

**“The Golden Rule”  
Shabbat Service  
Rabbi Adam B. Grossman, Temple Israel  
May 2, 2009**

Once there was a man who at his death was taken to heaven by angels. However, instead of going straight up, they made a stopover in hell. While in hell, the man saw a gigantic bowl with a stew, and around the sides were assembled emaciated and starving people. Each of them had a long spoon in order to reach the stew from the shore. The trouble was, that the spoons were too long. Every time they tried to feed themselves, they would scoop up stew into the spoon then, as it got to their mouths, the stew would fall off. So in hell, the people congregated in suffering, as all constantly attempted to eat the abundance of food in front of them. Next, the man was taken to heaven, and to his surprise, he saw the exact same scene! There was the same huge bowl of stew surrounded by people with long spoons, yet instead of a miserable scene all the people were well fed and elated!

Upon seeing this, the man turned to the angels and asks, "Why are the people here so happy and well fed?" To which the angels responded, "Have you not eyes to see?" As the man gazed more carefully the angels smiled and said, "Here the people feed each other. Here are the people that learned the way of love."

The point of the allegory – “Love your neighbor as yourself” is the powerful last line of Leah’s Torah portion:

It has become the basis for the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” or as our sage, Hillel taught, “That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow.” It is affirmed in each of the Judeo-Christian religions, but this notion is not limited to the Abrahamic faiths. It is a foundational aspect of almost all religions including Taoism, African Traditional, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Furthermore, its tenets are apparent in philosophies such as Marxism, Atheism, and Humanism. Yet, while the Golden Rule and Silver Rule are foundational components of our moral fabric, there are those who suggest the conception is too idealistic to truly create an atmosphere of goodwill. Instead of promoting kindness, these rules encourage consistency, which, depending on your desires, can lead a person to either greater care for others or have greater malice towards others.

Yet, in thinking about the story, specifically the difference between heaven and hell, consistency is not the core issue of the Golden and Silver Rules. Instead, the story directs us to our basic human needs, in this case, food. If all of us were hungry, what would we do? Would we in constant failure continue to work alone or would we realize that those around us are there to support networks? By answering this question, we can find value in the Golden Rule and in turn find value in our faith.

A Bat Mitzvah is the opportunity for a young woman to break down what is seen as idealism into a fundamental need. So for example, the Mitzvah project Leah performed and her passion for helping others found within her D’var Torah are not just faith directives. In actuality they are an implementation, of the Golden Rule in order to empower others to do the same.

By using Hillel’s statement, “That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow,” as our principle credo, may we during this Shabbat celebration, extend our goodwill to our community and through it encourage others to follow suit.