

Erev Rosh Hashanah Sermon
“A World Build On Love”
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Congratulations on your exciting new Sëlf! Please follow the ikea-approved directions...to properly put your Sëlf together.

1. If you are reading this manual, it is because your previous two-person unit, Geurlfründ, has been recalled owing to improper maintenance. In order to assemble your new Sëlf, you must safely disconnect from your Geurlfründ. Unplug from all associated devices and avoid the use of extension cords.
2. Verify that all of your necessary parts are included and intact. Your contents may have shifted...This will be resolved once your Sëlf is up and running.
3. Next, prop your Sëlf up on its feet and examine it. Blemishes and discolorations are standard given the natural materials involved. Do not inspect your Sëlf too closely, or you will identify imperfections you did not even know were there.
4. You may find it difficult to hold your Sëlf up without help. We suggest having a friend lend you support. Leaving your Sëlf completely unattended during assembly can result in injury, error, or poetry.
5. It is now time to find space for your Sëlf. Do not place on...surfaces...that contains memories, as this can cause leakage around the eyes.
6. Do not use any substances containing alcohol to cleanse your Sëlf at this time, as use of these may cause implosion...
9. Remember to gently wipe your Sëlf off with water and a soft cloth to remove dirt and lint. All other maintenance and repair should be performed by an authorized representative, preferably someone with a Ph.D.

10. In the final stage of the assembly process, you may notice that there is a piece missing from your Sëlf... Once this stage is reached, it is safe to reconnect with your former Geurlfründ unit. Although you are no longer officially attached, you will most likely still find your Sëlf compatible with that unit. In fact, you could not have built your new Sëlf had you not mastered the operating instructions that accompanied your previous model.

Well done! You have put your Sëlf together. A new two-person upgrade is now available.¹

This brief and somewhat humorous guide originally found in the “Shouts and Murmurs” section of *The New Yorker* is entitled “How To Put Your Self Together.” Putting yourself together, especially after a breakup, is not always a very easy task and none of us came with ikea-approved directions. Each of us enters this New Year with hopes and dreams and perhaps a bit uncertain about what the future holds. *Hayom Harat Olam - Today is the day of the world’s birth*, so Happy Birthday to the world and Happy Birthday to each of us. Tonight we begin the process of putting ourselves back together. Tomorrow we recommit ourselves to the values, ethics, and ideals we hold so dear.

Before we can talk about tonight or even tomorrow, we have to understand what happened a few days ago in our collective past. You see today is the 1st of *Tishrei* on the Hebrew calendar and while we call it the birthday of the world, today is really the birthday of humanity. According to our sages, the world was created on the 25th of Elul, 5 days ago. As a result, Rosh Hashanah becomes a day that holds within it humanity's potential to do good or evil because it is the day that Adam and Eve are created, the time they eat of the tree, have children, and get kicked out of the garden.²

¹ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/12/how-to-put-your-self-together-by-ethan-kuperberg>

² BT Sanhedrin 38a, Concept from Rabbi David M. Glickman

Each day as God reflects on His creation the word *tov* or good is used to describe what God had done. But on the sixth day, after creating both male and female, God reflects once again only this time things are different.

וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד

“God then surveyed all that He had made, and look - it was very good!”³ God realizes that it is *lo tov*-not good for man to be alone. It is clear to God and it should also be clear to us - we must create a world based on community.

As we celebrate the birthday of the world, I want to speak about love and community. So both you and the great sage Tina Turner ask, “but rabbi, What’s love got to do, got to do with it.” And my response is EVERYTHING!

We live in exciting, challenging and uncertain times. The Midrash, a collection of Jewish stories, envisions the angels asking, “When is Rosh Hashanah? When does the New Year begin?” The answer is found not on the calendar but in our deeds: when we recognize the humanity and the divinity within every human being and act accordingly.⁴ Unfortunately there have been far too many examples over the past year where we have been unable to see *that* humanity and *that* dignity in every human being:

- Global Terrorism
- Homophobia and hatred in Orlando
- The shooting of innocent police officers in Dallas
- The shooting of people of color
- The rise of anti-Semitism

³ Genesis 1:31

⁴ Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:14

And let's not forget about the current political cycle which for the most part has not truly elevated the conversation.

But this sermon is not ripped from the front page of the Miami Herald and sadly you will rarely find its message on the local or national news. My words tonight are about healing in the face of tragedy and building a world grounded in love and respect. If God believes that His creation is good and it is very good to be in relationship with another, than let's start the work now. Tonight let us begin to put ourselves together so that we may bring positive change to this country and to the world.

The psalmist teaches us "*Olam Chesed Yibaneh* - We must build a world of love."⁵ The Torah commands "Love your neighbor"⁶ "Love the stranger"⁷ and "Love God."⁸ Rabbi Tamara Eskenazi explains, "The three commandments are three dimensions of a single, deep connection: to love God is to love others, those like us and those who are not."⁹ I am pretty convinced that if we actually observed these three sacred obligations, our world would be significantly better. To love your neighbor is to see beyond race and religion. To love the stranger is to see beyond sexuality and politics. But to love God is equal to them all, because it leads to them all.¹⁰

Sylvia Boorstein says, "Imagine how our lives might be if everyone had even a bit more of the Wisdom that comes from seeing clearly. Suppose people everywhere, simultaneously, stopped what they were doing and paid attention for only as long as it took to recognize their shared humanity. Surely the heartbreak of the world's pain, visible to all, would convert everyone to kindness. What a gift that would be."

⁵ Psalm 89:3

⁶ Lev 19:18

⁷ Lev 19:34

⁸ Deut 6:5

⁹ The Torah: A Women's Commentary, 716.

¹⁰ Inspired by the words of Rabbi Amanda Greene,
<http://www.chicagosinai.org/worship/sermons/building-a-world-of-love>

Building a world based on love is not about always agreeing with others. In fact I would say that if we all agreed with each other, we would be living in a pretty boring world. But we must be respectful and we must not be offensive. So on Tuesday, November 8 I encourage you to vote! As a rabbi I can't and won't tell you who to vote for but I will tell you to vote for the person who you believe will truly help build a world grounded in love. I will tell you to vote for the person who teaches us how to love our neighbors more. I will tell you to vote for the party who will help us see the strangers living amongst us. I will tell you no matter who you vote for, no matter what you believe, I *am* telling you to vote! Then no matter who wins, regardless of how exciting or painful the outcome, let us come together so we can continue to build and rebuild.

Now that we have a basis for how to build a world grounded in love, how do we do the same thing here at Hillel? To start we can actually get to know the people around us. Do you know the people sitting a few rows in front of you or behind you. Please **take a few moments** to actually get up and wish each other a Shana Tova -- especially to someone you don't know!

Okay those greeting were relatively quick and perhaps quite superficial. I recognize that if I gave you enough time, you could probably have a decent first conversation. Well why wait, come back tomorrow morning or Tuesday morning and sit next to someone new. Perhaps you will actually realize that share something in common with this new person or people. A great place to meet people is at our new Hillel cafe called UKrave which is open from 11-9pm. I mean who doesn't love to bond around delicious food? This building can and should be buzzing with people all the time. Use the space, make it your own, make it your home, share it with a friend.

Speaking about building a world based on love, what would it look like to do just that by traveling outside of the country with Hillel? It so happens that we have an alternative spring break trip planned to Cuba in March. If you are interested in social action and making this world a better place, then this trip is for you. You can also go on our Birthright program and have fun in Israel while boosting the Israeli economy and taking part in opportunities to work with those less fortunate in Israel. If travel isn't in the cards, then why not volunteer with our Hillel Challah program each week where we bake and sell challah and the proceeds are donated to the hungry. Whether you are thinking globally or locally, Hillel has opportunities for you to build a world based on love. Let's not forget the motto from the film *Field of Dreams*, "*If you build it, he will come.*" If we build a world based on love here at UM Hillel, they will come.

It is true that the world may seem quite hopeless at times yet we are obligated to try and find light in the darkness. In a 1927 essay entitled "Why I Am a Jew," Edmund Fleg wrote: "I am a Jew because in every place where suffering weeps, the Jew weeps. I am a Jew because at every time when despair cries out, the Jew hopes." My colleague Rabbi Fred Guttman writes, "As Jews, we will never give up!

As Jews, we will never give up hope.

As Jews, we will never allow our behavior to be determined by our demonic fears. Rather with Torah as our blueprint, our behavior will be guided by our visions and our hopes...As Jews, we are to never give up on the premise that bias, bigotry racism, nativism, homophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism, and sexism can be defeated...

...As Jews, we will never give up hope that there will come a time when all people will recognize that we are all created, *betzelem Elohim*, in God's image."¹¹

¹¹ Words from Rabbi Fred Guttman

Once our master Rabbi Hayyim of Zans [19th century] told a parable: A man had been wandering about in the forest for several days, not knowing which was the right way out. Suddenly he saw a man approaching him. His heart was filled with joy. “Now I shall find out which is the right way,” he thought to himself. When he neared one another, he asked the man, “Brother, tell me which is the right way. I have been wandering in this forest for several days.” Said the other to him, “Brother, I do not know the way either. For I too have been wandering about here for many, many days. But this I can tell you: do not take the way I have been taking, for that will bring you astray. And now let us look for a new way out together.” Our master added: “So it is with us. One thing I can tell you: the way we have been following this far we ought following no farther, for that way leads us astray. But now let us look for a new way.”¹²

Olam Chesed Yibaneh – We must build a world of love and let’s start tonight!

¹² S.Y. Agnon. (1948). Days of Awe. NY: Schocken Books. p. 22)