

A frum looking man was traveling on El Al, when his seat mate asked what he did for a living.

"I'm a rabbi."

"Well," said the man condescendingly, "I was born Jewish. I don't know much about it, but I presume you could sum it up in one sentence: 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.'"

The rabbi smiled, then said, "And what do *you* do for a living?"

"I'm an astrophysicist," he replied smugly.

Well," said the rabbi, "I don't know much about it, but I presume I too, could sum it up in one sentence: 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star -- how I wonder what you are.'"

Black lives matter – white lives matter – Jewish lives matter.

Obviously, all lives matter.

On one level, I am saying the same thing, three different ways, when I say, black lives matter – white lives matter – Jewish lives matter.

All lives are the same and they all matter.

But on another level, when I say, **black** lives matter – **white** lives matter – **Jewish** lives matter, I think you can hear and understand that there are differences among these three categories of lives, and yet, still, they all matter.

Not surprisingly, today I wish to concentrate on the phrase, Jewish lives matter.

What I mean is that from my perspective, *the Jewish content of our lives as Jews* matters, a great deal.

Just by being here today, all of us are saying that Jewish lives matter – that who we are, and what we do as Jews makes a difference to us, even when it might not matter to anyone else.

But some in our congregation, just by being here today, are proclaiming "Jewish lives matter" in a way that is substantially different from previous years.

For the first time in many years, Anne Arundel County public schools are open today, on the first day of Rosh Hashanah.

When I and others first learned of this decision many months ago the initial reaction was outrage.

This is so unfair.

People began to feel as if this was a decision based upon religious discrimination.

Public school would never be open on Christmas, or Easter, or perhaps not even Dingus Day.

Have you ever heard of Dingus Day?

It is the Monday after Easter and in some religious communities it is a very important, if not holy day.

If you want more information, Google it – my job is to teach you about Tu B'Shvat and Tisha B'Av, not Dingus Day, other than to tell you that one of the reasons public schools are open on Rosh Hashanah might be so that they can be closed on Dingus Day.

Last year, shortly after it was announced that public schools would be open today, I called the county Board of Education to learn more about this decision and to register my protest.

I was able to actually speak to a human being, voice to voice and this is what I learned.

The County public school calendar committee originally recommended that schools be closed today.

And, in order to get in the requisite number of days mandated by the state, spring break was going to be a day or two shorter.

Dingus day though was not going to be touched.

Instead, spring break would start a day or two later.

This was presented to the members of the Anne Arundel County Board of Education and the board itself rejected the recommendation of the calendar committee.

On its own the Board decided to have schools open today while preserving a full week for spring/Easter break.

The official with whom I spoke, told me, that most persuasive was a Jewish man who preferred that the full week of Spring/Easter break remain intact so he could go away with his family on vacation.

When told that this would mean that school would need to remain open on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, his response was, that's okay – my children will miss that day because of my decision.

They won't be in school because I will keep them out of school, but I don't want them or us as a family to lose spring break.

After giving this response a great deal of thought, I realize that while I of course would prefer that Anne Arundel County public schools be closed today, there is value, religious identification value, in demonstrating to our children, and to the county as a whole, that many many Jews would take off anyway and that Jewish lives matter.

The best way to indicate that Jewish lives matter is not necessarily only to protest to the AACPS offices, but to demonstrate by choosing in large numbers to attend synagogue services, or in the very least, not attend school anyway, even though it's open.

By choosing not to be in public school today, or at work today, you are declaring, my **Jewish** life matters, sometimes even when it conflicts with other commitments or responsibilities.

You are deciding that the Judaism or Jewishness in your life is determined by you, and your Jewish calendar - not by Anne Arundel County public schools or anyone else's calendar.

Yes, I know that being here today instead of in public school might spoil someone's perfect attendance record.

First of all, that shouldn't be – missing a day of school for a religious observance like Rosh Hashanah should not count against a perfect attendance record.

I know that in most places it does – but it shouldn't.

Secondly, while missing school today might prevent you from receiving an attendance award from Anne Arundel County public schools or wherever, trust me when I say, you receive an attendance award for being here today.

The reward is not written on a piece of paper.

The reward is that you have clearly demonstrated that your Jewish life matters?

All of you who chose not to go to school or work today have made a very important point.

The point **you** have made, quite publicly is that, while observing our religion can be enhanced by the cooperation of others, ultimately, it is not dependent upon that cooperation.

Ultimately, it's up to **you** to determine how much your Jewish life matters.

Rabbi Akiva taught long ago that the central principle of our religion, at least as found in the Torah, reads V'Ahavta L'Rayacha Kamocha - and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Almost every year I find myself turning to this principle in one or another of my high holiday sermons.

And so it happens again.

The common translation of L'Rayacha, is as I just shared, “your neighbor”.

The word “ray-ah” which we translate as "your neighbor," might also mean, "your companion, your friend, your intimate other."

And those are the people you are supposed to love as you love yourself.

The Torah commands us to do this because very often it's difficult, challenging, and volatile, to love those who are closest to you.

Isn't it true that our companions, our friends, those with whom we are most intimate, often also cause us the most anguish.

And, loving ourselves, that also can be very difficult – not always do we act lovingly to ourselves, even when we often know better.

I will share with you two truths you already know:

it's more difficult to love others, even and perhaps especially those to whom you are close, if you don't love yourself;

and,

it's more difficult for others to love you, if you don't love yourself.

V'ahavta L'Rayacha Kamocha - and you shall love others,

and you shall love yourself.

If your **Jewish** life should matter to **others**, then it better be clear to others, that your **Jewish** life matters to *you*.

Let me share with you now how a well-known actor has continually needed to demonstrate to others how his Jewish life matters.

That which I have learned comes from an article in “The Algemeiner” written by Shiryn Ghermezian.

Joshua Malina who is a star on the hit TV show "Scandal" tells of the time when he had no agent and could only go to open call auditions. At a tryout for a commercial he needed to wait on a line that was maybe a city block long, only to discover that the audition involve eating a slice of pizza on camera.

"This ordinarily wouldn't have been a problem for me," he said. "But it was Passover."

He explained that as an actor he could pretend to eat the slice of pizza but as a Jew he could not actually consume it.

The woman handing out the pizza told him that was the end of the audition so he left.

He said, "I figure it's the closest I'll ever get to channeling Sandy Koufax, who famously refused to pitch in the World Series on Yom Kippur."

Later in his career, he discovered that the first day of filming for the Emmy award-winning television series, "the West Wing" was set for the second day of Rosh Hashanah.

He said that though landing the role of Will Bailey on the NBC drama was a huge deal; that he had needed the work badly; and that he had been pretty bummed to encounter such conflicts at the outset, he nevertheless would not work on a high holiday.

He recounted: "I took a deep breath and called one of the producers, thinking I wonder if I'm about to lose my job before it even begins. I told the producer about my situation, and I'll never forget what she said:

there's a *second* day of Rosh Hashanah?"

I explained that indeed there was. She laughed – she was Jewish, as I recall – and to my relief, told me she'd rearrange my schedule.

I think we know that this is a more difficult task in Annapolis and the surrounding communities.

And that is the case despite our living right in between two of the largest and most active Jewish communities in the country.

Let me tell you something you also already know - that if you want to live where Jewish lives matter most, move to Israel.

Proving you are a Jew in Israel may be complicated, especially if you converted to the faith.

Despite the overwhelming secular nature of Tel Aviv and much of the country, it is Jewish life, traditional and modern, religious and cultural, that still makes the Jewish state uniquely Jewish.

There you don't have to fight with the school system to close on Rosh Hashanah.

There you know exactly where most Jews will be today – in shul or, at the beach.

For that to change, services have to change and do more to attract people to the synagogue.

Yom Kippur though is different.

So many less people get in the car, and so many more go to the synagogue – not necessarily in the synagogue, but to the synagogue.

The preparation for the holiday of Sukkot is so magnificent, with all the huts being built, and people flocking to markets to buy lulav and Etrog.

Living in Israel is not proof that you are religious, is not proof that you believe in God, is not even proof that you believe in democracy, but, it is clear indisputable proof, that to you, Jewish lives matter.

We are just weeks before our next presidential election.

This time, we will elect a new president.

It is clear in this election cycle, and always, that you can be a Democrat, and disagree with some of the Democratic platform and still believe that American lives matter.

Or, you can be a Republican, disagree with some of the Republican platform and still believe that American lives matter.

Yes of course, as a Jew, you can disagree even with some of the policies promoted by the Israeli government, but without a doubt, it is still the truth that nowhere else, do **Jewish** lives matter more.

I am most proud of Or Sasson, the Israeli Olympian who won the bronze medal in judo at the Rio Olympics.

You remember that after he defeated his Egyptian opponent, Or Sasson extended his hand for the customary handshake.

And the Egyptian turned the other way and refused.

In front of the whole world, the Israeli acted like a mensch and demonstrated publicly that his JEWISH life matters.

Right after the end of the Olympics, my friend and colleague from Potomac Maryland, Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt, was invited to speak at a Sunday service held at one of the black mega churches in Glen Arden Maryland.

He addressed the issue of "black lives matter," by reviewing the long-standing alliance for civil rights between Jewish Americans and African-Americans, between Jews and blacks.

And then he turned to the Olympics and asked the several thousand in attendance if they saw when the Israeli Olympian was slighted by his Egyptian opponent.

And then he mentioned that the Saudi Olympian who refused to even compete with an Israeli.

And finally, he said that worst of all was the Lebanese Olympic delegation.

If you remember, when a bus came around to pick up Israeli athletes, the Lebanese delegation refused to allow the Israelis to get on the bus.

And then, Rabbi Weinblatt so astutely pointed out, that we to know what it's like not have a seat on the bus.

We know from our own history, that black lives matter, white lives matter, Jewish lives matter.

Let us do our share to prove that Jewish lives matter today, by being here, by worshiping as Jews even when work or school calls and when we support the State of Israel, including through the purchase of Israel bonds.