



**Rabbi Marvin Goodman, Rabbi-in-Residence  
San Francisco Jewish Community Federation  
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#1:

I'd like you to consider: When you engage in conversations about difficult subjects – how carefully do you choose your words? What impacts on you when deciding what words to use? The situation. The audience. Your feelings at the moment. The context of what's going on in our world. I believe that we rarely pay close attention to the words we use, especially when we're the least bit agitated. I believe that we rarely realize the power of the words we use.

Consider: The story is told of a sage who sent his servant to the market to buy the best kind of meat and then he sent him to buy the worst. In each case the servant returned with tongue. The sage praised him, saying that indeed there is nothing better and nothing worse than tongue because "death and life are in the power of the tongue".

Proverbs 18:21 reminds us of the power of words when it says – death and life are in the power of the tongue

We know how good we feel when we're praised and acknowledged, and we know how distressed we can feel when we're reprimanded, even when it is justified, all the more so, when the reprimand is uncalled for. Words are very powerful.

Today I'd like to suggest and encourage that you begin a practice. It's one I used to try to do when I was the rabbi of a synagogue, before I would begin to teach, preach or speak in some other context. Before you begin to speak, for a moment or two, look at the person(s) you are

talking with/to and say to yourself, "In God's image he/she/they have been created."

.....Understand that we each contain a bit of the divine and that it is the divine that makes us who we are.... Understand when you're ready to begin, that you're speaking with a unique individual person, or a group of these individuals who have each been crafted by God to be who they are – God's partners in the work of making our world a more holy place. Speak to each person(s) like you're speaking with the Divine.

Make God proud of how you speak with each of God's partners.

#2

Almost 10 years ago I was at a Jewish retreat at which I had a kind of awakening that I'd like to share with you because I think it speaks to the kind of effort we're trying to do...today and beyond. At the time, I was quite anxious, as we as a family were trying to decide where my oldest daughter would go to college. I was very anxious about the cost.

One day at the retreat, one of the leaders before Minchah shared a teaching about the verse – Poteach...God opens (his) hand and satisfies every living thing. She suggested that the verse isn't just about the opening of God's hands and providing for all, but it's also about what we each do and how we open our hands to ALL those with whom we come in contact.

During the silent parts of minchah I suddenly had the realization as I looked at my open hands, that my anxiety about college and my daughter was not about money, but it truly was about opening my hands and letting her go. It was a powerful revelation for me – and in that moment, it was like the anxiety about the cost evaporated.

It was an awakening to me to realize what was truly going on.

As we prepare to leave – I'd like to think and pray that all of us, who have experienced this day individually and collectively, have drawn closer to a place where we're more able to pay attention to what's really going on when we engage in difficult conversations about Israel or any other difficult subject.....And may it be so .....