naïve."

National political life is not a school playground

National security is in play here.

Trillions of dollars are in play here.

The self interest of the elite, the minorities, the disadvantaged, the middle class, the lower middle class, the blue collar, the white collar, women, and more – they are all at stake and its too late. The gloves are off and its red meat politics or die.

I would say to you, you are right. At this moment, our national politics are out of control. Perhaps beyond redemption at the present moment. Perhaps it is so and it will take time, until we are in a different time, until we can attempt some kind of national atonement.

But in the meanwhile, our moral fiber as individuals is at stake and we should not, cannot, must not act in our private lives as we do as a nation.

The problem is, of course, the political is never far away from the personal.

How long will it take in an environment like this, a super charged political environment, for us to break up parties, friendships, even families when our national pathology becomes the pathway for our private conversations.

We know from history, that countries implode!

This country imploded during the civil war.

I am old enough to remember the Civil Rights struggle and Vietnam and the generational and cultural wars of the 60s and 70s.

I remember "burn baby burn."

I remember Kent State.

I remember The Chicago 68

I remember assassination after assassination after assassination.

We are getting perilously close to wide spread political violence again in this country

But this time, our situation, is even worse, because it is more dishonest.

This time, we publically coach each other to lie, to deflect, to pivot.

There is so much anger, fear and anxiety building up on all sides

That it is only a matter of time until the pressure cooker begins to whistle or explode.

Social media brings us together, all of us, instantly, sometimes for very good purposes, but there is no filtering.

No fact checking.

Just raw assaults followed by spin and deflect and pivot.

The November elections cannot get here quickly enough for me

I hope we get there in one peace and without violence.

And, on the other side of the elections, I hope we can start to move beyond deflect, pivot and deny.

I can't see a path to healing at this point for this nation.

Healing the hurts of this nation are a tall order.

But without some measure of personal honesty, some modicum of truth as a nation, some recognition of the humanity of each other's political opponents, we are surely sunk as a nation.

Yom Kippur is the day we set aside for deep personal reflection.

It is a day of thinking, of apologies, of confession, of atonement.

It is a day during which we try to focus only on the spiritual level of life and get ourselves right on the inside before we can try and correct ourselves on the outside.

On this Yom Kippur, we have much to think about as individuals and as a nation.

Let us take its message to heart.

Let us dig deep.

Let us try to get us a new heart.

Let us strive to be our better selves.

Then, let us move forward, bigger, better, cleaner in heart and spirit.  
We are entitled to our differences.  
We have an obligation to be true to our views and beliefs.  
To stand up for what we believe to be right and true with courage and fullness of heart.

Our country needs a national Day of Atonement!  
It needs to reset, morally and spiritually  
Our tradition assures us that the divine capacity to forgive is real  
And within reach.

Woe to the nation that does not repent.  
Woe to the nation that only pivots toward the untrue and the hurtful.

May God bless this country and turn our hearts, before we turn any further on one another and cannot turn back.

Amen.

## ***"Not By Might: Jews Guns & Violence"***

Yom Kippur Morning - 5777

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.

When I was a kid, I played with guns.

Water guns

cap guns

Replica civil war rifles

Plastic Tommy guns

And even blank guns.

At carnivals, I fired phony guns, that barely looked like guns, at bobbing ducks that never dropped

And fired simulated machine guns on old fashion video games at arcades.

And if I didn't have a plastic gun, then I picked up a stick and starting shooting my imaginary enemies with my high powered pretend tree gun either as a charging marine or a high power sniper.

I was a mean, killing machine in chubby size shorts who was afraid of stray dogs, all cats and creepy bugs.

For a short while, my summer camp, Camp Harlam, had riflery.

We had single shot, 22 caliber carbines.

We fired at targets 50 feet away

Although we were also taught the songs of the civil rights and peace movements of the 1960s, we did have real guns and I loved it.

I loved the guns, the bullets, the smell of the spent shots and I loved my punctured targets which indicated that I was on my way to being the next Davey Crockett,

King of the wild frontier just north of route 209 in the Poconos.

In Israel, I stood real guard duty on several occasions.

I was issued a very big, very heavy WWII Czechy rifle.

I was also offered to hold and fire an M-16 but I turned it down

But I did accept an invitation to go to a firing range

And shot at indoor targets with a .38.

It was very powerful and very loud.

However, most of my experience with guns was really just watching them on TV and at the movies.

Lots of guns, lots of shooting, lots of single shot kills.

Today, most American kids watch hundreds of thousands of acts of media violence by age 18 and see about 16,000 stimulated fatal shootings by the time they graduate High School.

My late father, on the other hand, was a real combat soldier in WWII in Europe.

He had extensive training with firearms.

A few years ago, I even found his military issued license to kill.

I know he was issued a rifle and

he operated a 300 radio in the Battle of Bulge.

He told me he admired his fellow soldiers' gun skills.

They were mostly farm boys from Ark and OK.  
He said they could shoot a whisker off a cat at 50 yards  
But he was very afraid of hand grenades and said he taped his up  
So they wouldn't accidentally detonate while he was running.

My Dad told me he hated guns , his words,  
But admired his officers and General Patton in particular for their and his  
Gallantry, courage and fearlessness that was  
Necessary to defeat the Nazi army.  
We need people like Patton, my Dad said to me, to win war but soon as the war is over, lock them  
up like caged tigers.

In College, I was stunned to learn that critics of Judaism, both classical and modern, accused the  
ancient Hebrews, their God and their Jewish descendants,  
of being violent, and mass murderers.

They had too many, horrible examples to prove their point.  
The Torah says to kill a people called Amalek, all of them, man, woman, child and beast.  
The Bible sanctions revenge killing, they pointed out.  
Rebellious sons are to be executed by stoning.  
Elijah hacked the priests of Baal into chopped meat  
Haman's sons were publically impaled.  
And Mattiahias, at the beginning of the Hanukkah story, killed a Jewish collaborator with a spear in  
a public square before his townsmen.

In rabbinic school, by way of contrast, I learned about the widespread pacifism of the reform  
movement in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its enduring rejection of right wing Zionism,  
militant Orthodoxy and, later, the settler movement.

By contrast, I was also taught to believe that Israel's right to self-defense, including preemptive  
strikes was morally justified and that a strict adherence to the doctrine of the "purity of weapons"  
and limiting civilian casualties were deeply embedded in the Jewish State's military ethic. At one  
point, I even wanted to serve in the Israeli army although at the time , I was against American  
military involvement in Vietnam.

As a newly minted rabbi, my very first pastoral hospital visit was to a young man who had  
accidentally shot himself down the leg, while putting his gun into his holster, and was in terrible  
pain. As a prison chaplain for four years, I met with prisoners, convicted of felonies both with and  
without guns, all of whom, insisted they were totally innocent.

Today, I am a mix of feelings and memories about selective conscientious objection, an instinctive  
inability to fully embrace pacifism, a strong belief in non-violent political dissent, overwhelming  
pride in my own father's military service and a life long passion for war movies and visiting  
battlefields. All swirl around in my head, heart and soul in unresolved, contradictory and paradoxical  
ways.

One issue, however, is un-conflicted for me and that is a belief in gun control in the United States. Maybe it was the assassinations of JFK, then Martin Luther King, and finally RFK, that did it. Each one of those leaders was a kind of Hollywood idol to me and each one was cut down by a murderer. Each killing left me sick, angry and, in a qualified way, anti-gun.

Maybe it was the incredible tide of violent crime sweeping over our cities. When I was a kid, one of my neighbor's, who owned a pharmacy, was shot by a robber. He survived but his guard dog didn't. My best friend's father, who owned a Hardware store, was shot, too and barely survived. My uncle, a pharmacist, was robbed at gun point. The robber even stuck the barrel of his pistol in my uncle's nose before fleeing the scene.

But long before Columbine and Sandy Hook, I already had a conviction that gun violence was out of control in this country:

That efforts to limit the sale of assault weapons and high capacity magazines were wrong, deplorable and morally offensive.

That efforts resisting and limiting background checks were excessive,

That missing guns needed to be reported and

That statistical information on violence needed to be collected by national security agencies and by public health institutes.

There was no question in my mind that that the second amendment was not endangered by the "slippery slope" of responsible gun legislation but rather that well being of Americans was compromised by the steep success of anti-gun control forces.

Academic reports, that in the big picture, violent crime in America was actually decreasing did not offset the reality of actual shooting statistics in Baltimore, Chicago and Philadelphia.

Our cities are, without question, battle grounds

Our suicide rates are staggering.

In fact, self-killing is the leading cause of violent death in America today.

Our use of weapons against one another and on ourselves is unrelenting.

And with all that, the successful use of arms for self-defense is statistically irrelevant: a myth, a legend, a projection, but not a real shield against crime.

We are willing to take radical action against one form of terrorism, yet precious little against another, also vicious form, of domestic violence I would also call the terrorism of gun violence.

How many murdered school children will it take?

How many murdered people in a gay club will it take?

How many random bystanders mauled down by stray bullets will it take?

How many kids who accidentally put a bullet in their heads or their siblings' chests from a gun left unchecked at home, will it take until we take some kind of reasonable, common sense action to protect ourselves from the arsenal of inappropriate and illegally owned guns in this country.

A few facts, in the United States, there are approximately 300 million privately owned guns, one for almost every person in this country.

Our total death rate per 100,000 is 10.2; in Australia it is 1; in Japan it is 0; in the UK its .2

Three countries in the world have a higher firearm homicide rate than United States: Afghanistan, Iraq and the Congo.

In my view, the “gun status quo” in the United States today is unacceptable. We have too many oversized weapons and too many innocent lives lost and at risk.

What does our tradition have to say about weapons, violence and self-defense?

Judaism painfully recognizes that we are, as a species, fratricidal beings being with story of Cain killing Abel.

Yet, weapons, Judaism teaches, since we do not hunt in our tradition, are necessary but for extreme circumstances and need to be regulated.

In Judaism, self-defense and wars of self-defense are permissible.

On the other hand, a tradition that teaches that a flat roof must have a fence to prevent unnecessary injury or loss of life, is going to be at least as strict with respect to lethal weapons under that roof.

The Talmud is explicit in urging that neither proven criminals nor known unstable people be allowed to own lethal weapons and, obviously, neither the Torah nor the Talmud, can talk about guns per se.

Thus, I think it is fair to say that Judaism is not anti-weapon, but does not romanticize either weapons or violence.

Just as the prophetic goal of Judaism is to “beat swords into ploughshares,” there is also the admonition that there is a time to “beat ploughshares into swords.”

So, just as Judaism takes a realistic view of weapons and self-defense, it also clearly values peace and security over conflict and a warrior culture.

The Torah teaches that the original altars of the Jewish people were symbolically made of unhewn stone, “lest your sword come upon it and desecrate it.”

At the end of days, the prophet Isaiah looks toward a time “when the wolf shall live with the lamb....and war will cease and the land will be as full of knowledge of the Lord as the water that covers the sea.” (1:6)

On Rosh HaShanah, we have prayers and readings that cry out against violence!

When Abraham lifts the knife, to slaughter his son, a voice thunders from heaven,

“do not hurt the child, do not cut him, do not slay him, do not harm in any fashion.”

A ram is sacrificed instead and the ram's horn, the shofar, is made the permanent reminder, the eternal voice against mindless slaughter and the shedding of innocent blood.  
Tekiah – do not stand by when children are being slaughtered.  
Shevarim – do not stand by when the peace of your cities is being shattered  
Teruah - - do not stand by as rapid fire automatic gun fire is sprayed across movie theaters and dance floors and schools.

And on both Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, we have the words and warning of the great holiday prayer, Unetaneh Tokef, written with the blood of our own medieval martyrs:

*On Rosh HaShanah it is written  
On Yom Kippur it is sealed:  
How many will pass away, and how many shall be born.  
Who shall live and who shall die  
Who shall live their allotted time and who shall not live their allotted time  
Who by fire and who by water  
Who by sword and who by wild beast  
Who by hunger and who by thirst  
Who by earthquake and who by pestilence....  
Who shall be poor and who shall be rich  
Who shall be humbled and who shall be exalted.*

To these sacred words, let us add and:

*Who by high capacity magazines and who by semi-automatic fire  
Who by indifference and who by fear  
Who by political incapacity and who by moral numbness  
Who by unenforced law and who by lack of legal sanity?*

There is much we can do to improve our situation in our country today:

We can work toward limiting magazine capacity.  
We can improve and universalize back ground checks.  
We can insist that if you can't fly, you can't buy a gun.  
We can insist on tracking every gun sale just as we track every car sale in this country at gun shows and online.  
We can do a much better job collecting and analyzing the data of gun related violence both for the purpose of policy and public health  
We can rethink our policies of mass incarceration which help create hard criminals out of offenders who are not necessarily homicidal in the first place  
And we can do a much better job of working with kids in all areas of society to teach them that guns are not the answer and that good education and work are the ultimate solutions to our problems and are the true mandated paths of life.

We can do all this and maintain our Second Amendment rights for self-defense, recreation and collecting.

We can and we must say "No" to Sandy Hook, Columbine, and Orland and "Yes" to Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In the year ahead, let us begin a fast from violence, a reduction in gun based crime, and vow anew that we will not rest until every citizen in this great land can dwell beneath their own grape vine in peace and with security.

Amen.

## ***"Remember to Remember"***

Yom Kippur - Yizkor - 5777

Rabbi Lance J. Sussman Ph.D.

I clearly remember taking Psychology 101 as a Freshman in college. It was one of those big lecture courses. We sat in an amphitheater style classroom. The professor was from Texas, had a deep accent (kind of southern) and was very entertaining. One of the things I remember the most about that class was our unit on Memory.

Now “memory” from the perspective of a freshman psych class is mostly about models of encoding, storage and retrieval. It was rather technical but what impressed me was how central “memory” is to just about everything our brains do from language to thought to personality. Later, in a class on the psychology of religion, I learned about a different kind of memory, about a hypothetical “collective unconscious” and other subterranean types of memory important in culture, art and literature. Everywhere I turned, wherever I explored - the phenomena called “the human being” I encountered this idea of memory.

In a different way, Judaism also centers itself on the part of us we call “memory” in both personal and collective ways. In our prayers, we are asked to remember Creation, to remember the Exodus from Egypt, to remember what our ancient enemy Amalek did to us in the desert thousands of years ago, to remember our long history as a people without a national home, to remember the millions of victims of the Holocaust who have no one else to remember them and to remember our own loved ones who gave us life, raised us, loved us, provided for us, shared companionship with us, who enriched us and sometime frustrated us, who advised us, who were role models for us, who depended on us in their times of need, took care of us when it was their turn, who remembered others on our behalf who we never knew but somehow also became part of who we have become. *Zachor/Remember* – Judaism commands, being a Jew demands we remember.

Today, now, on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, is a special sacred time to remember. “Remember to Remember” one of our songs of mourning gently reminds us. We must remember.

Sometimes, remembering is easy. Pleasant memories rise in the mist and refresh us. The happy times together. The smiles and the laughs. The repeated words of wisdom. The soft touch. They all come to us like a mild fragrance we love to experience.

Sometimes, remembering is a mixed feeling. Disappointments. Sickness. Hurt. Even anger. We recall some of those moments too. But the fade and forgiveness rises. What’s the point of dragging it out. Let it go. Celebrate the good, the beautiful and the enduring. The higher part of life is lived on the planes of love and forgiveness. Today is a day to remember, to forgive, to love again.

Sometimes as we age, we begin to forget, especially the little things of today, the shopping list, a phone call, a gift to be purchased or a card to be mailed. We forget and it is frustrating. Memory

slows, memory shrinks, memory can become confused. We try to remember and the harder it is to remember the details of life, as parts of life slip away, core memories become ever greater, more important, more real.

Remember, do not forget, I was once taught at my rabbinic school in preparation for Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Memorial Day. The same is true in every day life. Remember, do not forget, even as parts of life slip away, hold on to memories, the life sustaining moments of completeness and joy.

Today, we remember those who cannot be forgotten, in our thoughts and in our hearts, they are with us still. Their memories make us complete, even when we are not. They may be gone from view but they are still present in spirit. Today our spirits and theirs are joined and we remember and we smile and we cry.

For those who have endured recent loss, this day, too, is a day to remember the yesterday on the other side of the abyss of loss. A happier, more complete day. A day which faded or ended quickly. A day which cut us off in the middle of the continuum of time. With pain in our hearts, we too remember and we are badly diminished. But in our grief, we need to search for new strength. Something, something tiny, something strong to hold to as we remember and go on.

We will remember and not forget those who died yesterday or during this past year or long ago in a different time. They are with us in every smile, in every tear, in every family embrace.

We will remember to remember because to remember is to affirm life and everything good which ever was and which is yet to be.