

# Weekly Teaching

## November 23, 2018

There's a wonderful word within Judaism: *Yiddishkeit*.

*Yiddishkeit* translates to mean "one's Jewishness," but, the word has a much deeper meaning.

Jews utilize the word *Yiddishkeit* to express our emotional attachment and love for being Jewish.

One lesson I try to emphasize is that we must love our Judaism; to love being Jewish.

To borrow the language of the Torah: "We need to love Judaism, truly, with all our heart, soul and might."

When we love something, there's a passion and energy for it that knows no bounds.

When the Jew loves their Judaism, then everything else falls in place.

What is true for the Jew and our particular pathway to God is also true for our co-religionists.

The love and joy of fully embracing one's spiritual heritage creates the artistic majesty of how we will then choose to lead our religious lives.

As a Jew, I know that there have been times in our collective Jewish history when we kept our beloved Judaism alive and beautiful even while being confronted with great horrors, such as when we were slaves under Pharaoh; when our great Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed; and when we were threatened with annihilation by the Nazis.

However, no matter what, and with God's blessing, we kept our *Yiddishkeit* alive through the centuries.

Today, Jews can love their *Yiddishkeit* openly and fervently.

However, modernity presents new challenges to our loving embrace of God, sacred traditions, and heritage.

My own children, when they were young, used to always ask me many questions about their Jewish upbringing, for example:

- Why do we have to go to Temple every Shabbat?
- Why do we even have to keep Shabbat?
- Why do we have to keep kosher?
- Why do we have to attend Jewish day school?
- Why do we have to give charity from our own allowance?
- Why do we have to volunteer to do community service?

They were all good questions, but the one question they never asked, which would have worried me the most, was "Why do we have to be Jewish?"

Fortunately, this question never occurred to them when they were young, and even while finding their own way as Jewish adults, they still don't ask this question.

It's my fervent goal that our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will have so much passion for Judaism they'll never consider asking "Why be Jewish?"

I hope the future generations of Jews never ask the question, because their Judaism will always be right there, right under their very skin.

As long as our children feel rooted in Judaism, and love being Jewish, they're going to keep being, and enjoying being, Jewish.

The comedian Allan Sherman once shared a personal experience:

*"There was a time when I couldn't find roots because I was ashamed to look at where they were. When you're at a cocktail party in the Waldorf Towers and they pass you the goose-liver pate, you very carefully neglect to point out that your grandmother's chopped chicken liver tastes a lot better to you! You cover up the old roots because something in your upbringing convinced you that they're weeds."*

The challenge for all parents who wish to raise children committed to their religious heritage is to pass along a reverent pride and love for their religious roots.

For a Jew, there's no room for weeds to grow when we're full of love for *Yiddishkeit*.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once taught:

*"Often we entertain lofty ideals but we don't live by them. The problem of our soul is how to live nobly."*

The religious person must love their religious identity nobly.

When we love something that way, there's a passion and energy for it that knows no bounds.

For the Jew, *Yiddishkeit* means a Jewish spiritual life always led with passion and commitment.

For every individual, no matter their spiritual path, you have to choose to live a life whereby you are continually strengthening the roots of your spiritual heritage with your love of everything sacred, or know that you otherwise are choosing to allow weeds within your personal spiritual garden.

May God give us the strength to live nobly!

Shabbat Shalom,

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