

In 2003, we started an annual event here we call the Midnight Run. Teenagers in the congregation spend the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving collecting foodstuffs, clothing, personal hygiene items. Thanksgiving weekend it all gets sorted and bagged.

Originally, we went into New York City that Saturday night to distribute the goods at a homeless shelter. Most recently, we work with St. Anne's Church on 16th Avenue, whose soup kitchen and many charitable efforts are key in propping up an especially needy area. Church leaders convinced us that doing on Sunday afternoon instead of Saturday night is genuinely more effective. So now we call it the Daytime Midnight Run.

We do this because we want to engage in a meaningful act of tzedakah and help those who need it. We also do this because it brings our own youngsters into contact with real life in a way they generally never have before. We want them to see poverty as a reality, not something on television. It is always a moving and eye opening experience. The adolescents learn.

I learn, too. One lesson was unexpected. You've probably seen our fall list of requests. Staple, non-perishable food items. New or gently used outerware, especially sweaters, jackets, winter coats, gloves, hats and scarves. New thick woolen socks are important. Toiletries like toothbrushes, toothpaste, bar soap, and so on. I'd like to think the list is comprehensive, logical and clear.

But maybe it's not. Here's some of the more interesting items people are moved to "donate" for the Midnight Run in years past.

Used Panty hose.

Used bras.

Golf clubs.

Broken toys and games missing pieces.

Designer leather pants.

Matza. Unopened, but from Passover 5 years earlier. We have to check the "eat before" date on all food. Maybe sometimes the motivation is more a desire to clean one's pantry than to help those in need.

Every year we try to be as specific as possible about what is needed. Every year, there's a certain percentage of what is given that just blows my mind. Sometimes, people don't listen.

It was with that in mind that we approached our effort at Hurricane Harvey relief. The day after Texas was ravaged, we encouraged our members to support the Federation's hurricane relief fund, confident those monies would be well and appropriately used.

Then I contacted Rabbi Lyon of Houston's Beth Israel Congregation. He gave us a list of supplies specifically needed, which we shared, emphasizing, that this is what we were told was of need by those on the ground doing the work. A few days later, you may recall, that changed. Storage space was in short supply city wide due to schools holding classes wherever they could. Now, gift cards. Stores were being restocked and this was the best way to help. We shared that message, emphasizing again that it came from those doing the work, and the congregation responded.

Last week, we sent \$10,000 worth of gift cards to Houston. Next week, a similar amount will go out. With that, monies contributed to the Federation's campaign, the enormous number of direct shipments I know were sent, and one shipment of eight pallets of cleaning supplies put on a truck, I am convinced that the aggregate Temple B'nai Abraham contribution to this effort is at least \$40,000, and perhaps more.

That's a staggering amount. Rabbi Lyon emailed me this Yom Kippur message to share. "Cliff. As you know, our daily liturgy include our hope that God will be 'Shomei'a Tefilah' one who listens to our prayers. It's said that we don't always know how God will respond, because we tend to 'walk sightless among miracles.' But you and your congregation listened, and responded in the most helpful way possible. From the bottom of my heart, and that of all whom you have helped, thank you."

We listened. We heard people cry. But we also listened to what they were saying.

Hear and listen. Last Shabbat, Troy Silver and Jack Levitt spoke about the portion Ha-azinu, which consists almost entirely of Moses' final poem to the people, before leaving them, as they prepare to cross the Jordan River. It begins, "Listen, O Heavens, let me speak, let the earth here the words that I say."

We could simply assume that the usage of different terms is to make the language more colorful, but both Troy and Jack rejected that idea. And I do, too. To hear, is the awareness of sounds entering our ears. To listen, is to pay attention to those sounds. If all our parts function correctly, we hear. It just happens. To listen, however, is a choice we make.

I've been reading Graham Greene's *A Burnt Out Case*, in which a high minded and wealthy white farmer in the Belgian Congo criticizes the doctor of a local clinic for lepers. "Dr. Colin doesn't understand the meaning of the word charity. Do you remember last year when I tried to organize a Leper's Day? He would have nothing to do with it. Said he couldn't afford charity. We had 400 dresses and suits accumulated and he said he couldn't afford to take the charity because there wasn't enough to go around, that he would have to buy clothing for all the rest to avoid jealousy, and he couldn't afford it. Can you imagine? A leper being jealous?"

I'd say the doctor had a point. The farmer might have understood, had he listened.

Nineteen years ago, I stood on this pulpit for the first time. I didn't know you. That was a problem. I looked out, I saw all those faces, and I thought to myself, who are these people?

If I were to become the rabbi of this congregation I hoped to be, I had to know you. I can look around this Sanctuary and almost every person I look at, I can think of a conversation, a class, a bris or a naming, a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, a wedding, a funeral, a visit on a college campus or a visit in a hospital, a meal, a cup of coffee. But such memories do not exist simply because we were together. I remember, because, I'd like to think, when you spoke, I listened.

The Early School of Temple B'nai Abraham, our preschool, has many extraordinary teachers. Years ago, I asked one, what's the first day of school is like? All these

little children, in a strange place, peering at you... When you look at them, what do you see?

She responded, it's kind of a blob, really. I've read the applications thoroughly. I know about them. But I don't know them. They are a nervous mass of young flesh. To teach them well I have to move deliberately. Transform them from an undifferentiated class of toddlers into a dozen or so distinct individuals. Each with his or own story, learning style, advantages and challenges, and certainly their own personality.

That first day, all I can see is a bunch of scared faces. The most important work I can do is to get to know each of them as individuals as quickly as possible. If I'm going to teach them, that's essential. And there's only one way to do that. I have to listen to them.

The words of a good teacher. We know when we are being listened to. A toddler does, too.

When Sigmund Freud developed his theory of psychoanalysis, he endured the jeers and condemnation of a medical establishment that found many of his theories strange and even shocking. That he never faltered in his efforts is testimony both to his strength of character and his certainty in his discoveries.

Freud called psychoanalysis "the talking cure." Many have suggested it should be called "the listening cure." Most of us are happy to talk. The key is to find someone who listens. The foundation of psychoanalysis is the relationship between the analysand and the analyst, the one "on the couch" and the one "in the chair." Psychotherapy works when the one in need has absolute trust that the one would help listens. To listen heals.

Several weeks ago, like so many I was riveted one mid-August weekend by the images from Charleston, South Carolina. The bizarre nighttime procession, the marchers wielding torches, chanting the eerie couplet, "Blood and soil, Jews will not replace us."

It was unreal. It was frightening. Something from history books come alive. The world at large responded with condemnation, outrage and disgust. Columnists

columned, rabbis rabbi-ed, politicians politicked. With perhaps one notable exception, the immediate national response was unanimous. This was an abomination.

After the initial shock of the images, I began to look at the individuals. They were white. Nearly all male. Serious. Intent. Frightening. I looked some more, I watched their faces, I began to wonder...why are you here? What brought you to this moment? How were you raised or what did you experience or which enzyme are you missing that is causing you to hold that torch so high?

I really wish I could have reached into the screen and taken one of those individuals into my living room and asked him those questions, and then say, please, answer. I want to listen to you. Maybe there is something that will help me understand.

Hannah Arendt wrote, "most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil." So how did you get there? Were you screwed out of a job by someone whose skin was darker? Have you always felt weak and puny and this makes you feel strong? Did your parents teach you certain kinds of people are evil? Or are you just loathesome? I want to know.

If there is something to know, unless we listen, we'll never learn it.

In the Haftorah for the first day of Rosh Hashanah we read about Hannah, beloved wife of Elkanah. Hannah was sad, sad beyond words. She was unable to bear a child. One morning she went up to Shilo, site of the most important temple of the day. She sat at the gate of the temple, and made a vow, "O Lord, if you will looking upon my suffering, and remember me, if you grant me a son, I will dedicate him to the Lord for all the days of his life."

Eli, the High Priest of Shiloh, watched her. He heard her mumble to herself, and was certain of the worst. She was desecrating this holy place. "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!"

She looked at him, told him why she was there and what she had vowed. Eli was chagrined. He said to her, "Go in peace. And may the God of Israel grant what you have asked of him."

Even Eli the high priest needed to learn. Unless we listen, we don't know.

It appears Washington today is the epicenter of not listening. To listen is a choice; not to listen, is also a choice.

A few days ago I had the chance to hear Representative Josh Gottheimer, a New Jersey Democrat who represents a district north of here. He spoke about something I'd heard of, but didn't know much about.

Several months ago he and Tom Reed, a Republican Representative from upstate New York, founded the Problem Solver's Caucus. Thirty-four members, seventeen from each party. They meet weekly for several hours to formulate, discuss and vote on proposed legislation.

The members agree to vote in favor of any legislation that receives support of 75% of the entire caucus, or 51% of both the Republicans and the Democrats. Gottheimer described a recent session that ran past 1:00 AM, formulating a legislative response to DACA. They debated, they negotiated, they went back and forth...they listened to one another...and ultimately emerged with a draft all supported.

What will happen next? Perhaps nothing. But I am encouraged by them. Because they show us that, even in Washington, people can listen.

Thirty-five years ago, a smart woman I know was working in a bank in Jackson, Mississippi. A regular customer came in one day, a middle aged man, a drug rep, married with children. He was upset. He had mailed his mortgage payment to the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York City but was eventually told it never arrived. He sent another check and, you guessed it, the bank deposited both checks, putting his local checking account into the red.

Smoke was coming out of his ears. The banker calmed him down, assured him that she would ensure all the bounced checks were paid at no cost or pain to him, and she was certain the Chase Manhattan Bank would send him a refund check for the overpayment. He snorted, looked her in the eye, pulled out the lining of

his pants pocket and said, "Ms. Siegal, did you ever know a Jew who would give you back money once it was in his pocket?"

She looked at him calmly and replied, "this one would." The man turned red. He asked, "what do you mean?" She answered, "I'm Jewish. I would never keep something that was not mine."

The banker knew the client was thought an honorable and responsible man. She also knew that the man had grown up and lived his entire life in an area with hardly any Jews, surrounded by and susceptible to the hateful ignorance and hateful prejudices of this region.

She listened. She knew the words were despicable. But maybe the man wasn't. Because she listened, she knew exactly what to say.

Times are noisy. Deafening. And when we hear loud sounds our instinctive reaction is to cover our ears. Retreat. Not hear anything at all.

But we must do the opposite. Because the louder it gets the more imperative it is we listen, so we know what the other truly thinks, we know what the other truly feels, we know what the other truly wants. When we listen, we start to turn the volume down.