

Good evening, everyone and welcome. My name is Simon Jacobson, and I'm the bechor, the oldest son, of our dear father, Gershon Jacobson, in whose honor we've all gathered tonight for the third Gershon Jacobson annual lecture.

In the name of my beloved family, my dear mother, Tzivia or Sylvia, my sister, Freida, my brother, Baruch Shalom, Chani, and Yosef Yitzchak, all our children and grandchildren, all our friends, and everyone who is here, we are truly honored with your presence.

Three years is a chazaka in Jewish tradition. That means it's something that has a firm standing; something, as the Talmud says, once it's established cannot be broken, chut ha'meshulash, the triple cord, is not easily nor quickly severed. It really means it's not severed at all. On a third yahrtzeit, however, we want to qualify that because we'd like a chazaka like that to be severed, as we pray every day for techias hameisim, as we pray every day for the coming of Moshiach, for the day when we will be reunited with all our loved ones.

Fundamental to Jewish philosophy is that the world of spirit and the world of matter do not have to remain separate, but they will be joined and united under the principle of Hashem Echad. So though, on one hand, three years of a yahrtzeit – in this case my father's passing on the 20th of the Iyar, tav shin samech heh, 2005, is something that we don't want to be permanent, we Jews have mastered the secret that even from grief and even from sadness and even from things that are not permanent we still can take away permanent, positive effects.

The fact is that we've gathered here together for the purpose of celebrating Jewish unity, ahavas Yisrael, taking on resolutions that will strengthen each of us in our own personal lives, family lives, and community, and commitment to perpetuating our rich and great tradition. It's been 3,320 years now since Mount Sinai. That's an exact amount. Then that lesson, that energy that we glean from a sad moment, does become permanent.

I recall a few years ago traveling to Israel with my mother, may she be well. She's the young blonde sitting with the white dress right here up front. Yellow dress, okay, but young blonde stands. So we traveled to Israel a few years ago to meet family and friends. My mother told me the following story.

She had met a journalist from the newspaper Maariv who now was already an elderly woman, and she shared with my mother the following moving episode. Remembering it so many years later you can imagine what kind of an impact it had on her.

The journalist said that when she first began working as a correspondent for Maariv she had met my father at different events and occasions. He was then a correspondent for another Israeli newspaper, Yediot Achronot. As they were talking – journalists become friendly – she wanted to make it clear to him that she is far from anything religious. She saw him in a beard and a yarmulke, so there was of course the conventional stereotype, especially in the eyes of objective journalists.

So she said to him, “I want to make it clear to you that I am far from observant. I’m actually anti-religious. So though we’ll have a professional relationship, let’s just know our boundaries and know where I stand.” I guess she thought my father was going to try to convert her to something or whatever. Anyone who knows my father ...

So my father said to her, “What do you mean that you’re anti-religious or not religious?” She said, “I don’t do all these old rituals that religious and Orthodox Jews are caught up with.” I guess they were speaking in Hebrew, so dati’im achreidim, or however you say fanatic in Hebrew. So my father said to her, “Really? You visit the sick?” “Yeah.” “You honor your parents?” “Yes.” “You give charity?” “Yes.” “Are you kind to others?” “I try to be.” My father said to her, “You’re keeping most of the mitzvos in the Torah. What do you mean you’re not religious? You’re committed to the Torah.” And she never forgot that.

She never forgot those words because it completely disarmed her obviously. Behind the stereotype she heard the kindness, the message, and she realized it’s true that we Jews are united much more by things than by those that may separate us. And the union is in the fundamentals of Yiddishkeit, which is the menshlichkeit, bein adam l’chaveiro, everyone on their own level. And she never forgot that she in a sense was embraced in that fashion.

She shared this with my mother that all these years later after she was retired she remembers it. It would be interesting to know how her life evolved.

I say it because all of you, or many of you, knew my father directly, even better in some ways than I did. We have good friends here, for many years, and you see people in many circumstances over the years, how they cover a story, the friendships, organizations, the different alliances and so on – you see a person. B’kisei, b’kasei, b’kosei. But even more so with a journalist who writes and sometimes has to be writing things that not everybody’s going to like. You can’t satisfy everyone.

So those of you who knew my father first hand know how this story captures the essence of his life, and even those of you who may not know him first hand, I convey to you that our being here, which is why we, as a family, decided to perpetuate – it’s not just about a sentimental thing to perpetuate my father’s memory, but because he was a unique Jew if I may say so myself as a son.

He was a unique Jew who made a kiddush Hashem. He was a man with a beard and a yarmulke sitting in the ‘50’s and the ‘60’s with journalists of all persuasions, of all religions, of no religions. You can imagine it was not an easy task.

At the same time my father was the farthest thing from dogmatic. Some people, when they spoke to him, didn’t see him as a religious person altogether. They saw him as a human being, a good person. The newspaper he first wrote for was the ???. Then later in an act of mesirus nefesh he established Der Allgemeiner Journal despite all the detractors

who said there's no hope, that Yiddish was dying with the older generation. It's now 36 years since the founding of the Algemeiner Journal, and my father's persistence was a message and a lesson to me and to all of us.

So there's no doubt that from the moment his neshama went up on that chaf Iyar, the cloud that rose on the 20th of Iyar, as the Torah says, we were convinced and absolutely committed to continue, not just this individual's life, but what he stood for.

This lecture, among other activities that we committed ourselves to, is very much a living monument, a living legacy, to a human being who lived through the Holocaust and Stalin and so on. Am Yisrael Chai. We are here together to celebrate, to make a kiddush Hashem. We lived in a world where there are, unfortunately, too many chillulei Hashem, too much desecration of G-d's name.

The Medrash says, 'v'ahavta es Hashem Elokecha,' you shall love G-d. The Medrash says 'v'ahavta,' may G-d be beloved to people that see you. When someone sees you they should say, "Ah, this is what a G-dly person looks like? This makes me love G-d." Unfortunately, sometimes we see the other side. I don't want to talk negatively. So the power of a kiddush Hashem today is extremely acute, extremely important, and this is what we're celebrating here tonight.

So, in the spirit of this message, right after my father passed away we established the Gershon Jacobson Jewish Continuity Foundation. I did it simply, the only way possible. I asked friends and people who knew my father, "Is this worthwhile doing?" It wasn't like I was looking for a job. I wasn't looking to fill my time. On the contrary, but once I saw the response, and response on a very literal level – financial help, moral support – in real ways, not just people mouthing slogans and saying, 'yeah, we'll help you' and so on.

So it was clear to me that this was meant to be and it would take on my part and on our part as a family to commit to it. I just got a call last week from someone who said, "You're still doing this lecture?" He thought, you know, the first year it was a sentimental thing, a yahrtzeit.

I have no doubt that it's only growing from year to year, because it's a spirit that is indomitable. It's the spirit of Yiddishkeit.

So, briefly, this foundation is dedicated to celebrating kiddush Hashem, to telling the Jewish story as my father so loyally did for many years, and to continue telling the story for our children and grandchildren, that we should never have a break in the story line. The story is a very fascinating one, a very sad one, but a very happy one. If you just look back at the last 50, 100 years, it's amazing in retrospect what the Jews went through in one century.

This has to be continued. We do so, number one, through the Algemeiner Journal. I would like all of you to give an applause to the staff of Algemeiner Journal, beginning

with my youngest brother. My youngest brother is Yosef Yitzchak Jacobson. Yosef Yitzchak, stand up, rise. Stand up a moment. Wave to the crowd.

As our loyal writer, the professor of linguistics at Vilnius University, otherwise known as Vilna, here's Dovid Katz, the youngest editor-in-chief in the history of the Jewish people. He's in the Guinness Book of World Records.

And to my other brother, Baruch Shalom, who in his own loyal way dedicated himself for many years working with my father and continues to preserve the archives, the whole history and the story as well. And of course to my sisters who will be very humble and tell you they do nothing, but they are an unbelievable support and vote of confidence behind the scenes – we couldn't do it without you.

And of course to my mother, my dear mother, who is now on one hand, sad to say, alone in a way. But on the other hand her hands are full with eineklach and children, and some of our functionality definitely affects her as well. So we're all together a beautiful family, and she has her hands full with all of us. So to my dear mother, in all the ways that she supports and all the ways that she is visibly and invisibly a part of this, we also say thank you.

I told the story about the ethical message also in connection to this evening's lecture. As I was saying besides the Algemeiner Journal and Algemeiner.com, a website with future plans to develop it further to serve the Jewish people to make that kiddush Hashem, we also established this annual lecture. This is a lecture that we dedicate to finding a topic which addresses something vital or relevant to our times. The first year we had Rabbi Lau, Chief Rabbi Lau. Last year we had Dr. Elie Weisel. Each lecture has not just been a nice few words of a guest speaker, but something of substance, something of meat that can make us all think, stimulate ideas and hopefully address some of the provocative, controversial and relevant issues of our time.

So in the spirit of this kiddush Hashem, the spirit of the message of integrity of my father's life, including in the pages of the Algemeiner Journal, which was above all Yiddishkeit – what did Yiddishkeit bring to this world? Besides what it brought to Jews in their own lives, what it brought to the world is, simply put, civilization. Civilization, the basics of modern civilization, of democracy, the principles of the Declaration of Independence, that all men are created equal. Jews would say that all people are created equal. And these principles are all based on what we received at Sinai, at Har Sinai 3, 320 years ago. We brought civilization to this world.

It's not just Jews who say this but also non-Jews, some of the great non-Jewish thinkers and founding fathers, including John Adams. Recently there have been different books, including The Gift of the Jews. It's vital sometimes for Jews to hear this because of their own shame or defensiveness. We have nothing to be embarrassed about. We brought morality to this world. From Avraham Avinu on, Jews were non-conformists who stood up for values that were not part of what the pagan world accepted. We went against the grain, and we are the children and grandchildren of such Jews.

Sadly, not all Jews are aware of this. You know, you talk about a religion -- people say 'religion, oh, keeping Shabbos,' like that woman, the writer from Maariv. So, in that spirit, we felt it appropriate to invite Rabbi Joseph Telushkin as a guest speaker this year. He's a prolific author. Many know him by the famous book, Jewish Literacy.

Recently he began and published the first of a three-set series called The Code of Jewish Ethics. Basically it's principles of Shulchan Aruch, bein adam l'chaveiro, and if you read the introduction he makes exactly that point, that many people dismiss religion as some type of ritualistic system. They forget that a fundamental element, as the Medrash says, is mitzvos, [Hebrew], mitzvos were given to refine human beings. Even bein adam l'Makom, even mitzvos like davening, prayer, Shabbos, kosher, are not detached from the human condition; they're part of the refinement process. When you take off a day of the week – Shabbos – it's not just about eating cholent or sleeping; it's about taking the day and focusing on family, on the spirit instead of the material aspect of your life, on the end instead of the means.

So all of Yiddishkeit is around – as Hillel says in the Gemara, if you have to sum up the entire Torah standing on one foot, [Hebrew], that which you dislike, that which you hate, you should not do unto others or, in the positive, v'ahavta l're'echa kamocho. All of the Torah, not just the laws between men, bein adam l'chaveiro, even the laws that are just bein adam l'Makom are all part of refining a human being, refining this crass world, reversing the trend from ego and greed into a world of giving, sharing and virtue.

So in that spirit, which is so much a part of what Yiddishkeit is about, we have invited Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, a famous author. I want to thank Rabbi Telushkin, first of all, for so easily and so willingly agreeing to come when I called him. He said to me absolutely yes without any question. So please welcome Rabbi Telushkin, and we'll hear the keynote address from the Rabbi about the issues of morality in this complex world. Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, please.

Rabbi Telushkin:

I'm honored to be able to pay homage to Gershon Jacobson. I grew up in a household where my father was an ardent, loving reader of the Algemeiner Journal, and one of the things that I'm very grateful to Shimon and to Yosef Yitzchak for is – you know, most people obviously hear the name and think of it as just the Yiddish newspaper, but they've really inserted a very strong English-language section into it. My Yiddish is shvach, so I am very grateful to them for that, and the articles that they print and re-print from elsewhere are really quite wonderful.

Shimon, in relating that story about his father and the journalist from Maariv, really got to the heart of what I'm trying to do in systematically collecting Jewish ethical teachings in a large variety of areas. What motivated to me to work on this was the realization that one of the sad things that happened to Jewish life – I don't know if you could say it

happened in modernity or happened before – is that the word ‘religious’ has come to be associated in people’s minds exclusively with ritual activities, what’s called in Hebrew *bein adam l’Makom*, laws between people and G-d.

Thus, if two Jews are speaking about a third, a not uncommon occurrence in Jewish life, and the question is raised ‘is so and so religious?’ the answer will be based exclusively on rituals – he keeps Shabbat, he keeps kosher, he is or he doesn’t and he’s not. So one could form the very peculiar impression that in Judaism ethics are an extracurricular activity. Now I say this is a Jew who is passionately committed to Jewish rituals. In addition to our belief that these are the will of G-d, there are also three other reasons that occur to me.

Without rituals we don’t have holiness. Anybody who ever thinks back to a meaningful Shabbat that they had, what added the dimension of *kedusha*, of holiness to the Shabbat, was the ritual element. I’ll just give you one example. The Shabbat is inaugurated by lighting two Shabbat candles, according to Jewish law. I’m just curious by a showing of hands, in how many of your households do they practice the custom of lighting an additional candle for each child in the house. How many of you do that? So a large number of people.

I grew up in a household where my parents did it, and I remember a very wonderful thing that Abraham Twerski once told me. Rabbi Twerski comes from a very major Chassidic family, and he’s himself a psychiatrist. He was telling me that he grew up in a household where his parents lit an additional candle for each child born in the house. And he said, “It was wonderful for me as a child to know that because I existed every Friday night there was more light in my parents’ household.”

And what Rabbi Twerski was underscoring in that comment was the powerful ability of ritual to speak the language of poetry. All parents tell their children that they love them, and usually they tell them that quite often. Twenty years later many of these children end up in therapists’ offices complaining that they never felt loved by their parents. So part of the power of ritual is that it can communicate these lessons in not such head-on ways, but in ways that are very effective.

Without rituals we wouldn’t have Jewish continuity. Shimon has noted that over 3,300 years ago the Jews left Egypt, the holiday of course that we celebrated just a few weeks ago. Michael Waltzer, the political scientist at Princeton, has argued that the story of the exodus, the *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, has influenced more movements of social justice in history than any other story in recorded literature. But if the Jews didn’t perpetuate the telling of that story through the seder, that story would continue to influence people but we, as a people, would no longer exist.

That, too, then is the power. We have continuity because of that story.

I’ll give you another example of Jewish continuity. When was George Washington’s birthday? There’s a reason I’m asking this; it’s not a trick question. What was the date

of his birthday? February 22nd. If I asked it of Shimon, he would not only tell me February 22nd he would also tell me the Hebrew date.

We're the last generation of Americans who are going to know that about Washington. When I was a child growing up, everybody knew Lincoln's birthday was February 12th and Washington's birthday was February 22nd. Today they've all been collapsed into President's Day, the third Monday in February which is supposed to honor all presidents but ends up honoring none.

Could you imagine if a group said, 'you know how we could increase observance of Yom Kippur? Let's standardize the date and make it the first Sunday in October?' What would happen? Well we know. It would collapse. People would stop coming. Part of the power of a ritual is that you have to adjust your life to the ritual. When people just simply dispense with a ritual because it becomes inconvenient people end up just not observing the ritual at all.

Part of the power of Jewish holidays is that in over 3,000 years of Judaism's history, they have never once arrived on time. Every year – 'the holidays are early this year,' 'the holidays are late this year,' never on time.

And third, rituals have the ability to communicate ethical lessons as well. I'll just give you one example. When I was growing up in the 1950's there were far fewer products that had Rabbinical supervision. Today it's a phenomenon in America. Indeed, most of the products with Rabbinical supervision are actually sold, not only to Jews who keep kosher, but to many non-Jews because there's a very positive association with kashrut among some 6% of the populace that willingly seeks out kosher food.

So today you could actually go into a supermarket anywhere in the U.S. and find many products that have Rabbinical supervision. When I was growing up that was much less the case. Obviously, if you grew up kosher you were extremely punctilious about any meat products, but many Jews with dairy products would check ingredients. My friend, Dennis Prager, who grew up near me in Brooklyn said, "When I was 6 years old the first words I learned to read in English were 'pure vegetable shortening only.'" He said it was not a bad lesson to learn at the age of 6 that "I couldn't have every candy bar in the candy store."

So *bein adam l'Makom* is at the heart of Judaism; it's unbelievably important. But as Shimon mentioned, Rabbi Jacobson mentioned, in telling the story about Hillel, there's a detail people sometimes forget in that story about Hillel. The way the story is normally told, people think a non-Jew came to Hillel and said to him, "Tell me the essence of Judaism while I'm standing on one foot," and in response to that query Hillel gives that famous response, "What's hateful unto you don't do unto your neighbor. The rest is commentary. *Ziel gemar*, now go and study."

In actuality there's a little difference. What the non-Jew actually said to Hillel was, "[Hebrew] Convert me to Judaism on the condition that you can teach me the essence of

Judaism while I'm standing on one foot," and it's in response to that request for conversion that Hillel says this ethical principle. So he was responding in a sense in a halachic way. In other words, he wasn't giving a sermon "ethics are central;" he was saying this is at the real heart of it.

You know, the commentaries on the Talmud were a little troubled by the speed with which Hillel seems to have converted the man. If you look at a Tosafos – it's actually a Tosafos in Yevamos that refers to this – they make the comment that Hillel had the prophetic insight and the intelligence to see that the man would become fully observant. But it really underscores the significance of ethics.

Any time you try and systematically present Jewish teachings on a subject you have to have some point of view. How do you choose your material? How do you organize your material? At the heart of my belief there is a great emphasis on Judaism's insistence on bechira, on free will. So you'll say, 'so what's the big chiddush? What's the big insight? Everybody believes in free will.' The truth of the matter is that not everybody believes in free will.

If you don't believe in G-d then what become the determinants of human behavior? In other words, if you don't believe that anything spiritual exists, that all that exists is the physical, then how do you account for human behavior? And the two answers that are commonly offered are heredity and environment.

I once saw a cartoon showing a young boy of about 9 or 10 years old looking at his report card filled with D's and F's. Over his shoulder you see his father with a big scowl on his face, and the kid is saying, "What do you think it is, Dad, heredity or environment?"

Probably the most famous criminal defense lawyer in American history was also America's most famous religious skeptic, and that was Clarence Darrow. Darrow was well known as an opponent of capital punishment, which is obviously not a surprise. All criminal defense lawyers, one would assume, oppose capital punishment. What is less known is, is that Darrow opposed all punishment, and he opposed it exactly for the reason that I stated.

Darrow was not just a lawyer. He was a religious skeptic; he did not believe in G-d. What did he say? "All people are products of two things and two things only – heredity and environment. All people act in exact accord with the heredity which they took from the past and for which they are in no way responsible, and from the environment in which they were raised. We all act from the same way."

Add to the equation what the belief in G-d adds in Judaism, a belief in a neshama, a belief in a soul, which means and helps account for the fact that two human beings can come from the exact same background, be raised in the same household and one can come out the greatest of sinners and the other can come out the greatest of saints. Human beings, at their heart, have free will.

Now I want to make it clear what I'm saying and what I'm not saying. We don't have free will in every area of life. Judaism's insistence is that we have free will in the moral sphere. So insistent, in fact, is that Maimonides says without that Judaism in a sense actually collapses. What was the point of the prophets telling people to be good if it had been predetermined that they couldn't be?

What does it mean, therefore, when I say that we don't have it in every sphere? We don't. Had I devoted my life to studying chemistry, I assure you the world of chemistry would not have profited thereby. It was pretty apparent at a young age that that's not where I had any skills. And really had I devoted my life to it, at best I would have ended up as a very mediocre chemist.

And it applies in many physical areas. I'll give you an example. How many people here, by a showing of hands, at some point in your lives have been joggers? Okay, how many of you were able to run eight-minute miles? Seven-minute miles? Six-minute miles? I'm speaking to a Jewish audience.

I actually had a very funny experience. A couple of years ago I was making this point, and clearly, you know, by seven-minute miles very few hands are left up, and by six-minute miles everybody's hands are down. One hand remained up. Remarkably enough, it was the hand of a man named Eric Candell who, in 1990, won the Nobel Prize in Physiology in Medicine. Eric had been at the speech, and there was a very sharply angled lectern. When I put my notes on they kept falling to the ground, and I'm a bit of a klutz and I couldn't adjust the lectern. So Eric comes up and adjusts the lectern, and it was fine. I remember I laughed at the time, because when I was a kid if somebody would do a fairly simple task they'd say, 'you don't have to be an Einstein to do it.' Meanwhile, I had to have a Nobel Prize winner adjust my lectern.

It turned out that he had actually attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush as a child. They had no high school in those days. He had gone to ?? High School, had been on the track team, and had run a four minute and 50 second mile. I said, "Eric, clearly your job in coming to the speech today was to make everybody feel inadequate. It's not enough you won a Nobel Prize, you had to run a sub-five-minute mile? Genug. Give somebody else a chance."

But in any case, we don't have free will in every area of life. Our religion still makes sense because of its insistence that we do have it in the moral sphere. That's why people can be summoned and demands can be made of people.

Fascinatingly, Jewish tradition expands the area of free will into areas you wouldn't normally think it would necessarily apply. There's a wonderful Mishneh, the first Mishneh in Perek Daled of Pirkei Avos, the first Mishneh in the fourth chapter of the Ethics of the Fathers, that's famous because it asks a series of questions.

The first question it asks is "Eizeh hu chacham?" Who is wise? In this audience I suspect quite a number of people will know the answer, but what are the next words that

follow? How do they define it? Halomed mikol adam. Oddly enough, that question is asked elsewhere in the Talmud and there's a second answer, who is wise? Haroeh ... one who sees the future consequences of his acts.

But the first answer the Rabbis give to who is wise, is one who learns from everybody, halomed mikol adam. It's a very interesting answer. Normally, we would think who is wise? And the answer is a very small percentage of the populace, because to some extent our intelligence is limited by our IQs. Many people have more limited intelligence than others. Among Jewish children all of them, of course, have unlimited intelligence according to their parents, but as my grandmother, a"h, used to say, "There are so many brilliant little children. Where do all these stupid adults come from?"

In any case, look what the Rabbis do. So, normally who's wise? A small percentage of people, and it's somewhat built in to the structure of the world. What do the Rabbis do? They expand it. Every single person is capable of becoming wise. A person who is so full of himself that all he thinks is he has to teach others, that person eventually isn't going to be so wise because he's not continuing to learn. But everybody can become wise.

They ask the question, "Eizeh hu ashir?" Who is rich? And the answer is Hasameyach b'chelko, one who is happy with that which he has. Here, too, the Rabbis expand it. Who is rich? Normally, it's only a very small percentage of the population. When I was a kid in Brooklyn in the '50's if someone had a million dollars they were considered very rich. Now you can make a down payment on a small apartment in Manhattan.

But the truth is what the Rabbis were saying is if somebody is always thinking about money, even if he has tremendous amounts of money insofar as he's thinking about money a lot he's not rich, because the purpose of being rich is so that you don't have to think about money all the time. But by saying that if you're happy with what you have, what the Rabbis were saying is that wealth is accessible to everyone.

"Eizeh hu gibor?" Gibor probably really just meant who is strong, but it also has the connotation of who is a hero? And what do they answer? One who overcomes his negative inclinations. Again, heroism when you think of it in the physical sense is restricted. A relatively small percentage of people in society are going to be physically very gutsy.

My daughter, Naomi, says that when she was two years old she thought I was the bravest man in the world. This belief was shattered when she was four years old and we went to an amusement park and I wouldn't go on the roller coaster.

So, first of all, heroism is limited by physical constraints. Secondly, even if you have fearlessness it's not going to manifest itself very often in life. So it would be a rare virtue, a very wonderful virtue, but a rare virtue. By saying that it refers to overcoming your yetzer hara, by saying that it refers to overcoming your negative inclinations and is

something that you can struggle with every day, they again make it accessible to everyone.

This evening I want to look at three issues that raise ethical implications and see what I understand the Jewish tradition is offering us guidance on. One is the issue of forgiveness, one is the issue of obstacles to change, and the third is the inter-relationship of humility and self-esteem.

When I started working on this I would make note cards on a subject, so I took the subject of mechila, of forgiveness, and I was making note cards every time I came across a source that I thought should be written about. Obviously, you start with the Chumash, you start with the Torah, and you go to the later books of the Bible. You go obviously to the Mishneh, the Talmud, the Medrash, medieval Jewish thought, modern Jewish thought, and I looked at non-Jewish thinkers on these subjects, as well.

When I gathered my note cards, what occurred to me was – it's not a particularly novel insight, but it hadn't occurred to me previously – that I found three attitudes essentially towards forgiveness in Jewish sources. There are times when it is obligatory. There are times when it is optional, and in a sense the chiddush that distinguishes Jewish tradition from many other traditions is there are times when forgiveness is actually forbidden.

When is it obligatory? The answer is in the large majority of instances. If somebody has inflicted hurt on you that is not irrevocable and sincerely asks for forgiveness, we are obligated to forgive. It doesn't mean that it's easy. You might struggle with it, and the Rabbis understood. Jewish law understood that you might struggle with it, which is why Rambam, Maimonides codifies as Jewish law that you have to ask somebody you've hurt three times. Because it's possible that the first time you asked for forgiveness the person might still be too hurt, too upset to grant it.

But Maimonides doesn't only direct his comments to the one who has to ask forgiveness. He also directs his comments to the one who's being asked for forgiveness. And he said that by the third time you have to find a way to forgive. You have to work on yourself. One who doesn't forgive by the third request is an achzari, a cruel person. So there's something there; there's an insight for both sides.

By the way, you have to ask on three separate occasions. You can't just go to somebody and say, 'Do you forgive me?' 'No.' 'Do you forgive me?' 'No.' You know, you've got to give the person a chance.

Interestingly, there are times when forgiveness becomes optional. When is that? Well, one rather obvious case is when somebody doesn't ask for forgiveness. If somebody doesn't ask for forgiveness you're not obligated to forgive them.

Secondly, is if somebody really did do something irrevocable to you. If you look in the Yerushalmi, the Jerusalem Talmud, the example they give there is somebody who's besmirched your name because you can't ever really undo a besmirching of one's name.

Even if you reach all the people who heard about it, you're not going to reach all the people who they then told about it, so damage always affects your name. And we know that *shem tov*, having a good name in Jewish life, is an exceedingly valued virtue.

Having said that, there are reasons even when forgiveness is optional why it can be worthwhile to forgive. By the way, it's worked into the structure even of the Shema at night, at least in some prayers. Many Jews say the *Shema al hamitah*, the Shema before going to bed, and many Jews literally, I know, that's what they say. They say the first *pasuk*, or they say the first paragraph of the Shema. Sometimes, by the way, it's people who you'd be surprised say it.

To my great shock, I once saw an interview with a prominent American newscaster who said that he maintained a tradition from his childhood of always saying Shema before going to sleep at night. And, lo and behold, it was Mike Wallace.

As I've often said, Judaism is not a zero sum game. The Rabbis never said, 'Okay, we'll add on a prayer here, but in return we'll subtract another prayer,' which is why the prayer service over the years has gotten longer. If you look in the Artscroll Siddur the *Shema al hamitah* is eight pages. One of them is a *Hineni Mochel*, a prayer of forgiveness. I hereby forgive, and you then list a series of people that you forgive, you know, one who hurt me physically or one who hurt me monetarily.

Interestingly, by the way, and you're going to laugh when I say this but it's not meant to be funny. You are supposed to forgive someone who hurt you monetarily. You still have the right to sue the person, but you should let go of some of the anger. If you look it's actually even in the *Zaka* prayer we say before the *Yomim Noraim*, that you still reserve the right to do that, but you should let go of some of that anger.

Why do I say that it could be wise to forgive? I'll give you two examples that I heard, both from friends of mine. One is from Harold Kushner, who is a Conservative Rabbi. Kushner tells the story that there was a woman in his congregation whose husband had deserted her. He had divorced her ten years earlier, and it was an ugly divorce. The woman was understandably very *rageful*.

What disturbed Kushner, though, was that ten years had passed and her rage seemed unabated. He said to her, "For ten years you've been walking around with a hot poker in your hand ready to throw it at your ex-husband, only you never have. All that you've done is burn a hole in your hand." That's what can happen if we don't forgive. We are left with this great anger.

The second insight I got which is related to that is another one from the Rabbi I mentioned earlier, Abraham Twerski. Twerski became a doctor in the early '60's. His area of specialty was addictive behavior. In those days addictive behavior primarily referred to alcoholics. By the late '60's it started to include drug addiction, and now addictive behavior is applied to a whole series of self-destructive behavior.

The problem recovering alcoholics face is that they are tempted to drink. You know, it's very much a part of their life. They're addicted to it, and the most common reason Twerski said that recovering alcoholics who really don't want to go back to drinking do drink and sometimes break their abstinence is because they're angry at someone. They're rageful, and they do that to calm down.

So a recovering alcoholic told Twerski that for his own well-being he had to learn to control his anger, to not nourish grudges. He then said something so smart to Twerski that it applies to every one of us in this room whether you have an issue with drinking or with any area of your life. He said, "To carry a grudge is like allowing the person in the world whom you most dislike to live in your mind rent free." Why would anybody do that?

To a large extent, we as human beings and our moods are products of what we are feeling. If you're thinking about someone you love a lot who loves you, if you're thinking about a happy event in your life, your mood will probably be good. If you're thinking about someone at whom you're very angry, your mood will decline. If you're thinking about unhappy events or things you're very nervous about, your mood will decline.

Most of us have had the experience at some point in our lives of getting up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and then not being able to fall back to sleep because we're obsessively thinking about something.

There's another point, too. One of the great commandments at the heart of Judaism, of course, is 'love your neighbor as yourself.' I say that there's a commandment there implicit to the neighbor. The neighbor has to allow himself to be loved. People sometimes nourish grudges and attribute bad motives to other people. But they sometimes really have to go to the person and say how they've hurt them. Very often people who've hurt us aren't aware that they've hurt us. They certainly might not be aware of the extent to which they've hurt us.

Moshe Leib of Sassov, the Chassidic Rebbe, says that he learned the meaning of love from two peasants who were at a tavern. Right away you know you're dealing with an unusual Rebbe who acknowledges that he went into a tavern and that he was listening in to these two peasants from whom he learned an important lesson. It's a well-known Chassidic story. The two peasants were sitting there drinking, probably getting a little high, but then one of them has tears in his eyes. The other one says, "Why are you crying?" He says, "I'm crying because you don't love me."

The other peasant says, "We've been best friends since childhood." And he said, "No, you don't love me." "Of course, I love you." "No, you don't." "Why do you say that?" "Because if you loved me you would know what was hurting me."

For many years I was very impressed with that story, and I thought that's the definition of loving another person, knowing what hurts them. Then one day it occurred to me maybe

the other peasant really did love the guy but he didn't know what hurt him. In other words, part of loving another person is not being a mind reader. We all go through life hurting other people, even unintentionally. People have to make known what it is that hurt them. Otherwise they'll end up nursing grudges.

There are people who really do that, and it's very self-destructive. If I have to tell you what's bothering me, then even if you do it it's not worth it. You know, or a whole series of things. But human beings have to be told.

A wise woman I know told me that when she decided to confront some of the people who had hurt her and told them, to her shock she found out that many of these people really loved her and cried at the realization that they had hurt her. So you can't just walk out on other people; you have to be willing to expose yourself. Then, of course, it became much easier for her to forgive them.

The chiddush in Jewish sources is that there are times when forgiveness is forbidden, and when is that? The answer is you can't forgive a crime committed against another person. So, again, you'll say, 'why is that a big insight?' Because the dominant mode of thinking in contemporary Christianity is that you can. I'll give you two examples of it. The first deals with the Reverend John Miller of Martha's Vineyard. You'll say why am I picking on John Miller of Martha's Vineyard who probably no one here has ever heard of? I always have this fear that one day he'll actually show up in my speech.

But I'll tell you why I pick him for an example. He had an unusual experience in his life. In 1997 he was told that President Clinton would be in attendance at his church that Sunday. Obviously, the President can't just show up at random at a church, because it has to be checked out by the Secret Service. So Reverend Miller had a very rare opportunity. He knew that his sermon was going to be listened to by the President of the United States, and really listened to. The President can't be seen yawning during the sermon. He certainly can't walk out if he doesn't like the content of it.

So he had one chance. I was going to say that he had one shot at the President, but that's inappropriate. He had one chance to present the sermon. You can imagine that any clergyman – minister, priest, rabbi – who had one opportunity to present a sermon before the President of the United States is going to think long and hard and very carefully about what he wants to say.

So what did Miller do? This was in August of '97. In the middle of his sermon he held out a large photograph of Timothy McVeigh, the man who bombed the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in which 168 people were killed, and he said to his congregants including the President, "I invite you to look at Timothy McVeigh and forgive him. I have forgiven him. I ask you to forgive him. We, as Christians, are asked to forgive him."

Why? Timothy McVeigh was not only one of the most vicious murderers in American history, he had no repentance at all. He was the one from whom I learned that horrible

expression – when he was asked whether he regretted the two dozen children killed at the Federal Building, he said they were “collateral damage.” That was the first time I ever heard that expression.

The second person to express this view was Pope John Paul II. Before I say what he said, I want to say something else. He’s a man I had exceedingly high regard for. John Paul II played a major role in bringing down Communism in Eastern Europe. He did a number of wonderful things for Jews. He went to the synagogue in Rome to pray. He visited the Kotel, the Western Wall, in Israel where he inserted a note into the Wall asking G-d to forgive him and the Catholic church for things they had done to the Jews. I’ve always wondered about that, because I always thought you weren’t supposed to read what people put into notes in the Kotel. So I always wondered. It was probably some journalist who pulled it out. And, of course, he established diplomatic relations with Israel.

I’ll tell you another story about him. Yaffa Eliach, whose husband Dovid Eliach was my principal in high school, wrote a wonderful book called Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust. Yaffa’s also a Ph.D. in History. She checked out the stories very carefully.

She has a remarkable story about a Jewish family, a couple, in Poland in ’42, I think. They were in a ghetto and they knew. They were getting reports; they knew it was terrible. They knew they really weren’t going to be able to escape, but they did get out of the ghetto one night. They went to a Christian couple who they had been friendly with and they brought over their two-year-old son.

The couple agreed to take the boy, and the parents said to them, “If we come back when the war is over, you’ll return him to us. If we don’t come back ...” They gave this Polish couple the address of family members in Montreal and in Washington, D.C. “Please write them and ask them, I’m sure they’ll adopt the child.”

The parents then went back into the ghetto. Poland was not a friendly country to Jews. There was no place for them to escape to. Of course they were deported. The Christian couple took wonderful, loving care of the child. They took him to church with them. In ’45 the war ends; the parents don’t come back. By ’46 they go to their local parish priest and say, “It’s clear the parents are dead. We want to adopt this boy. We’re very devoted to him. Please baptize him.” The priest says, “Tell me exactly what the parents’ instructions were.” They answer honestly and the priest says, “You must first write to those two families in North America. If they don’t adopt the child, I will arrange to baptize him.”

They write the two families, and both families want the child. First, because of immigration reasons, he ends up in Canada. He then ends up growing up in Washington, D.C. They always stay in touch with this Polish woman. She’s rather poor, and they send money to her. She never tells them the story.

In 1979 one day they get a letter from this woman telling them the whole story of how she wanted to convert the boy, and what the priest had told her. She said, “Why am I

telling you this story now? Because yesterday that priest became Pope John Paul II.” So it’s a very remarkable story.

Having said that, now I can say something a little critical about the Pope. I wanted to establish that I’m an admirer. Okay. 9-11, 2002: “We pray for the victims today, may they rest in peace, and may G-d show mercy and forgiveness to the authors of this terrible attack.” Why mercy and forgiveness? The only regret the murderers of 9-11 had was that they hadn’t struck a half hour later. Instead of striking at ten to nine in the morning, had they struck at 9:20 they would have murdered far, far more people.

So here’s the Jewish chiddush – that there are times when forgiveness shouldn’t be granted. But the biggest, more important chiddush is that over 95% of the time we should forgive. We shouldn’t hold on to grudges. We cause pain. It’s so common.

I’m curious. In your families, at the level of first cousin and closer how many of you have relatives who are not on speaking terms? Okay, we know that and it’s sad. I have a congregation in L.A. for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I always say in my last drasha before the chag, find someone you haven’t spoken with, you know, and it’s not because of the most grotesque crime you can imagine, and find some way to reach out. We’re all going to go into shul on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and ask G-d to be forgiving to us, and He’s probably going to look and see how forgiving we are to others. So it means the large majority of the time we really should forgive.

What are some of the obstacles to change? You know, I was sitting and making note cards on the whole subject of tshuvah. Obviously, many of the note cards fell into the clear-cut categories of when should you repent, how do you repent. But what struck me was that there are a lot of obstacles to repentance. What are some of them? Some of them are obvious – fear, we’re afraid to even confront the issue because we’re afraid we won’t change. Stubbornness, pride.

I’ll give you a few others. One of them is the tendency to blame others. The Biblical view is that the tendency to blame others is as old as humankind itself. G-d entrusts Adam with one mitzvah, one commandment, not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam eats from it. G-d says to him, “Why did you eat of the tree?” and what does Adam say? “It was Eve’s fault.” G-d says to Eve, “Why did you eat of the tree?” What does Eve say? It was the snake’s fault.

The tendency to blame others is a very deeply-rooted tendency among human beings. In fact, I would argue that many of us almost sometimes have our excuse ready. Even as we do something wrong, we’re thinking of how we can blame it on others.

I remember I was once speaking to a young woman I knew who had this tendency. She was always blaming others when she did things she shouldn’t have done or when something went wrong. At a certain point I said to her, “I’m very pessimistic about your future. You are about the unluckiest person I know. You always fall in with bad people, and there’s nothing you can do about it. You probably will have a very unhappy and

unsuccessful life.” I said, “Ironically, if you sometimes took responsibility for the wrong you did, I would actually be far more optimistic about your future. Because if you can cause your problems you can un-cause your problems. That’s why it’s so important to take responsibility.

People who can’t recognize their weaknesses and take responsibility for them are annoying. I find the older I get the people I least enjoy dealing with are people who don’t recognize their faults, who get defensive when you point them out. It accounts for the phenomenon of why somebody can be 70 years old and still be an immature person.

So one of the reasons that we often don’t repent is because we don’t acknowledge what we’ve done wrong. We blame others.

A second tendency: we rationalize. One of the al cheits that we klap to, that we repent for, is shechatanu l’fanecha b’onus u’v’ratzon, that sins we committed under duress and willingly. Obviously, willingly makes sense. Why should we confess to something we did under duress? It’s an interesting question.

Ernst Simone, who was a German Jew and a very close devotee of Martin Buber but later on became more religiously observant, had a lot of interesting and unusual insights. One of them was that we say we did it under duress, b’onus, but we really weren’t forced. We say, ‘I couldn’t control my temper,’ but we could have. ‘I couldn’t act really fully honestly; I was under too much financial pressure,’ but other people were and did act more honestly. So we say that we did it under duress.

Now interestingly, the Bible gives us an example of a very great figure in Judaism, a very great figure, who speaks in the manner of a person who rationalizes. Moses goes up on Mount Sinai and while he’s up there the Jews sin with the golden calf. And what does Moses find out to his great horror? Who was the one involved in building the golden calf? Lo and behold, it was his brother Aaron. So he says to Aaron, “How did you do such a thing?” What does Aaron say? “V’omar lahem, I said to them, l’mi zahav hitparachu, whoever has gold give it to me, throw it in. V’yatnu li, and they gave it to me. V’yashlicheni b’aish, and I threw it into the fire. V’yatzei ha’egel hazeh. I threw it into the fire and out came this calf.”

Okay, that sounds like rationalizing. I have a feeling it was a little more complicated than that. So that’s why Moses is so horrified at the time. We all have this tendency, even very good people. We don’t want to fully confront how we might have had the responsibility.

The hardest thing to repent is when you believe that the wrong you did was a good thing. The prophet Yeshayahu refers to that. “Oy, oy to those who say of choshech that it’s ohr. Oy to those who say of darkness that it’s light and light’s darkness.” They never think they did something bad. That’s why it’s so hard for a terrorist to repent, not only because they’ve committed the irrevocable act of murder but because they continue to believe that the most evil thing they’ve ever done is the best thing they’ve ever done.

So we have to work very much on trying to overcome those obstacles to change. One thing that also makes it hard for people to change is that they have low self-esteem and they don't think they really can. Now here we come across an interesting thing – the tension between humility and self-esteem.

If I handed out a piece of paper to everyone here tonight and a pen and I said, "Write down what you think were some of the cardinal virtues of Moshe Rabbeinu. What were some of the great virtues of Moses?" I think people would say he was courageous. You know, we think of Moshe confronting the Egyptian who was beating the slave, and how he stops him from ever beating anyone else again. We'd say Moshe was a man who was obsessed with fighting injustice. He stood up for the daughters of Midian against the men of Midian who were oppressing them. He was compassionate in the way he intervened on behalf of his sister even though his sister had just spoken ill and unfairly of him.

Yet, if you look in the text of the Torah nowhere does it say Moses was courageous, Moses hated injustice, or he was compassionate. We read those events and we infer that. What the Torah does tell us about Moshe is only one explicit virtue. V'ish Moshe, and this man Moses was very humble. So humility, obviously, is an exceedingly important virtue. And yet it doesn't mean that you have to not look at yourself honestly and see your good traits.

I remember years ago I worked at a summer institute in California where we did work with college students. There was one young man who, even at the age of 19, I was able to recognize had remarkable abilities. He really has gone on to do wonderful things in Jewish and Israeli life. Yet whenever I would hear people compliment him on something he had done, "It was nothing."

I said, "Why do you say that to people? First of all, they're complimenting you. You have to throw their compliment back in their face? Secondly, nobody really believes you that you think it was nothing. It was very obviously good." He said, "So, Joseph, what should I say?" I said, "When someone compliments you say, 'thank you, that's very kind.' You don't have to go through all these acts to try and deny it."

I always draw solace from the fact that it seems to me if you look in the opening chapter of Bereishis, the first chapter of Genesis, there's a phrase that occurs there six times. V'yaar Elokim ki tov, and G-d saw that it was good. You get the sense that G-d was schepping nachas. He saw that what he had done was good, and He's giving us, I think, a basis that we should also be able to say we've done something good.

I know people who when they do something wrong are so uncomfortable with it, but if they can't be comfortable and happy when they've done something well then they're in a no-win situation. When it goes well they deny it, and when it goes badly they go on and on about how they failed. You have to be able to appreciate it.

You know, the commandment is 'love your neighbor as yourself,' so the explicit commandment is 'love your neighbor,' but what's the implicit commandment? Love yourself. I wonder if there has been an abusive parent in history who had a decent self-image. It's not good when someone doesn't like themselves. It doesn't, as a rule, make people kinder to others.

Think of your own life. Are you more apt to be forgiving as a parent, as a friend, when someone has messed up when you're feeling good about yourself or when you're in a bad mood about yourself as well. Many people when they're in bad moods exhibit bad moods towards others. You have to have a good self-image.

There's a wonderful story they tell about the Chofetz Chaim. The Chofetz Chaim, of course, was an enormous halachic authority. The Mishneh Brurah is a staggeringly brilliant work that covers so much of the Jewish laws, specifically *bein adam l'Makom*. But in the popular Jewish mind the Chofetz Chaim was associated with the mitzvah of *lashon hara*, *shmiras halashon*, not speaking unfairly of others.

The Chofetz Chaim had a very long life, because he was born in 1838 and died in 1933. He became famous as a relatively young man in the late 19th Century, and he lived at a time when it was probably one of the last times in history when you could be famous without being recognized. In those days photographs weren't as common and certainly in the frummer world many people discouraged photographs.

So the Chofetz Chaim was once going to give a speech. He was on a train, and he was seated in a compartment with a man who was clearly also a religious Jew. They started talking, and he says to the man, "Where are you going?" The man says, "I'm going into town. The Chofetz Chaim is speaking tonight. He's the greatest saint in the Jewish world and also the greatest scholar." The Chofetz Chaim was a little embarrassed to hear himself referred to like that so he said, "I know the Chofetz Chaim. He's not such a *tzaddik*. He's not such a saint. He's not such a big scholar." The other man gets so upset he slaps the Chofetz Chaim in the face.

That night the man goes to the speech and to his horror who's giving the speech? The guy he slapped. So after the speech he goes over, "Rabbi, I had no idea it was you. I never would have done something like that. I apologize. I beg your forgiveness." The Chofetz Chaim says, "Why are you begging my forgiveness? It's my honor you were defending." He said, "I learned an important lesson from you. I've been going around for years telling people not to speak *lashon hara*, not to speak unfairly about others. Now I've learned you shouldn't speak badly about yourself."

What's important when it comes to the subject of humility and self-esteem is to distinguish them. Rav Chaim of Volozhin in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos* makes the point. He said, "If a person truly has nothing to be proud of then the fact that he is humble is not a great virtue. He should be humble."

Churchill had a political opponent that he really disliked, but somebody once said to Churchill, "One thing you must acknowledge, he is a modest man." Churchill said, "You're right. He has a lot to be modest about." So that's the issue.

There was the mashgiach ruchani at the Mirrer Yeshiva, Rav Yerucham Levovitz, who had a very important point. He was making the observation that a lot of people are not aware of their weaknesses. He said it's a terrible thing, because it's true. It's what I was saying earlier. People who are not aware of their weaknesses don't work on themselves. They don't know how to work on themselves. They get defensive when you point it out.

But he then went on to say something very powerful. He said, "As bad as it is to not know your weaknesses, it's even worse to not know your strengths, because those strengths are what are ultimately going to enable you to overcome your weaknesses."

American society is overly concerned with weaknesses. Parents go to school on parent-teacher night. They get four positive reports about their child. They get one negative report. Suddenly that one area in which they got a negative report becomes the most important area. But that's foolish. It's not the most important area. I mean, obviously if we're talking about a real character defect it could be. But we all have weaknesses. So what?

The truth is it's actually irrelevant. It's only in American high schools that they so value being an all-around person. They don't value it anywhere else. You know what's really valued in life? Having an area of expertise. Imagine trying to get a good job, "Well I'm pretty good in everything." It's actually more important to be very good in something.

When parents go to a parent-teacher night for high school students who are 15, it's very unlikely if they're weak in math or they're weak in chemistry or they're weak in English that that's going to turn out to be the most important area in their life. There's a very good chance that that's going to be a relatively peripheral area, and you've got to do whatever you can to make sure that they pass and graduate. But too much emphasis is put on people's areas of weakness. People's areas of strength are where they're going to excel, and it's what enables people to have a positive self-image.

Abraham Twerski, who has written a lot on this area, has a remarkable insight. He said, "How do you know in a given situation what's going on, whether it's humility or low self-esteem? The difference between the two is the following.

Humility inspires. Humility makes you think, 'this is what G-d wants me to do. If I am in this situation it can't just simply be an accident. There's a reason why I'm in this situation, and this is what G-d wants me to do.'

Low self-esteem demoralizes, and it always demoralizes. Low self-esteem can demoralize in any way. You know, Rabbi Twerski goes on to make the point that low self-esteem is like a yetzer hara. The yetzer hara in Jewish tradition, the tendency towards evil, is always depicted as being fairly brilliant. It finds its own ways to seduce

you. So it says there are people it can seduce who are rather low characters. It can seduce them to physically hurt another or to be dishonest.

But what if you have to seduce somebody who's of a higher character, who's not going to punch somebody that they're angry at? You find different ways to seduce them. You convince them, 'you know what? You're not smart enough to waste your time studying. If you study Torah, it will be a waste of time. You're not smart enough to do it.' Or 'you can't be a public speaker. You shouldn't undertake to do that job,' or 'you can't motivate other people to do it. You're not smart enough.' You know, it takes advantage of things.

There's a wonderful statement attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt, the first lady who was married to Franklin Roosevelt. She said, "Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent." We should all feel really good about ourselves.

I wanted to cover other areas as well. I'll give you another example of an area. I'll just speak of it very briefly. Anger. How many people here wish they had better control over their tempers? Okay, now I'm going to ask the question the right way. How many people here are seated next to someone who they wish had better control over their tempers?

I want to give you one guideline on the subject of anger, and even if you continue to have a somewhat bad temper if you follow this guideline you will never again say something that will cause a rupture in a relationship or cause such terrible, irrevocable hurt to another. No matter how angry you get at another person, restrict the expression of your anger to the incident that provoked it.

If somebody did something that hurt you and you talk about that, you're unlikely to say something that would be so destructive of the other person's ego that it will cause a real break in your relationship. Don't start summoning up everything the other person has ever done over the last five years, you know, 'you did this, you did that.' Somebody mentions something that happened ten years ago. Why is that so bad if people do that? Well, for one it's not fair. We don't want to do it.

Sometimes you meet a person who, as a kid, had weaknesses. The reason they end up wanting to go away from home is because when they see people from their youth people still remember them, and they don't want to be remembered like that anymore.

Also there's another very destructive element when you remind somebody of something bad they did ten years ago. It makes them think that you think about it a lot. Why is it there already? So they'll feel 'what's the good of trying to change?'

I was speaking to a man, a friend of mine, who is an exceedingly successful businessman. He's had tremendous success in life. He told me that when he was a kid his younger brother was the star in school, and he was a bad student. One day, lo and behold, he came home and he had an A on his report card. His mother said, "You could have gotten

an A+.” He said, “To hell with that.” You know, that’s when he totally gave up on school.

If you mention something that happened many years ago, the other person thinks, ‘oh G-d, this is what they’re really thinking about.’ It can be hard because we want that.

A friend of mine, a psychiatrist in Los Angeles, said he tells couples, “No matter how angry you get at the other, and no matter what the other person might have once done, it is forbidden to mention anything that is over one year old. You want to get divorced? Get divorced. But if you’re going to stay married there has to be an ethics of fair fighting, and that has to apply in the realm of anger.”

So I just want to show a number of the areas that we just covered this evening and how we can take some of these things and apply them in our lives.

Forgiveness? We have people who have hurt us, but you know what? We have to struggle. If they’re sorry that they hurt us, if they express an apology for it, we have to open our hearts. We have to open our hearts and let that love in, because otherwise what are we doing here if we’re closing our hearts?

So we have to find ways to forgive. It doesn’t mean we have to be simple-minded. We can tell people what they’ve done to hurt us. But we have to struggle with ourselves. If someone’s inflicted hurt that’s not irrevocable and they ask for forgiveness, we’re obligated even if we can’t give it the first time. We’re obligated to give it.

Secondly, even in those instances where it’s optional, as I said, confront, speak to people. Sometimes it’s just worth letting go of the anger, because it ultimately becomes more self-destructive. Do you want to be that?

Certainly every Jew who went through the Holocaust had the moral right to be furious and angry for the rest of their lives, but I’ll tell you this. When you speak to children of Holocaust survivors and they were that in touch with that anger, it was not a pleasant experience to be raised in that household. So I’m saying that even when people have the right to that anger it doesn’t always mean that that’s what we should be in touch with as much.

But there are times when forgiveness is forbidden. Obviously that was the case for people who went through the Holocaust. But we have to try and find ways to restrict the realm of the anger that we’re feeling. You can’t become so forgiving that we forgive those who have really hurt others. We have no moral right to extend such forgiveness.

When we have to think about wrong things that we’ve done we can’t just blame others. Even if we do feel others were somewhat responsible, we have to look inside ourselves and see, ‘can I take some sense of responsibility for that?’

We can't rationalize it and say that it was nothing, because obviously a refusal to acknowledge the wrong that we've done guarantees that we're not going to undo it. It means we aren't going to grow. And our purpose in this world is to grow. That's why. I mean, if we're going to end up virtually the exact same at the end of life as we were at the beginning then it means that we've lived a wasted life.

Finally in the area of self-esteem, we have to have that sense of self about ourselves that we can change. If G-d takes pride, v'yaar Elokim ki tov, G-d saw that it was good, we have to cultivate in our own lives things that we can see that are good. When we don't see it we'll become worse people. Remember what I said earlier? I wonder if there was an abusive parent in history who had a decent self-image.

Perek yud bet of Bamidbar, Chapter 12 of Bamidbar, is the chapter in which it says of Moshe, v'ha'ish Moshe, and this man Moses, anav m'od, was very humble. One chapter later is the story of the meraglim. One chapter later is the story of the spies who were sent into ancient Canaan to spy out the land. They say something so fascinating there. We all know what happens. They come back and they say, "We'll never be able to possess the land. The residents there are giants." And they throw the whole Jewish people into a panic. Two men, Joshua and Calev, said, "No, we can possess it," but the other ten tribal chieftains say we can't.

If you look in pasuk lamed gimel, the 33rd pasuk, they make a fascinating comment. They said, "hagavim," we were like grasshoppers in our own eyes and so we appeared to them. They don't say they looked down upon us as if we were grasshoppers. They say in our own eyes we looked like grasshoppers. And if you see yourself as a grasshopper, that's how you'll act.

Moshe could have been the most humble man of his time, but he went to Pharaoh. He said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go, Shalach et ami, let my people go that they may worship G-d." His humility did not preclude him from confronting evil and overcoming his fears. But when you see yourself as a grasshopper look what can happen to you.

There's the famous teaching, of course, attributed to Rav Simcha Bunim, you should walk around with two pieces of paper, one in each pocket. One should say, "bishvil li nivrah olam," you know, it's the Mishneh in Sanhedrin, "for my sake was the world created." A lot of Jews, I think, are willing to say that. No, I mean, the idea was that it's based, of course, upon the teaching of the Mishneh, why was man created individually? At one time the whole world population was one. This is to teach us the infinite value of human life.

And in the other pocket you should have the words of Avraham, "anochi afar v'efer, I am dust and ashes." You have to know when to confront each. When you're feeling arrogant you have to remind yourself that you're dust and ashes. That's what we're going to become. You know, we feel so high.

I remember a teaching in Sefer Chassidim. He says, “You think you’re so good looking? Some day you’re not going to be so good looking.” You have to have a little moral imagination, so don’t look down so quickly on other people.

Anochi afar v’efer. But you’re only supposed to look at that when you’re feeling arrogant, and when you’re feeling low, for your sake was the world created.

I remember when I was in a Yeshiva in Israel, Keren v’Yavneh, I loved studying the Mesillas Yesharim, and we had a mashgiach who used to say, “You know, the Mesillas Yesharim, the Path of the Upright, I don’t tell all boys to study it. There are boys already who have a low self-image. They’ll take that book and it can really make them feel like they’re nothing. It’s intended to break arrogance.” I don’t know if it was a good sign that he wanted me to study it.

Anyway, what I’m saying is we all know that when we look to Judaism and you look to shmiras Shabbat and you look to Shabbat and you say, ‘what is another mitzvah I can incorporate? What can I do with kashrut?’ We all know the power of these mitzvot to affect our lives. What we don’t always recall though is that there are such a myriad of hundreds and hundreds of ethical teachings and ethical insights. As we start to incorporate them it will make us a blessing in the lives of ourselves, in our own lives and the lives of those around us.

This is something the Rebbe spoke about, the renewed significance of making known the sheva mitzvot, of Jews playing a role in the world. Non-Jews are not going to be impressed if we have a wonderful, mehudar etrog, but they want to know that if they’re dealing with Jews they’re going to learn something about what it means to be a mensch.

We have these wonderful teachings, what it is to be a mensch. The man whose memory we honor tonight was a man who was renowned for his menschlichkeit, and may we also be disciples of Gershon Jacobson in that we, too, become renowned for our menschlichkeit. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Rabbi Telushkin, for a content-rich talk, and I hope to see you at good occasions. We should celebrate well. Have a very good summer and, again, see the Allgemeiner Journal and all our activities as partners with you in telling the story of Jewish life. We welcome your stories, your input, your rebuttals, your arguments, your endorsements. Thank you very much and a good night. Thank you again, Rabbi Telushkin.