

In the reality of our lives in the Land of Israel (and not only there), we are gradually being torn to pieces. Controversies (about everything: foreign affairs and internal affairs, economy, religion, society —) are, in and of themselves, a problem. The gaps are enormous, and there is very little consensus about anything. Worse than that are the hatred and the license to hate; for not only are there differences in ideas and practices: there is also a considerable measure of mutual hatred, a hatred that people are not only unashamed of but also openly demonstrate. And what is worse even than that is the estrangement: people from different sectors, especially the religious and the non-religious, no longer have a common language; they are not only uninterested in encountering each other, but also unable to do so.

The only remedy and solution for causeless hatred is causeless love, and the only remedy for alienation is major, highly focused effort to create rapprochement. When so many people are not interested in meeting with or talking to each other, we must go out of our way to open the doors and pave ways to creating contact despite everything. We are commanded not only to “seek peace,” but also to “pursue it” (Psalms 34:15) – just as when something that we badly need is not within reach, we must chase for it in order to attain it.

We must therefore go out to the streets and create contacts with people—every kind of people: from those who are sublime human beings to those who are just plain people, about whom the best thing one can say is that they too are God’s creatures. Such contact cannot be made through idle talk or “dialogues” (intelligent or stupid); rather, it should be created through attempts to impart contents, and to do it in ways that the listener can at least absorb, and perhaps even understand and identify with.

Although one can never know what impact such things may have, realistically speaking one should not expect such encounters to bring about miracles. But still one should work, try, make efforts to create some point of connection. Even partial and temporary connection is something about which our Sages (Song of Songs Rabbah 5, 3) say: “Open for me an opening as narrow as the point of a needle, and I will open for you an opening through which chariots and wagons can pass.”

The *Shema* is one of the few things in which there still is a point of encounter between very different kinds of people within the Jewish nation. There are still positive memories and fractions of memories of, as well as an attitude of respect, for *Shema Yisrael*, “Hear O Israel.”

When meeting with people and suggesting to them to say the *Shema*, or at least to carry the text with them, we grant Jews the possibility to connect not only with us, but also—which is so much more important—with their own essence.

This must be done graciously and in good measure; but every such encounter, by its very existence, is both a path and a message.

Surely, something like this does not come easy to everyone; sometimes one has to gird oneself with “holy chutzpah” in order to overcome natural shyness. One should also be prepared for negative reactions (such as taking stock with other people’s transgressions, or incitement, and the like); but if one prepares oneself ahead of time, one may encounter other things as well. Thus, “he that follows after righteousness and mercy,” even if at first he may be taken to be a hopeless nuisance, is guaranteed that eventually he will “find life, prosperity and honor” (Proverbs 21:21).

In a certain sense, this is an elections campaign—but not for this or that party or leader: rather, it is a campaign for the real choice—namely, to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30: 19).