

2014

Love

Your Fellow Jew





Unreligion

Nothing has been as detrimental to the Jewish People as the modern idea that Judaism is a religion. If we are a religion, then some Jews are more Jewish, others less Jewish and many Jews not Jewish at all.

It's a lie. We are all one. If one Jew stumbles, we all stumble with him. When the same Jew stretches out his hand to give to a needy soul, to wrap tefillin on his arm or to light a candle before Shabbat—all of us stretch out our arms together.

We are not a religion. We are a soul. A single soul radiating into many bodies, each ray shining forth on its unique mission, each body receiving the light according to its capacity, each embodiment playing its crucial role. Together, we compose a symphony with no redundant parts, no instrument more vital than another. And our path back towards that original source of light is through every other ray that extends from it.

A healthy heart is one where every part works in harmony. A healthy Jewish people is one big, caring family where each individual is concerned for the other as for his own self. Where one Jew faces rough times and the others hold his hand. Where one meets good fortune and all of us celebrate.



Where no one is labeled or alienated for his or her beliefs, behaviors or background. Where each runs to do an act of kindness for the other and shuts his eyes and ears to the other's shame.

And if, for whatever reason, one may slight the other, then all is sensibly worked out. Or maybe just forgotten—as the right hand forgives the left for striking it out of clumsiness.

Shouldn't I Love Everyone?

Some don't think that Jews should single out Jews for special treatment. In their minds, there are no subsets of humanity; all distinctions should be erased.

We need to get down to reality and human nature: If someone ignores his own brother's needs, what's behind his kindness to others? First we learn to care for our own family and then we can truly care for everyone else. This is the path the Torah gives us to reach the ocean beyond our own egos: First find the river of which you are a tributary, the place from where you come, the destiny to which you are headed and the people with whom you share that heritage and journey. And then you will reach beyond.

It works. Even in the ghettos of the Middle Ages, non-Jewish beggars knew to knock first on the doors



of the Jews¹. Things haven't changed much: When the Peace Corps was first founded in America, 40% of those who volunteered were Jews². And a 1987 study found that the more a household volunteers for Jewish purposes, the more it tends to volunteer for non-Jewish purposes as well³. If we preached universality exclusively, there would be no Jews to volunteer—we would have disappeared long ago, along with our message of social justice to the world.

There's another reason to start with your fellow Jew: If we do not take care of our own, who will? Perhaps this is the secret of our survival: We are unique, for to this day, when one Jew hears of another Jew's plight somewhere across the globe, he identifies with that Jew, feels his or her pain and is moved to do whatever he can to help.



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1. *Abrahams, Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, 329
 2. *John, Jews, Justice and Judaism*, 292
 3. *Wuthnow and Hodgkinson, Faith and Philanthropy in America*, 135

Practically Speaking

1. Start each morning by saying, "I accept upon myself the mitzvah to love my fellow Jew just as I love myself."
2. Speak only good about other Jews. Don't even listen to a bad word, unless some real benefit will come to this person through your conversation.
3. Look for opportunities to do another Jew a favor.
4. Support a Jewish free loan fund.
5. Bring Jewish people together. Tear down the false barriers of age, affiliation and ethnicity.
6. Invite other Jews to share in the most precious thing we have, our Torah and our mitzvahs.



Straight from the Source

LEVITICUS:

“Love your fellow as yourself.”

RABBI AKIVA:

“This is a major principle of the Torah.”

ZOHAR:

“The entire Jewish people are a single, perfect whole.”

RABBI ISAAC LURIA, “THE ARI”:

“Every morning, before your prayers, commit yourself to love every other Jew as your own self. Then your prayers will be accepted and bear fruit.”

THE BAAL SHEM TOV:

“A soul descends from its place on high and enters this world for seventy or eighty years just to do a favor for another.”

THE MAGGID OF MEZRITCH:

“Do you hear what they say in the heavenly academy? That to love your fellow Jew means to love the completely wicked just as you love the completely righteous!”

THE REBBE:

“Labels are for shirts, not for Jews. We serve all Jews equally, with no expectations.”



