

My friends, I have not spoken here very much about the man that I refer to when I use the words “my rabbi.” There are rabbis (not to mention rabbis’ wives (I’m not being sexist here; I know rabbis’ husbands too but have not heard the same from them)) who hate the term “my rabbi,” but I actually love it. Perhaps because I use those words out of great love and respect for my rabbi, I hear them the same way from others. When people refer to me as their rabbi, it warms my heart.

My rabbi was Howard (חיים) Kahn, עליו השלום. He is the reason I am a rabbi today. I'll tell you lots about him over time, but I can't go into as much detail as I would like on Shabbat—you cannot eulogize someone on Shabbat, and it would be very easy for me to slip across that line.

You may have heard my sermon that said every rabbi needs a Dick Cavett, because many of Rabbi Kahn's Friday night talks began “I heard this week on Dick

Cavett...” He was the best rabbinic speaker I have ever heard. Tonight, I mention him because I cannot understand how he was able to be so good. I have a huge advantage in my rabbinate that Rabbi Kahn never had. I cannot imagine being a rabbi without this indispensable tool. The proverbial apple may not have been good for Adam and Eve, but I can’t imagine being a rabbi without the iMac in my study, the MacBook in my home, and the iPhone on my belt.

Why not? First of all, with those tools I can be in touch with my congregants 24/6. (24/6—I don’t care who you are, that’s funny!) And speaking of staying in touch with you, please do follow the instructions in this week’s newsletter to follow CST on Twitter.¹

More to the point: It would be time consuming to the point of being undoable to do the research for this talk without

¹ www.twitter.com/CSTRabbi

my computer. Thanks to my iMac and a piece of Jewish software, it took almost no time at all.

But before I share with you the fruits of my electronic labor, let me get into the main topic of my talk tonight. It is one of the most famous verses in the entire Torah, but I would be willing to bet at least a nickel that no one really knows what the verse says.

The verse is the famous commandment to love your neighbor. It is the second half of Leviticus 19:18, which begins *You shall not take vengeance or hold a grudge against your countrymen*. Then comes the part about loving your neighbor. I would be very surprised if anyone can correctly quote the rest of the verse.

Is it *Love your neighbor as yourself*? Honestly, my nickel wager was based on the assumption that almost everyone

would say that is how the verse ends. Different translations notwithstanding, it is not the correct answer.

לֹא־תִקֶּם וְלֹא־תִטַּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶת־בֵּית לְרֵעֶךָ כַּמּוֹךְ אֲנִי יְהוָה :

Do not take revenge nor hold a grudge against your countrymen, but love your neighbor as yourself. The words that almost everyone ignores are the last two words of the verse, which I would suggest are the most important in the entire verse: אני יהוה — I am God.

Here is what I would not have been able to tell you without my iMac: the words : אני יהוה appear 201 times in the Hebrew Bible. Of those 201, only 23 of them conclude a verse of the Torah, one of which does not really count for the purposes of this talk because that one does not contain a commandment, so let's talk about the remaining twenty-two. I suggest to you that if of the 5,853 verses in the Torah, only 22 (less than 0.4%!) conclude with the

words אֲנִי יְהוָה, it is a big deal when a verse **does** end with *I am God*.

The obvious question to ask is why do these verses end with these words? And the answer that I have to offer is the following: it is the answer to a question. I will tell you what that question is before the end of my talk. First, let me lay the groundwork.

If I or any other person tells you to do something, you have a choice. You can do what I tell you or not. The guidance I have given you is my opinion: it would be good if you love your neighbor as you love yourself. But if all we have is the opinion of human beings, then all we have are opinions as to what is right or wrong. There are no moral absolutes—you think the Holocaust was evil and wrong, but Nazis disagreed. We have what the Talmud calls a *teiku*—a standoff. The debate ends in a tie.

Judaism rejects such an idea. Judaism teaches that there are moral absolutes that come from a moral authority that supersedes even the highest human moral authority. And that is why certain commandments from the Torah end with *I am God*. It is to answer an anticipated question. You must love your neighbor as yourself. “Oh yeah? Who says?” God says. That’s a whole lot different from Sendrow says or some wise old Israelite says.

Finally, let me point out one of the most important letters in the Torah. It is the *lamed* (ל) prefix before the word *your neighbor*. It is not the same Hebrew as when we are told to love God. You might ask, “How can the Torah command me to feel a certain way about my neighbor. I either love him or I don’t.” If you make this challenge, you are correct. That’s why that *lamed* is so important. The Torah is actually not telling you how to feel about others; it is telling you how to treat them. You must **behave lovingly** towards others. Who says? Now you know the answer.