

“Ten Ways to Remove Hate”

Rosh Hashanah 5780

Rabbi Rachael Jackson

This is the evening of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. [In case that wasn't completely clear to everyone before you got here; just making sure we're on the same flight, making sure we're awake, not sleep; making sure we're all here for the same reason].

Unlike the secular New Year, we are here before midnight and there isn't any champagne. So we don't have that in common. However, top ten lists pepper our world at the conclusion of December, so why not now! Usually we see top ten lists of celebrities who died. Top ten best movies, or books, or songs. Top ten anything you can think of. Probably this year it's going to be top ten memes or top ten tiktoks. [And if you don't know what that is, please ask someone from Gen Z].

I figure, I'll add my own top ten list: Top ten ways to remove hatred. This felt like a good topic because frankly, the news is hard. Unless we actively seek it out, news of good events or feel-good stories are few and far between. We need to know going into the New Year this new year, 5780, will be just that closer to unity, just that closer to kindness, just that closer to peace.

Here is my top ten list of ways to remove hatred and create kindness while we're at it.

Number one: become an interventionist God and create world peace at the snap of a finger. No? Ok, just kidding, let's try something more manageable then.

The real number one: Turn off the tv and turn off the internet every once in a while. Our brains are not wired to handle that much information. We don't quite know how much information a person from about 600 years ago truly received in their lifetime, but it is though for a person who is on the internet for a full day, receives as much information in that one day as person did in their entire lifetime 500 years ago. So turn it off.

Everything that happens in the world is given us to at once. But we *cannot* process the barrage of data headed our way. And much of it is presented as data in the form of statistics—how big was the earthquake, how many people died in the tsunami, how much will it cost to repair damage from the hurricane, how many people are displaced from the raging civil wars, et cetera.

Let's say on the very off chance that we were able to absorb those numbers, we could not *emotionally* absorb the people behind the numbers. No matter what the media tries to say, the real impact is with people. And our hearts *cannot* handle it all.

In order to prevent fatigue, you must take a break. If we don't, we risk growing numb. We can not do our part to remove hate in the world if we ourselves are blind to it. Therefore, turn off the news and re-center ourselves. Once we do that, once we've done that, we can engage once more. Deuteronomy first tell us "You shall not remain indifferent¹". And then Elie Wiesel of blessed memory expands to say, "the opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference."²

We can begin to lessen hatred by ensuring that we do not become indifferent for any reason, including numbness from tragedy overload.

Number two: Once we have temporarily turned off the outside world, we can look inside yourself and find your values and your passions. Find that light inside you which you know you have the power to spread to others. This type of volunteering cannot be done with a checkbook. It is the kind that requires a hands-on approach. More likely a full-body approach. Because your legs will allow you walk up to the problem. Your hands will help solve the problem. And your face will do so with a smile and your heart will do so with love.

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat³ tells us that "The work of repairing our badly broken world is not a sprint, it's a marathon. Or, to borrow a metaphor from Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, it's a relay race -- where we take turns handing off the baton to each other, so that when any one of us is unable to keep going, the work of moving forward continues"

These acts, which we collectively call *tikkun olam*, radiate light. The idea of where *tikkun* comes from is the gathering in of these sparks and collecting the light so that we can hold something even brighter in our world. So we can radiate the light and remove the darkness. Helping to repair the world and helping to make this corner of the world a bit better and brighter.

Number three: This light which you are bringing into the world, is also shining for you. When we do acts of goodness, we ourselves feel better. Often this translates to confidence.

¹ Deut 22:3

² Common knowledge quote; sourced from: <https://reformjudaism.org/print/173986>

³ <https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2018/10/on-taking-action-and-turning-inward.html>

This snowballs our desires and helps us push our own boundaries of comfort. We can then test out these new boundaries, these new margins by going to a place which is safe and yet uncomfortable. I cannot give you concrete examples because comfort zones are different for each of us. Each one of us has a different box which we feel good in. And each of us pushes against the walls in different ways. Though, for many it can be categorized as a change of socio-economic status or locations of other ethnicities or religions.

How does this relate to hate? Because so many times, hatred is found across human-constructed walls. Such as gender, nationality, language, and those already listed. If we chip away at the wall, we can acknowledge and demonstrate our willingness to build a bridge toward peace and love. We can demonstrate our engagement and our unwillingness to be apathetic. What a great way to remove hatred.

On Oct 13, two weeks from now, Hendersonville, just grassroots decided to have a unity talk. It will be held at St. Tabernacle AME Zion, just over here on 6th street. There are 5 of us on the panel. One way we can remove hate is by breaking down barriers of otherness.

Number four: Have the hard conversation. But not in a confrontational manner (that's not a conversation, that is an attack) more in a manner of dialogue. I don't mean the political statement of "across the aisle", I mean with the person in your life. The person with whom, for whatever reason, there has been tension. There are no high or low roads when it comes to communication—it is or it isn't. Communication is talking about what is really going on, the real issue. Conversations, true and vulnerable have the power to make us honest with ourselves and the person we are dialoguing with will see this. Modeling authentic and candid speech is contagious.

Imagine if we all actually said what we meant and meant what we said. Where we didn't play verbal games; where we didn't have the meeting after the meeting; where we didn't try to triangulate our friends.

At a TEDx talk, Ash Beckham, reminds us that hard is hard, and "we need to stop ranking our hard against everyone else's hard to make us feel better or worse about our closets; at some point in our lives, we all live in closets. And they may feel safe, or at least safer than what lies on the other side of the door.

But a closet is no place for a person to live....be authentic, be direct, never apologize for speaking your truth.⁴”

Have the hard conversation and the barrier of hatred will be chipped away.

Number five: take an acquaintance out to lunch. That seems both simple and disconnected. Here’s why this is a suggestion. An acquaintance is someone you know because you have at least one mutual thing—perhaps a job, a friend, a congregation. I’m betting if you look around, especially those of you in the front, you’re not going to know everyone in the room. Yet, you know little about them nor they you. If you take them for lunch, you’ll get to know more of them and vice versa. This simple meal will deepen the relationship.

How many people in here remember the game “Red Rover” [or the game show “the weakest link”]. Or for any chemist, hydrogen bonds. If we have the ability to strengthen our weakest bonds, we are much better off as individuals and therefore the community we are a part of is also stronger. I am not saying you will become friends. I am saying that you both will expand your knowledge, grow your understanding, and let you see new perspectives.

This strength makes us less susceptible to holding or receiving hatred.

Number six: Gossip. Just don’t do it. Just don’t. But what does that mean? It means don’t say things; it means don’t listen to things; it means stop others when they are doing it. Much easier said than done. We are told “do not be a talebearer among your people⁵”

In Hebrew, the term for gossip is *lashon hara*, which actually translates literally to “the evil tongue”. One simple way to figure out if this is case of your speech, ask yourself if you are talking about someone else, are they not in the room with you, [and I don’t mean like in the room, I mean actually next to you, part of the conversation] without addressing your own emotional response *to* them. Talking about someone just to talk about them is gossiping—even if the information you’re sharing is theoretically positive. In fact it is almost guaranteed to be positive because in Hebrew we have a whole different term for speaking gossip when it is a lie or a rumor. So even if you say something really great, it’s still gossip.

⁴ TEDx Boulder talk by Ash Beckham:

https://www.ted.com/talks/ash_beckham_we_re_all_hiding_something_let_s_find_the_courage_to_open_up?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

⁵ Lev 19:16

And I have to make a caveat. There is a difference between having a venting conversation and having a confidential conversation with someone like me or a therapist. That's a different situation.

But to go up to your friend and say, did hear, do you know what, did you see that Rabbi Jackson kept her shoes on the entire time on the bimah tonight! That never happens. [which by the way , you can't ever see my feet, which is amazing, because of this (lectern) and there are lots of times when I do take my shoes off up here. That's still gossip.]

We also know that humans are very social and conversation is critical to that socialization. We can use "I feel" statements; we can be real and not superficial when we talk.

Also, we would do well to take note of our faces, our heads, as the rabbis saw them: "The Rabbis explain that the design of our heads also tries to minimize our speech since humans have two eyes, two ears, and two nostrils, but only one mouth."

And also our earlobes, what's the purpose of earlobes if not for earrings—to plug your own ear. And why the size of our pinkies? To plug our own ears. They weren't so great at anatomy but they were really good with analogy.

We should listen twice as much as we speak. And when we do speak, we can use what we see and experience to know ourselves better and to share that knowledge with our friends. Just imagine how nice it would be to firmly know that other people weren't talking about you. By removing gossip, we can help remove hatred.

Number seven: Don't be anonymous. This is so dangerous—to ourselves most especially and to others secondarily. If you want to leave a review for a restaurant online or on a comment card, name yourself. If you want to have a debate about the validity of a particular social position, name yourself. It's for your own protection.

About 15 years ago, during the still-nascent age of social media, a person⁷ came up with a formula, which I have amended for language: Nice person plus audience plus anonymity equals mean person. People say and do things with under the covers of anonymity that they wouldn't dare say or do in person. This has been true since well before the internet—think back to costume parties, or Purim, or even modern-day Halloween.

⁶ BT Ketubot 5b

⁷ Jack Gabriel, as referenced here: <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/greater-internet-fuckwad-theory>

Trick or treat anyone? Cannot figure out who the person is who is doing the tricking. Being anonymous and the negative attitudes which come from that do not only poison that which you are talking about, but worse, they poison you.

We can remove hate by removing anonymity.

Number eight: Don't move the good person line. I have to explain this one a bit. Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby gave a heartfelt comedic speech in December last year in which she called out the good men talking about bad men. I cannot do her speech justice, so I encourage you to watch it yourself, as it is only about seven minutes long⁸. In summary though, she postulated that all people believe they are inherently good people—which is a good thing. But when someone who is like you does something immoral or illegal against someone not like you, the line in the sand of what is good and what is bad moves.

So good men ought not set the line of men behaving badly toward women—women should. White people ought not set the line of white people behaving badly toward black people—black people should. Her list appropriately goes on to include cis and trans, straight, able-bodied, neuro-typical.

In every population, there is a subset population who is more vulnerable than the majority. I don't need to say that to this room. It is our job to let those susceptible tell the majority what is right and what is wrong for them.

If the vulnerable get to be in control of what is malevolent, then we can begin to remove hatred.

Number nine: Let love in. Truly let love affect us. We can start slowly by feeling gratitude and awe. We can open up our eyes and look around and focus on the good, focus on the love. And we can slowly begin to internalize it. As many of the relationship books on the shelves these days will tell you, love is a verb. It is an action word. Love requires us to be active participants. A song⁹ from about a decade ago says, “The end of fear is where we begin // The moment we decide to let love in.” Those human-made walls I spoke of earlier can be further chipped away at when we let love in. Love is powerful, it is contagious, it is life-altering, and life-affirming.

The more we love, the easier it is to remove hate.

⁸ Hannah Gadsby speech at “Hollywood Reporter: Women in Entertainment”;
www.facebook.com/anggos/videos/205181440384921/

⁹ Goo Goo Dolls, “let love in”; video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeBE5DJTmmk>

Number ten: love. Love yourself. Love your neighbor. Love the stranger. This comes from Leviticus 19:18, which reads “v’ahavta l’rei-acha camocha” or “love your neighbor as yourself”. This tiny partial verse of only three words has so much packed into it. We ask, who is our neighbor? The immediate and easiest response says our neighbor is the person who lives near us. We all know that definition doesn’t fully work, especially in such a spread out society such as our own.

Same goes for asking who is a stranger. Again, for many of us, maybe our direct neighbor is our stranger. But here’s the thing: it doesn’t matter. We are told to love both the neighbor and the stranger as ourselves—which hides the fact that we are supposed to love ourselves as well. We can be remove hate with love. Love yourself. Deeply. Love your neighbor. Truly. Love the stranger. Authentically. For we know that we are all created in the likeness of God¹⁰. All of us, no exceptions.

Pirkei Avot has a verse which reads¹¹: “Great is God’s gift of making us in the divine image. But even greater is the gift of *knowing* that we are made in the divine image”. Modern Rabbi Yoel Kahn has this to add: “Despite our ongoing, renewing, mutual estrangement—whether between one person and another or between entire peoples—the “other” can never be completely demonized so long as I remember that they too, just like you and I, are imprinted with the image of God¹²”.

There are many ways to remove hatred, these are just ten. You will invariably come up with your own list, and when you do, please let others know, including me. May 5780 bring us a year of love. May it bring us a confidence to know we can remove hate. May it bring us peace, for us and all the world. Because we may not be the interventionist God I spoke of, but that does not mean that have no power. So let us use the power that we do have to create and find peace in our world. Then we will have a shanah tovah umetukah—a good and sweet year.

¹⁰ Gen 1:27

¹¹ Pirkei Avot 3:14, as translated in *Lights in the Forest*, pg. 110.

¹² Ibid.