

When I was in the fourth grade, I met a man named Jim Craig. He was friends with my teacher and he came to visit my class as a special guest. Hearing that he was coming to visit, lots of boys in my class were giddy with excitement; I, on the other hand, had no idea why he was special.

As it turns out, Jim Craig was the goalie for the 1980 US Men's Olympic Hockey Team. If you were around and following sports in those days, you may remember the "Miracle on Ice" that took place on Friday, February 22, 1980 when the Men's national team - filled with amateur players - defeated the much-hyped Soviet team.

I'm told that this was A REALLY BIG DEAL.

I know about as much about hockey now as I did then. But I know it was A REALLY BIG DEAL because not 1, not 2, but THREE movies were made about it. The most famous of these was called "Miracle," and it came out about 10 years ago.

Rabbi Dov Moshe Lipman, an American-born Israeli rabbi who writes for the Times of Israel and the Jerusalem Post, published a piece on Aish.com this week in which he used the movie Miracle as an inspiration around Tisha B'av. There's a scene that Rabbi Lipman quotes that I want to share with you; in this scene, the U.S. team's coach, Herb Brooks, successfully brings his disorganized team together:

"Throughout the early practices with his team, Brooks asks players to introduce themselves to the rest of the team. The dialogue always follows the same pattern of the first introduction sequence. The coach turns to a player and says, "What's your

name?". The player answers. Coach Brooks says, "And where are you from?". The player answers with the city that he lives in. The coach asks, "Who do you play for?" and, to a person, every player answers with their college name.

Five months before the Olympics, after playing a game in which Coach Brooks feels his team has not put forth their maximum effort, Brooks makes them stay on the ice to skate "suicides" -- as the name suggests, an exhausting drill. This continues over and over; after each time, the coach says, "Again," dashing their hopes that this would be their last sequence.

Hours pass with the team being forced to skate back and forth, over and over again.

Suddenly, a player's voice calls out from among the crowd:

"Mike Eruzione!" [eh-RU-zee-oh-nee]

The player is gasping for breath and barely gathers the strength to continue,
"Winthrop, Massachusetts!"

Coach Brooks, catching on, immediately asks: "Who do you play for?"

The player, the eventual team captain, struggles and says: "I play for...the United States of America!"

Coach Brooks softly replies, "That's all gentlemen."

They went back to the locker room to collapse... and then on to the Olympics to not only defeat the Soviets in a semi-final game, but to win their last match against Finland and take home the gold medal.

Rabbi Lipman's message in the article quoting this movie is one of unity: the team was only able to succeed when they stopped seeing what divided them and started seeing what united them.

So too is it with the Jewish people.

We are a mere 4 days past Tisha-B'av. As a people mourning the destruction and devastation that befell us over the years, we are still reeling from and processing the holiday. Our tradition ascribes us 7 weeks of consolation because we are not expected to be done with the day of mourning quite yet.

We are taught that the Temple was destroyed because of *Sinat Hinam* - senseless hatred - which is precisely what we've seen these past few months in Israel and in the States. We've seen hurtful and inflammatory protests at the Western Wall against equal access to the Wall. We've seen a Jewish Israeli man, known to be an eccentric person, killed in the Kotel plaza for being assumed to be a terrorist. And we've heard hurtful words, mean accusations, and nasty rumors spread about one another.

What could be different if each of us took this week's Torah portion to heart? If we read the Shema not only as a declaration of faith in One God - but as a declaration

of the unification of One Israel, that all worships that same One God. Would we treat each other differently? Would our words and our actions be more loving, more unifying instead of dividing?

Leviticus 19, verse 18 teaches us וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ - “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Rambam expounds, “We are commanded to love and care for our fellow as we love and care for ourselves. We should treasure our fellow and their possessions as we treasure our own. Whatever I wish for myself, I wish also for my fellow; and whatever I dislike for myself, I should also not want to befall them.”

The commandment might seem obvious, but the Torah includes loving one another as a mitzvah precisely because our actions don't indicate that it IS obvious for us. At times, it is easier to keep Shabbat, make sure our weights and measures are fair, and to build a parapet around our roofs, than it is to see the humanity in others. Many of the mitzvot are checklist like. We take care of them by doing them once, or once in awhile, and can check them off our list. Not so with loving one another.

We are 4 days past Tisha B'av... but we are just 1 day away from Tu B'av - Judaism's holiday of love - which begins tomorrow evening.

The opposite of *Sinat Hinam* is *Ahavat Hinam* - senseless love. The kind of love that is unconditional, not always valued, certainly hard to find and even harder to give. It is the kind of love we often have for our families: they might make us angry, they might make wrong decisions, and they might veer far from the path that we expected or wanted, but we still love them. Love does not mean always agreeing; it means being willing and able to look beyond disagreements to see the essence of the person. *Ahavat Hinam* means loyalty to the Oneness of God and thus to the oneness of our people.

Sefer Yezirah, an ancient Kabbalistic work, teaches that there are three bodily organs of love - the heart... and the two ears. We demonstrate our love for one another by actively listening to each other. Not by talking; not by giving; not by touching; but by listening.

The Chinese understand this concept as well. The Chinese character for the verb “to listen” is made up of the three characters that mean eyes, ears and heart. Chinese culture teaches that listening is a whole-body experience. But it is also more than just the body; the heart represents more than just an organ that pumps blood. It represents our soul and our emotions.

Listening is Love. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for love - אהבה - has the same numerical value as the word אחד, the word for “one”. Both words have a Gematria value of 13 - and there is a Kabbalistic tradition that if two words have the same numerical value, the words are deeply connected.

We see this connection between these words when we read the story of Creation and see that God created Eve as a partner for Adam, saying:

כד על-פּוֹ, יַעֲזֹב-אִישׁ, אֶת-אָבִיו, וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ; וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ, וְהָיוּ לְבֶשֶׁר אֶחָד.

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one.

The romantic in me appreciates that we can read “They shall be ONE” as what we would wish for ourselves in the same situation, that Adam and Eve be, or find, LOVE.

So when we read the Shema:

ד שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה אֶחָד.

4 “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is **one**.” We can also hear the word אֶחָד with echoes of the word אַהֲבָה, love.

While perhaps a bit of a stretch, the notion that oneness and unity as an expression of love speaks to me at this time of discord in our people.

Our midrash teaches that when our forefather Jacob was dying, he drew his children near to his bedside and expressed his concern that they would not remain Jewish. They replied, “Shema Yisrael”, Listen Jacob (who was also known as Israel), “Adonai is our God, Adonai is One”. In Jacob’s dying breath, he whispered the words “Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuto L’olam Va’ed”, Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.

I have to imagine that Jacob’s fear was not that his children wouldn’t follow the laws of kashrut or that they would go to war without taking the appropriate Jewish

precautions - but that they would forget God. And in doing so, would stop treating one another lovingly, with dignity and respect. That they would stop listening to one another in the way Jacob and his own brother Esau stopped listening to each other earlier in their lives.

So when we say the Shema and remind ourselves of God's oneness, we need to also remind ourselves that the way we express the core values of our Judaism is by treating one another with respect, by deeply listening to each other, and by allowing ourselves to encounter the other.

Even within the watchword of our people Israel, the Shema, listening and love go hand in hand. The V'ahavta, the verses immediately following the Shema, echo the themes of love, ensuring that we reinforce the value of love with our children, with our neighbors, and within ourselves.

Ruth Messinger, President of the American Jewish World Service, wrote a *dvar tzedek* this week on what she calls "Shema Moments", moments when listening intently allowed her to better understand people who are silenced, disempowered, or rendered invisible. These are the moments when we realize that our assumptions do not provide all the answers; that unasked questions are missed opportunities; and that the difference between hearing and listening is often paying attention and finding common ground.

How would the altercation between George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin have differed if, before Zimmerman joined the Neighborhood Watch, he had undergone

sensitivity training and community engagement programs? Would these have allowed him to truly see and hear those he assumed he was protecting his neighborhood from? Maybe not - but all the same, a little empathy goes a long way in telling the difference between someone to protect and someone to protect *from*. And imagine the ripples such a conversation could have in a community.

What if every teenage seminary girl sent to the Kotel to take up space - sent by rabbis, no less, so that the Women of the Wall couldn't be there - what if each one sat down, talked with, and really listened to supporters of Women of the Wall? I imagine such conversations might not end with agreements, but I have a hard time believing that the spitting, cursing, and egg-throwing that took place would still feel like an acceptable response.

Talking and, more importantly, listening to one another allows us a glimpse into the humanity of those we perceive as "the other". We do ourselves and God a disservice when we, intentionally or not, skip over the opportunity to engage with one another.

So what happened to Jim Craig, the goalie who visited my 4th grade classroom? It turns out that after a short career in the NHL, he became a motivational speaker. In 2011, he was named one of the Top Five Speakers....on the topic of Team Building by the Speakers Platform. It seems that the learning to be part of the US Olympic Hockey team, representing not himself, not his college, nor his state, but his entire country made an impact.

So too it is for us. Let us learn from Coach Brooks' model and learn to play for the same team - God's team - and to speak with senseless love about our fellow teammates.

Shabbat Shalom.

The Hatzi Kaddish before our Musaf Amidah is found on page 432.