

Three Words

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Kicked. Converged. Soccer.

These three words saved the life of Jessica Tinsley and her friends. You see, they had planned a five-mile circular hike through the woods of Hamsterley Forest in the U.K. But after three hours, they were hopelessly lost. Unable to find their way out and on the verge of tears, they used a cell phone to call 999, the British equivalent of our 911. Right away, upon hearing their story, the dispatcher told them to download an app to their phone.

Yes, an app. Not just any app, but a unique app called what3words. They had never heard of it, but they dutifully downloaded it. Within a minute of its download, the police knew exactly where they were. The search and rescue team quickly found their way to the soaked, freezing hikers and brought them to safety.

Chances are you have never heard of what3words. But you will. Its creators divided the entire world into 57 trillion squares. Each square is 10 feet long by ten feet wide. They then had a computer assign a random 3-word code to serve as the address for each one of those square 57 trillion squares. Three words is all you need, it seems, to do that.

For example, the Washington Monument's location is: congratulations.fingernails.desk. The statue of Liberty's address is: planet.inches.most. Because each three-word combination represents only ten square feet; the location marked by any three words can be very precise.

Of course, so can GPS. But to be that precise, GPS must use long strings of numbers before and after decimal points that are too hard to remember and easy to mix up. But what3words is easy to use and remember.

The three words, for example, for the location of the new Herman sculpture in the Berger garden of the Linden Courtyard is: soda.rally.blunt. You can check me out after *Yontif!* The three words for the point at which the Geller Family Jordan River fountain in the courtyard empties is: dock.shadow.needed.

This may sound a little crazy, but it works so well that businesses around the world are latching on to it. Tata Motors – India's largest auto manufacturer – is building it into their cars' navigation systems. Mercedes Benz already uses what3words in their navigation and so does Ford, Jaguar and TomTom. So, if you have one of those, you might want to check that out!

Many countries, like Britain are using what3words for emergency services. Mongolia – where the majority of the population are nomads and don't live at a traditional address – uses

what3words for its postal delivery. What3words is being used to give addresses to people in refugee camps.

Traveling? Lonely Planet uses what3words to direct you to points of interest. Looking for that perfect getaway? Air B'n'B uses what3words too, so you can find that perfect retreat tucked away in the forest far from any roads.

Three words. Three simple words can tell you exactly where you are, and where you are going. And that got me thinking: What are the three words by which we should navigate our lives? What three words can serve as our guideposts, keeping our priorities in front of us, influencing our choice of actions, encouraging us to reach for our goals, helping us become our better selves?

Maybe those three words are "I love you." Three simple words that make our hearts sing. They remind us of who is most important in our lives. Do we say them often enough?

Maybe those three words are "I'll be there." Or "Let me help." Or "Count on me." A commitment to be fully present in the lives of those we love and to always be ready to help others.

How about: "Maybe you're right." A humble acknowledgement that we do not have all the answers and that we have much to learn from each other.

Today the three words we are thinking about most might be "I have sinned." "I hurt you." "I am sorry." Or maybe: "I forgive you."

The sages give us three words, or at least three terms, by which to guide our lives. In Pirke Avot we read: עומד העולם בדברים שלשה על. חסדים גמילות ועל העבודה ועל התורה על. The world stands upon three things. *Torah, Avodah, Gemillut Hassadim*. *Torah*: lifelong learning. A struggle to better understand our history and our heritage, to ascertain what God wants from us and how we should live. *Avodah*: Worship. To seek to fill ourselves with holiness, to bring God's light into our souls and into our world. *Gemillut Hassadim*. Acts of lovingkindness. Reaching out to others to help them in times of need. Sharing with them our love.

Perhaps if we could just commit ourselves to live by these three principles – these three words: learning, holiness, kindness – *dayenu*. That would be enough for us.

Henry James offered a different set of three words. He said that there are three things that are important in life. The first is: be kind. The second is: be kind. And the third is... be kind!

There is a legend that King Solomon sent his faithful servant Benaiah out into the world to find the one thing that when you are happy, makes you sad; and when you are sad, makes you happy. Benaiah returned with a ring on which were inscribed three words in Hebrew (four in

English): *עבור זה גם* *gam zeh ya'avor* – “This too will pass.” When life is hard, we should have faith that things will improve. When we are riding high, we should remember we were once at the bottom too, and we will be again. So take care of those in need. As the Yiddish expression says, also in three words: “the wheel turns.”

Author Chris Brogan once wrote an article in which he offered his three words, “Ask, Do, Share.” Ask means always asking how you can help, and always being willing to ask for help. Doing means taking action. Sharing means sharing your wealth and talents, sharing your knowledge and your experience, sharing the lessons learned and the possibilities that lie before you. Ask. Do. Share.

I always ask our B’nai Mitzvah what three words best describe them. The answers are always insightful. One told me that he was Energetic. Creative. Funny. Another said Organized. Helpful. Quiet. A third told me Caring. Artistic. Crazy. Its amazing how much of a person’s qualities can be captured in just three words.

If I was searching for three words that guide us as a congregation, I might say Relationships. Meaning. Impact. First and foremost, we are like a big extended family that looks out for each other, helps each other, shares in each other’s grief and joy. We also share together in a search to add meaning to our lives through prayer and study; and we seek to engage collectively in making a difference and impact our world through our support of Israel and through acts of kindness and *tikkun olam* – seeking to repair our broken world.

So, by now I hope that you might be thinking about your 3 words for 5780. What are the three words that are your guideposts? What are your three words that describe your greatest aspirations, your best self, that will guide your growth, your accomplishments, and your blessings in the coming year.

Take a moment, close your eyes, and ask yourself: What are your three words? The three words that describe who you are. The three words that describe who you hope to be.

Don’t worry. I will not ask you to divulge your three words. Hold them in your mind and heart. Only you need know them. But a year from now, make yourself accountable to them.

As for my three words? Hopefully, you saw them when you entered the synagogue today. They are emblazoned on a striped multi-color banner which I ordered for us for the holiday. If you ever received an email from me in the past 18 years that I have been here, the same words have always been found at the end of every email.

The Torah says, *במוך לרעיך ואהבת* *v’ahavta l’reyecha kamocho* – Love your neighbor as yourself. It’s 3 words in Hebrew, a bit more in English. Rabbi Akiva identified this as the most important

and fundamental principle in the entire Torah, the one commandment which encompasses all the others.

The sign in the Gross Atrium says:

Love your neighbor who doesn't
look like you
think like you
love like you
speak like you
pray like you
vote like you
No exceptions. Love your neighbor.

It does not need any more elaboration than that. Just three words that teach us what it means to treat every human being with love, respect and dignity. Three little words כּמוֹךָ לְרַעִיךָ וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ *v'ahavta l'reyecha kamocha* – Love your neighbor as yourself – that could change us and change the world if we took them on as a call to action.

Let me end this sermon with three final words.

תּוֹבָה לְשָׁנָה תִּכְתְּבוּ לְשָׁנָה לְטוֹבָה *L'shanah tovah tikateyvu*

May you be inscribed for a good year!