

## Web-Based Radio Show

### Religious Values and Nurturing Experiences

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Welcome to our Web-based Radio Show. Today is Tuesday, the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah and because we are doing this on a very, very important holiday, as many of you know Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are two of the most important holidays of the year to individuals like myself who are Jewish. I wanted today's show to honor the religious principles inherent in Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur but also religious principles of all religions – Christianity and as I've come to understand even Eastern religions like Buddhism.

Common to all religions are some general principles. One for example is often stated as The Golden Rule – Honor thy neighbor like thyself or do unto others as you would have others do unto you. I've come to understand that that's been analyzed by Greek philosophers and maybe others as an important principle of reciprocity because there are two parties – yourself and the other – and you are honoring the other or treating the other like yourself. There is also a derivative principle that goes along with that – that is not only treat your neighbor like yourself, but don't covet his wife, don't covet his or her goods, etc., but also a stranger in your midst should be treated as a member of your own family. You should extend yourself so love others and treat the stranger like a neighbor and then afford that person the same principles. I know in Judaism at least where I'm more familiar, on some of the holidays like Passover there is a special cup of wine left for the stranger and they are welcomed into that household.

Now there are also, if you look at the Ten Commandments, these principles are embedded in the Ten Commandments, as well as principles honoring the sanctity of religion, making sure that the religious values are respected and there are no false gods and no false idols.


The question is what does all this have in common and how does this relate to what we have been talking about with our approach to children with special needs and our approach to children with challenges and our Floortime Model? Can we relate these two to each other? I was thinking about this and thinking about the importance of



religion in all our lives and also thinking about the principles that are embodied in our Floortime approach. Now to understand the relationship of the two to each other, I want to first elaborate on one other important religious principle or religious value and that has to do with how religion came about and what its purpose was during the course of evolution.

When Monotheism came into being, some would say 10,000 years ago, others might put it a little shorter or a little longer, more 4,000 or 5,000, others a little longer, but when it came about in the history of human evolution, many have elaborated that it unified humankind in a very, very important way. Now there were common principles to govern behavior like not to murder; again The Golden Rule in its different versions. And of interest here is if you look at the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant version of the Ten Commandments, they are all a little bit different; they are all worded differently although they all embody the same principles. Some of the commandments are divided up a little differently; one from the other. But when Monotheism came in there was one set of rules for everybody and apparently that helped facilitate trade because people could now understand the rules of somebody in a distant land they were trading with. It helped people come together and live together, feeling a little more safety and a little more security because there weren't different deities that would have different values and call for different behaviors so you knew what to expect. Common to many of almost all of the Monotheistic religions was this deep abiding love for others; this deep abiding respect for others; this deep abiding principle of reciprocity – you treat others as thyself – which is the cornerstone and many have said The Golden Rule really summarizes what we're talking about – you are not coveting your neighbor's wife or your neighbor's goods and in honoring the religion that you are a part of and you are, in a sense, paying attention to these important principles.

What does this have in common with our Floortime model and what we call our DIR® Floortime™ Model; what we have been advocating over these many years for children with special needs but really for all children? Well, to understand this means going back to what is the purpose? What are the goals of the approach we have been advocating of Floortime and the related question of not only what are the goals of Floortime, but how do children learn to love others? How do children learn to empathize with others so they can treat others as themselves? How do they learn to reflect on principles of behavior that go beyond their own basic needs of the moment? These are the critical questions. How do they separate their own fantasies, their own wishes, from the realities of the world so they can appreciate the needs of others? We will come back and look at these principles in just a second.




So we're asking the question about what's required of an individual being able to embrace the religious value of The Golden Rule and really the essence of all modern religions and also the realization that Monotheism was in itself an abstract principle; a principle of common rules governing all of humankind, all of human behavior and this was an important step in human evolution to facilitate people living together and trading across great distances. Obviously, it wasn't perfect; there were wars and obviously there were wars even under religious banners and human beings didn't always honor the essence of the religious values which were so important in the evolution, I think, of our species.

Let's look at it from a positive point of view of what religion is intended to do; what religious values have as the core essence which is this principle of reciprocity; of extending beyond yourself your own needs to really embrace the needs of others and respect others and honor others, whether it's honoring your parents or one of the Ten Commandments or your neighbor's goods but it's really respecting, honoring and loving others like yourself – that's the essence of it.

So let's look how that comes about. It doesn't come about automatically. We know that babies, whether with nervous systems that we say are neuro-typical or where their nervous systems that we describe as having special needs to them or individual differences which make learning language or being able to perform complex motor acts more difficult – regardless of whether it's "neuro-typical nervous system" or one that has these special challenges to them, we know that certain kinds of human experiences are necessary for individuals to get beyond their own basic needs; to care about others; to love others; to be part of a reciprocal relationship where they can consider the needs of others.

Let's look at what needs to be learned. You need to learn: 1) to focus on the broader world; to have not just a sense of inner security and an interest in the world but an interest in a shared world; a world where you and others are part of that world. You need to engage with others with a range of feelings – love, compassion, caring, assertiveness. You need to be able to be aware of when you're angry, which is another human emotion. So you need to have relationships that embody a full range of human feelings. And most importantly, you need to advance to where you can interact with others; read their facial expressions and their gestures – that is their emotional signaling, to see if they are happy or sad because without that you can never really understand what they're thinking and feeling, and if you can't understand what they're thinking and feeling, there is no way to honor them or treat them like yourself because you're only focused on your own needs.




We need to learn to cooperate; what we call shared social problem solving; that also is part of treating your neighbors like yourself and also coming together in groups; to bring in a stranger into one's household and honor that stranger; to expand the group beyond oneself. We need to have thought which begins with meaningful thought; thought related to one's own emotions and which are creative in nature and then extend into logical thinking where a sense of reality is established where one can appreciate the realness of the other world. We need to go to advanced higher levels of thinking; what we call multi-causal thinking and comparative and gray area thinking where you can see the degrees to which you and others have different feelings and how your feelings affect their feelings; how a little bit of annoyance on your part may lead to a little bit of annoyance on their part; and real meanness on your part lead to meanness back – that's an important element of reciprocity.

And we need to be able to reflect on who we are and what we've done – evaluate ourselves; are we good people – particularly on these holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we have the ten days of penitents where in the Jewish faith it's an opportunity to look at one's behavior over the past year and look at the degree to which one has been a good person or one has faltered and take stock and try to improve for the following year. That too is part of The Golden Rule ; honoring others and caring for others as for oneself because to do that and to embrace common principles requires some degree of self evaluation and reflectiveness; to what degree is one doing it?

So in essence, one has to master the nine levels of what we have described as our functional, emotional, and developmental capacities; always from shared attention; attention to the world of one's self and others and engagement and reciprocity and shared social problem solving, all the way up through creative and logical thinking and having a sense of reality up to being able to be reflective. Without these capacities, we tend to be need-oriented.

So how are these capacities promoted? How do we promote them in children with special needs? How do we promote them in children who don't have special needs? How can future generations embrace the important evolutionary step that came into of place when modern religions took front and center; be it Christianity, Judaism, or the Eastern religions?

Now, the question we are asking is how these values of these characteristics come into being whether with children with special needs or with children who don't have special needs? As we have talked about in the past, certain experiences are necessary.




We won't try to cover all of these but we will highlight a number of these. For example, to be engaged with others, we need a caring, loving adult who is there for the child – hopefully it's mom or dad, but it could be grandmother or Aunt Tilly or even a hired caregiver – but someone who is there for the long haul because without that, that sense of intimacy, that sense of caring and love is not experienced by the newborn baby and therefore if not experienced, can't be felt and can't then be shared with others. What you don't have and have never experienced is hard to give to others. We know that children who are deprived or grow up in orphanages with impersonal care, unless they are given fortunate experiences later in life where they are offered this care and nurturing, they often don't have it in their hearts to care and love for others, especially embrace that Golden Rule that we're talking about.

The principle of reciprocity – of seeing that life operates within two individuals reading and responding to each other's emotional signals and facial expressions and gestures, as well as words and thoughts; that ability to understand one another which is the beginning, along with intimacy, of empathy; of really caring because the intimacy helps you care and the reciprocity – the back-and-forth reading of emotional signals helps you not only care, but understand what the other person is feeling at a deep level, at a pre-verbal level as it occurs in eight, nine, ten, eleven or twelve month old infants; that's when it is first learned.

The shared social problem solving which follows helps bring that to a higher level where you are not only understanding others but you're working together; understanding their needs and your needs and trying to collaborate on shared common problem solving; again, first learned as toddlers, even before words are spoken. So here's where that empathy and that important principle of reciprocity and really the concept of being able to treat the neighbor like thyself is made possible because without having that reciprocity; without having that ability to appreciate the need of others, it's impossible to treat the neighbor like yourself – you don't have the ability to do it.

And then as we advance to the creative and logical thinking and the higher levels of thinking, we are able to now not only intuitively read the feeling of others, but we're able to appreciate what others are feeling at a level of thought. We can, surprisingly, as it begins in pretend play with a two year old playing with mom or dad or grandmother, the doctor game – each one taking care of the other – or even having battles and fights – we're appreciating what? We're appreciate this back-and-forth flow of ideas, each one feeding off the other; each creating something bigger than was there before; a whole that is bigger than the parts – saving the princess from the evil dragons, or nurturing the baby with a fever back to health as a pretend doctor, or being a school teacher who is




pretending to teach the children – all of this has what? It has in common the ability to understand that thoughts and feelings operate within this two person system and they can be verbally expressed, or expressed through ideas; so that allows the appreciation of others and empathy to occur at a higher level.

Getting into the world of reality – as we connect ideas together, what are we really doing? We are connecting our ideas to someone else’s ideas. When mom says, “Why do you want to go outside?” and we say, “Because we want to play” – our ideas are connected to mom’s ideas. Once we connect our ideas to someone else’s ideas we’re appreciating a reality outside ourselves. So now we can appreciate the reality of someone else’s existence – they are not just the make believe dragon, or the make believe doctor or school teacher where we can keep changing who they are depending on our needs at the moment. Now, there is a stable reality out there. When mom says, “No” and we say, “Why not?” and she says, “Because it’s not good for you. You have to stop eating the ice cream or you have to go to sleep now because you have to get your rest” – that structure, that limit that’s embodied in the principle of honoring thy mother and father, who convey to you their values, is embedded in establishing the reality of the world outside one’s self with rules and regulations that govern society that will help us develop a sense of morality and moral integrity later on. But it begins with connecting our ideas to someone else’s ideas so that sense of reality becomes very, very important in embracing these religious values that we’re talking about.

And as we’re talking about this, can children with special needs, as well as children who don’t have special needs, learn these? Absolutely! But they need the experiences of nurturing and compassion; they need somebody reading their emotional signals; they need somebody to be their pretend partner; they need somebody who asking them why they want to go outside or who are setting limits in a consistent way; and if that person keeps changing and is not the same person who is nurturing them, these lessons and these key abilities aren’t mastered as well. It’s one thing when the person you love and who you are devoted to and who you have intimacy with says, “No, you can’t have more ice cream, you must go to sleep.” It’s another thing when just a relative stranger is saying it to you or somebody in a daycare center, where you don’t have that emotional investment in. So it’s very important for the same caregivers to be a part of this and to help us master these important lessons if we’re going to really embrace the values that make us human beings and the values that are embodied in modern religions.


Once we establish our ability to appreciate reality – the reality outside ourselves – and appreciate the reality of other people and their needs and also the rules and regulations that we all need to get beyond ourselves, we can only advance to higher levels



of thinking. Again, if there is that social partner that helps us; we need the nurturing caring adults in our life – mom or dad or grandmother or our other caregiver or caregivers – but they have to be constant in our lives; they can't be changing; they can't be part of a group that caregivers change all the time. They can help us advance to what we call the higher levels of thinking – multi-causal thinking, comparative and gray area thinking. So in gray area thinking, for example, we appreciate the feelings of others but in degrees. Are we making Susie sad, or mom happy, or dad gleeful? Have we been respectful just a little bit or a lot or a whole lot? The world is governed not by all-or-nothing thinking – that leads to wars or polarized thinking – you're good, I'm bad, you're evil, I'm worthwhile, you deserve to live, you don't deserve to live. That polarized thinking is what fuels the misguided interpretation of religious values. All religious values when they came in were to help human beings live in harmony together and in harmony with the world. And that requires appreciating the subtlety of other people's feelings and thoughts and that there will be differences among us. But they are a matter of degrees so we can all believe in fundamental goodness and we can all believe in The Golden Rule and yet have different religions; have different ways of expressing it; we don't have to have one belief that defines us as all good or not embracing that belief that binds us as all bad. That's pre-gray area thinking; that's what we call polarized thinking where you can be logical but think in terms of extremes. That often is a justification for behavior that we would consider antithetical to The Golden Rule.

But that again requires a social partner, parents, but also teachers, by this time also friends – where there's nuance, subtlety in the dialogue, in the appreciation of the feelings of others. This doesn't occur without that experience. None of these capacities are pre-wired in the human brain. To be sure, when these capacities develop, we see areas of the brain develop. We may see different neuro-chemical systems developed to a greater degree. Yes, human beings have the potential to develop these systems; these connections with different parts of the brain; but it takes the outer experience of a nurturing adult, a caring adult, a rule limit-setting adult, an adult that asks us or challenges us to think, to develop in us these areas of the brain that allow us to embrace these values that are so important for humanity being able to live together.

And then we get to the most important level of reflective thinking. It often doesn't occur until the child is ten, eleven, twelve, or thirteen years old and continues throughout our lives as we expand our world – our ability to evaluate ourselves; our own thoughts and our own feelings. This allows us to develop a truly mature sense of morality; not just based on fear of punishment but one based on appreciation of the values of the world and the values of other people as well as the development of our own




set of values. This ability to evaluate ourselves; to be reflective; to take a step away from ourselves; to say things like, “Gee, I wonder why I’m feeling angry today” or “I wonder why I’m feeling so happy today” or “I wonder why I slipped and misbehaved” or “Gee, that essay I wrote isn’t as good as I normally do” or “Gee, I feel badly that I mistreated my friend and gave into the impulse of the moment.” That ability for self-evaluation is the cornerstone of a mature sense of morality because what is morality? It’s the ability to see that there are principles and values outside ourselves that are important and we try to aspire to them and live up to them but it means evaluating how well we are doing. Are we living up to these important values and principles? Are we being good people? Are we being helpful to our friends and colleagues? Are we treating our neighbors like ourselves? Are we trying to make the world a better place? Are we taking in the stranger and making him a part of our family?

And another elaboration of that – do we have a value system where the starving child in Africa or in Asia is as important as one in our own family – where we care about famine and we care about hardship around the world. Sometimes we do and sometimes we don’t. When individuals or political systems other than our own deviate from values we think are important, we go into polarized thinking – they’re bad and we’re good. We have to destroy them. Or, do we try to appreciate their history and their culture and where they have come from and what roles this may play in the evolution of their lives and can we help them move to what we think will be a more satisfying or more healthful set of values and political realities and how can we do that? That’s all part of a mature sense of morality.


To be sure, there are times when evil may exist and we must deal with that. But to make that subtle distinction requires, again, this ability for reflective thinking and how does that come about? Well, that’s a product of all the steps; all the types of thinking we have already described. It’s an outgrowth of our ability to be nurtured; our ability to have someone read our emotional signals; our ability for someone to share creative pretend play with us; our ability for someone to ask us the causal questions; the “why” questions to establish that outer sense of reality; it’s an outgrowth of gray area thinking where someone is challenging us to be more subtle and more nuanced in our thoughts. And that leads to reflective thinking and a more mature sense of morality. There’s always an ability to work together in groups to protect our shared humanity and our planet.

So, in short, these are the values that characterize Judaism on these important holidays, that characterize Christianity and other religions as well, and to embrace these values means a certain type of care giving. We are going to talk about the general characteristics of care giving and how it will help children with special needs or without



special needs, and how important it is to receive this kind of care giving and master these critical capacities.

So what are the experiences that we require in growing up, whether we have special needs or whether we don't have special needs, to master or to acquire these capacities that are embedded in all modern religions? Again, we are talking about this because it's what's called the Judaism high holy days – Rosh Hashanah and in ten days Yom Kippur. Well, clearly, we need a nurturing adult or adults who can care for us as babies. Clearly, we need these same nurturing adults having enough time to read and respond to our signals and interact with us and to enter into shared social problem solving; take the time to gesture with us and help us find that toy, or help us find the juice in the refrigerator when we are toddlers; who has the time and inclination to get down on the floor and do creative pretend play with us; who will take the time and have the interest in asking why we want to go outside and not just say “yes” or “no” to help us connect our ideas to others; and who will be involved in subtle nuance thinking with us; to ask us how we feel towards our friends and why we like this one better than that one and how much; and to think through with us how we feel and why we treat Johnnie different than Susie or why we're mean to our brothers or sisters. The same nurturing adult or adults will be the ones who help us become reflective by asking us how we feel and why we feel a certain way; and why we think we did certain things; they will teach us values not just by concrete rules which supports polarized thinking – all-or-nothing thinking – the kind of thinking that breeds hostility; but rather, they will teach us rules by helping us reason through and understand the importance of the rule; the why of the rule; and that will be embedded in the history of that nurturing, loving relationship so we'll care about the explanation of the adults who are helping us. We will have that background of caring. And as we learn the reasons for the rules; as we learn values, we will also learn through that caring adult to take a step away from ourselves and our own needs. Well how will that come about? That will come about because we will care enough about somebody else – our mom, or our dad, or our brother, or our sister, or our best friend – and we will understand how they feel and gradually we will be able to take a step away and say, “Gee, was I kind to them or was I mean to them?” and “I wonder why I'm feeling so bad today or I'm feeling so good today?” That doesn't come about automatically; it's an outgrowth of the subtle thinking that allows us to look at shades of gray; it allows us to look at how angry, how sad, how happy, how gleeful we are and as our caregivers help us question why we're feeling that way, it helps us take that step away from ourselves and wonder why also.




But it has to be a caring adult who we are invested in to care that they are asking a question and to want to answer that question and in answering the question, we take a step away from ourselves and we begin being able to evaluate or reflect on our own thoughts and feelings and this leads to our ability to embrace the values of others; embrace the values of our religion and our common culture and heritage and it allows us to not just embrace that, but allows us to become the kind of people who will be able to teach others to do that eventually too. When we grow up, we will be able to be caring, loving adults. We know that children who have been deprived, who haven't had these experiences, have a hard time parenting their children so it allows us to continue on the culture; to continue on the values that we have.

Now, at this time in our history, these capacities, these values are very, very important because more and more we're living in a global world and so the principle of loving thy neighbor or taking in the stranger and making him a neighbor becomes more and more important. As we live in a more global world, these principles we have been talking about become even more important. Our neighbors are no longer just those who live in our community but those who live in other continents – Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East – they're all our neighbors. They are all strangers that we need to welcome into our home and treat them as our own. So the principle of reciprocity, of treating others like ourselves, obviously that suggests we feel good about ourselves but if we have had these nurturing experiences, we undoubtedly will.

The ever expanding communications through the internet; the shared dangers we all face through nuclear, biological, and other weapon systems – mean we all share the same lifeboat, so we're all neighbors in this larger world. Global warming, the way in which the economy is connected from one country to another now, how the markets in one area of the world effect markets in other areas of the world – all this means we're part of a truly global interdependent world.

Everyone is everyone's neighbor. All the strangers need to be welcomed into our house and treated as our own. That's a huge, huge moral and psychological step to take – a huge one! Can individuals who polarize, who take small differences and make them huge; who will take one political belief or a difference of religious orientation even though the larger goal may be shared of treating thy neighbor like thyself; but take these small differences and polarize them and make the other into the enemy – will that promote this kind of global working together that we need? Obviously not! And is it pie in the sky to think that human beings can reach the point where we can extend our humanity, our sense of shared humanity, through the whole globe where we can aspire to embrace the values inherent in modern religions dating back many thousands of years




and the values that are necessary for our survival now that are the same; showing the wisdom of evolution and of these common religions. Can we make it? Can we grow and develop and expand our sense of morality?

And can all children, those with special needs as well as those without special needs, acquire these abilities? Well, we have demonstrated that certainly children who are not supposed to have a sense of empathy because of their autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis can develop that, particularly if their neurological challenges aren't too severe. We have demonstrated that with a number of older teenagers and adults now who have been through our DIR Floortime program. They have even a greater sense of empathy than many of their peers. So having special needs or a different type of nervous system doesn't mean we can't provide the experiences that provide this kind of growth. To be sure, there will become individuals who may not acquire the language or the thinking skills we would love for them to acquire, but the majority of individuals living on the planet can. Even those who don't develop the full thinking capacity you would like, can develop a strong sense of compassion and love and caring of others which is the essence of what we're talking about.

So, what does it mean to make this a global experience; to expand our sense of shared humanity; to embrace all those around the world? Well it means that we provide nurturing families and safe communities and a sense of security for all individuals in every corner of the world. This means food and housing and medical care and protection of family members to nurture; and it means helping out where there are natural disasters but also helping out where there are political systems or leaders who are interfering with the individuals receiving this kind of opportunity for human growth and development.

So it's a tall order. We're moving in that direction very gradually and slowly but we need to speed up our efforts because without that, our common interests may not get realized. So embedded in the high holy days for the Jewish religion and really the values of all religions is The Golden Rule; embedded in that is a survival of the planet for the future. Everything from protecting the planet from global warming, making sure there is enough healthy water and food, to minimizing unnecessary wars, to making sure that every human being is part of a safe, secure family that can provide the essentials and safe communities and nation states that feel safe and secure and are part of an interconnected global system.

This is the challenge for the future but it was predicted many thousands of years ago with the principles of modern religion. So, today we tried to tie our human values – the values of nurturing which are so essential to our DIR Floortime Approach to children



with special needs so they too can share in this common humanity that we talked about, but we tie that today to our larger goal for childcare and for family life all around the world. If religion means something special to us as it does for many, we've got to focus on not just the literal reading of a passage but the larger meaning in why religion came about, what it represents for bringing whole peoples into the realm where there is something greater than themselves; something more important than themselves; and I would say this is the principle of sharing a common sense of humanity with others around the world. Protecting the world for the future and for future generations and it all begins with nurturing, care, and safe, secure families and safe communities.

Thank you for joining us today and we will continue with our radio shows next week.