

Who is Karl Becker?

Did you watch the debate on Sunday night?

Karl Becker is the uncommitted voter who took the mic for the final question of Sunday night's presidential debate and asked the question which seemed to have the greatest impact of the evening: an impact on both the candidates and on the audience.

The question he asked was: "Would either of you name one positive thing that you respect in one another?"

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield wrote about this:

"Even sitting at home, I felt the energy in the audience change from a mixture of bored exhaustion mixed with cage match fury, to one of surprise, interest and hope.

You tell me which set of emotions is more likely to lead our nation to a better place, however you define that better place?

And it wasn't only the audience that shifted, it was the candidates themselves."

Tone changed – body language changed, shook hands which didn't happen at the beginning, smiled.

Trump's answer – she is not a quitter – she is a fighter and doesn't give up.

Hillary's answer – spoke about Donald trump's children, which as a parent, I know, you know is a great compliment.

Rabbi Hirschfield - Karl Becker reminded us that leaving space for something positive in interactions even with our opponents, not only improves the quality of our disputes, but it brings out the best in us.

He reminded us of perhaps the key insight behind the entire school of positive psychology — an insight backed up by more than a generation of serious research i.e.

Working from the awareness of strengths and virtues, rather than weaknesses and pathologies, is quite often the most efficient path to achieving our goals in life.

Karl Becker showed us how to reset moments of conflict so that we are more likely to get what we want and what we need throughout our lives.

This really shouldn't surprise us.

Most of us know that we like happy endings, sweeter endings, balanced endings.

Many of *you know* how much I like to find order in the Torah readings.

I call it framing and when I can find some sort of symmetry, whether it is thematic or literary, I feel better and I think it shows the beauty of the Torah more clearly.

It helps to put loose ends back together.

And Lord knows, that tonight more than any other is when we concentrate on the loose ends in our life, and our need to put them back together.

When we are successful in that effort, it is easier to do that which is necessary to move forward in this next year of life.

Our sages were very wise in understanding this tendency that seems to be shared among most human beings.

For the most part, it is the rule that Torah portions, and Haftarah portions are designed to end on a positive note.

Even the end of an aliyah within the Torah reading, if possible is supposed to end on a positive note.

When the Conservative movement opted to allow a triennial Torah reading and needed to create new aliyot divisions for the triennial system, one of the great challenges was to find new aliyot endings that were positive and not negative in content.

It was difficult to do, but not impossible by any means.

And we learned the other night in the debate, that even the most formidable opponents, are able to find something positive in the other when placed in a position where it is necessary and beneficial to do so.

Let me share with you a secret about one of the most important and most difficult things I've needed to do as a Rabbi, now thank God for over 38 years.

I have needed over and over again, and sometimes in admittedly difficult situations, to say nice things about people.

Think about it – hundreds and hundreds of b'nai mitzvah, weddings, and funerals –

Joke – Ya-akov Cohen dies.

Rabbi has to prepare eulogy. He goes to interview the family. No one says anything nice about him.

The Rabbi does know what to do and how to prepare.

The time has come for the Rabbi to speak.

He looks at those assembled and says, when I think of Ya-akov Cohen, I want you know one thing.

His brother was worse.

The truth is that I learned pretty early on, that there are redeemable features, positive traits, for just about everyone.

And they are not that difficult to discover, if we are only willing to search for them.

When it comes to the opportunities I have to speak publicly about people in those situations, I don't lie.

Instead, I only look for that which is good, and I, and all of us should do that much more often.

Let me tell you what I do on the other major fast day of the year.

On Tisha B'Av eve I come here to join with 15 to 20 other people to commemorate the destructions of the Temples, to remember other tragic occasions in our history, to sing, to chant and to read the book of Eicha – Lamentations.

With the help of Les Pizarz I present videos that connect us with Jerusalem and Israel and demonstrate how other musical artists commemorate this day.

It is a sad day, a difficult day, but a moving day and different than any other day of the year here.

In the morning we try to gather a minyan together. I pray with those who are assembled, feeling naked because it is the only morning of the year when I am not wearing either tallit or Tefillin.

And then later in the afternoon, I travel to the small Orthodox synagogue in Olney, Maryland and there I join with others who only then put on Tallit and Tefillin for Mincha.

Before Mincha, I watch a series of videos produced by the Chafetz Chaim Foundation.

Each year these video presentations are dedicated to teaching about how to remove Lashon HaRa, bad mouthing, gossip, nastiness in language about other people, from our lives.

These presentations are instructive, informative and very well done.

And they are a most appropriate and incredibly wise way to spend this difficult day.

Our sages long ago determined that on these days of commemoration, as easy as it might be to look outward at the enemy, it is more helpful and instructive to spend at least as much time if not more, looking inward at our lives.

If we have a need to be critical, let us be critical of ourselves.

And if we want to spend time thinking about others, let us look for the positive in their lives.

Think about how Karl Becker was able to make that happen at the end of the most contentious debate between the two people who are contending with each other right now to be the next president of the United States.

The Chafetz Chayim foundation is named for **Israel Meir (HaKohen) Kagan** (January 26, 1839 – September 15, 1933), who was known popularly as the **Chofetz Chaim** (Hebrew: חיים חפץ, *Hafetz Chaim*).

He was an influential European rabbi of the Musar movement, a Halakhist, posek, and ethicist whose works continue to be widely influential in Jewish life.

His popular name comes from a phrase in a verse from Psalm 34.

P. 52 in the Machzor – let's look at it.

“Who is the man that desires life חַיִּים חֲפֹצֵה, *Hafetz Chaim*, and loves days, that he may see good therein?

Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile.

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.”

This is your mission statement for this day,

and of course also, for everyday.

Last night I attended an annual Teshuva Drasha – lecture of Repentance, in Kemp Mill, delivered by Rav Issachar Frand, a very well-known ultraorthodox rabbi in Baltimore.

You may hear more about this lecture tomorrow evening before Neila.

The lecture was dedicated in memory of Rabbi Hillel Klavan, long time Washington DC Orthodox rabbi who passed away this last year.

Rabbi Frand began by mentioning how he caught the tail end of the debate on Sunday night.

And he mentioned the last question in the debate of which I have been speaking tonight.

Rabbi Frand specifically mentioned Hillary Clinton's response that she admired Donald Trump's children.

And Rabbi Frand then continued to state that one way of many to measure Rabbi Klavan's life, was to realize that he and Rebbison Klavan had very good children.

And then he proceeded to detail their goodness.

For those of us who have children, we know that when our children are complemented, we are also complemented.

That's what we call Nachas.

And if we don't have children, we are nevertheless, ourselves, children to our parents, and we are all children of God.

And so tonight, as we look around this room and as we return home with our loved ones, let's look for something good to say, let's look for something admirable to imitate, let's find something proud to declare, about each other, and maybe just maybe, the God we worship will turn to us as a parent and say, yes indeed, you make me proud, and yes indeed

I have good children.

**Amen**