

**Rabbi Rochelle Tulik**  
**Yom Kippur 2020/5781 Morning Service Sermon**

All Democrats are socialists.

All Republicans are fascists.

All liberals are snowflakes.

All conservatives are gun-toting lunatics.

All protestors are criminals.

All cops are murderers.

None of these statements is true. We know this. Not all Jews are rich or stingy. Not all Asians are good at math. Not everyone on welfare is lazy. Not all Muslims are terrorists.

We know this.

And yet...these days, this is so often the narrative. It is all or nothing, black or white, with or against, us or them. So much of what we see and read and hear is forcing us to “take a side”. There is no grey. No nuance. No space for dialog. No time to listen. In most of our places of discourse, it is almost impossible to find common ground with those who have different opinions. Impossible to open our ears and hearts to the humans at the other end. Sometimes I wonder if people are even trying anymore. We’ve moved so far away from each other. So far to the left or the right, this side of an issue or that side.

Everyone is shouting. No one is listening.

It feels as though there are no forums for coming together. No safe spaces to share differing points of view. Everyone knows it all already. Why should I

listen to you if I already know what you're going to say. You're a republican - you MUST believe that abortion is murder. You're a democrat - you MUST want to TAKE MY GUNS. You watch MSNBC...you watch Fox News ... What could we possibly have in common?

Everyone is shouting. No one is listening.

The message is clear - there is no space between. I can't love Israel and also question Israeli policies. I can't recognize the pain and violence perpetrated on Black and Brown bodies more often than white bodies and also know that there are truly good decent people risking their lives every day to try to make our cities safer. There is no nuance. There is only LEFT and RIGHT, right and wrong.

And it truly feels like it's all or nothing. If I bend on one issue, I've betrayed all other issues. There's no space to evaluate things on their individual merits, individual sets of facts and details. There's no space to talk calmly, listen openly, and find common ground.

Everyone is shouting. No one is listening.

But finding compassion for others and seeing their side doesn't mean giving up your values. It doesn't mean betraying your team or selling out. It means making space so both sides can heal. It means pushing a little but from a place of understanding. I can support the police and demand fundamental and lasting changes to the way they function. I can hope for a Palestinian state and fight furiously against anti-semitism.

I can lead with love and compassion. I can listen. And hear.

The Talmud teaches,

For three years there was a dispute between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the former asserting, "The law is according to our view," and the latter asserting, "The law is according to our view." Then

a voice issued from heaven announcing, “The teachings of both are the words of the living God, but the law is in agreement with the School of Hillel.”

But [it was asked] since both are the words of the living God, for what reason was the School of Hillel entitled to have the law determined according to their rulings?

Because they were kindly and humble, and because they studied their own rulings and those of the School of Shammai, and even mentioned the teachings of the School of Shammai before their own.

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin interprets the text by noting that the heavenly voice ruled in favor of Hillel for moral reasons - because he and his followers were kindly and humble. The followers of Shammai had become arrogant. Certain they possessed the truth, they no longer bothered to listen to, or discuss the arguments of, their opponents.

Everyone was shouting. No one was listening.

The School of Hillel studied the views of their “enemy.” They listened to other perspectives and mentioned them in their rulings on Torah. For this reason, they were chosen to define the law. They listened and studied all sides of an issue - even perspectives or explanations they didn’t agree with. They understood the need for compromise and understanding. Even as they stood firm with their rulings and their beliefs, they took time to understand the other side.

They listened. Humbly.

The art of compromise is demanding and arduous and all of us have much to learn. The natural way of our culture these days pulls us away from compromise and toward the outer edges, the extremes, the absolutes. Sometimes we may worry that if we spend time listening more, we will lose sight of our ideals. But one’s character is not solely measured by their ideals. It is also measured by how they’re willing to compromise for the sake of

preserving human dignity. We must work to move closer to each other. Not to betray our values or our beliefs. But to honor the other humans with whom we interact, with whom we may disagree. We must stop shouting. Learn to listen.

An interesting fact about tefillin - the leather straps some Jews use while praying to remind themselves of the teachings of Torah. The straps are uneven - the right strap is longer than the left. The explanation given is that the longer strap represents *chesed* (love and kindness) while the shorter strap represents *gevurah/din* (strength or judgment). This is to remind us that *chesed* is greater than *din* - love and kindness are more important than strength and judgment. It is a lesson on the virtue of compromise.

There are, of course, values that should not be compromised. But for the sake of peace, often we must compromise our upper hand even when we feel certain of the truth. Rashi taught that doing “the right and the good” “refers to a compromise, within the letter of the law” (*Devarim* 6:18). We are to focus more on building a world of compassion, healing, and peace rather than on strict truth, strict law, and punishment.

Compromise is hard. Seeing both sides of an argument, hearing the pain of your “enemy”, feeling their struggle. It is much easier to sit with only your pain, only your views, only your truth. But we are taught to be like the disciples of Hillel - kind and humble, able to see, acknowledge, and understand our “enemy’s” point of view. If we can do this, we stand on much firmer moral ground.

Not all cops are bastards. Not all protesters are looters. Not all republicans are heartless. Not all democrats hate America.

There is so much space between. The world is filled with nuance and grey areas. And there are people with real stories, real fears, real pain with whom we may disagree. If we hope to be understood we must seek to understand. We must practice the compassion we know we have and that we hope for

from others. We must stop shouting and listen. Truly listen. Only then can we move forward together in peace.

Rabbi Hayim of Tzanz used to tell this parable: A man, wandering in the forest for several days, finally encountered another. He called out: "Brother, show me the way out of this forest." The man replied, "Brother, I, too, am lost. I can only tell you this. The ways I have tried have led nowhere; they have only led me astray. Take my hand and let us search for the way together."

Rabbi Hayim would add: "So it is with us, when we go our separate ways, we may go astray. Let us join hands and look for the way together."

As we come to the end of our Days of Awe, as the gates begin to close, I want you to remember the grey space, the nuance, the importance of compromise in the world. I want you to close out this Yom Kippur day committed to finding a way to listen more and shout less; practice *chesed* more than *din* - love over judgment. I want you to reach out, join hands, and look for a way together.