

Uncle Harry. He was a rabbi for fifty years in the same congregation. He marched with Martin Luther King and with Heschel in the march on Washington and spent many, many days in Selma, Alabama. He really is a legend in the Jewish community. So he's not famous in the global sense.

Eboo Patel: Make him famous on "30 Good Minutes!"

Sherre Hirsch: But he's famous in my family. He had a profound influence on me and I think it was his commitment to civil rights. Actually, Martin Luther King spoke at my uncle's ordination ceremony because their relationship was so tight. Purely famous for me but necessarily famous for the world.

Eboo Patel: This is a remarkable part of your narrative. The Dalai Lama came to your congregation.

Sherre Hirsch: Right. That was in incredible.

Eboo Patel: In your family was somebody who marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. I mean it's a story that ought to be told. And thank you for telling just a part of it with us right now.

Sherre Hirsch: Thank you.

Christine Chakoian: It's true. I'm so inspired to think about all of the places in my own life where there have been those connections that perhaps have been in the background, that are beginning to emerge in my own imagination about things to savor in these interfaith connections. Thank you for sharing your story.

CLOSING

Christine Chakoian: Our time is gone for today, but please come back next week for Part 2 of our series "One God." Sherre Hirsch and Eboo Patel will be with us again, and Eboo will share his experiences as a Muslim-American growing up in the suburbs of Chicago.

Before we go, I encourage you to visit our website at 30GoodMinutes.org, where you'll find an extensive collection of reflections and stories to enrich your spiritual life. Now, from all of us at "30 Good Minutes," may peace be with you in the week ahead.

found admiration for?

Sherre Hirsch: Absolutely. I mean I see it in Christianity especially because we're very connected to the church. We have a church, closer than our synagogue, within walking distance. So we pass the church to go to our synagogue and I see them very active. Our next door neighbors are very involved with them. So we've been very much inspired by that. I think more than anything, I think it's what traditions share, that they share this desire to heal the world. You see now with all the things going on in our world, you don't say, oh, it's the Jews that are helping or it's the Christians. It's humanity that is helping, it's people. But it's only newsworthy, the one person that doesn't. Right? It's humanity that is of service. So I do see it in Christianity. I see it in Islam. I see it in all religions that there is a real service component.

Christine Chakoian: Have you been part of any service organizations or activities, secular or in the community, that have brought people together on those projects of justice and right?

Sherre Hirsch: So many it's hard to pick one! We hosted the Dalai Lama at our synagogue, which was something fantastic. We go every year—I don't want to say once a year—on Thanksgiving to serve meals, but that's the day we definitely go. Our synagogue, for example, every month we run a homeless shelter and we run a kitchen. So we go back and forth and it's so fluid. Actually, one of the biggest decisions I had as a rabbi in the pulpit was I wanted to bring a gospel choir into the pulpit for Martin Luther King Day. And there was a little bit of hesitation, "What if they start singing Jesus?" And I said, "Ah, what if?" They would actually have passion. And everybody was like, "Do you think we'll catch it?" Fortunately, it's not contagious! I think some things are good to be contagious. I think devotion would be a wonderful thing to have a little more infectious nature to it.

Eboo Patel: One of the things that strikes me is that your journey is more and more the norm than the exception, which is to say that people encounter religious difference very early in their lives and they watch how that religious difference strengthens their own conviction and makes them a better "whatever" they might be. The other thing that strikes me is that not only is that the norm now but it's affected remarkable people throughout 20th century history. I think about Gandhi in London reading the Sermon on the Mount and finding some of the core dimensions of Hinduism within that ethic.

Sherre Hirsch: Right. Abraham Heschel, Martin Luther King.

Eboo Patel: There you go. That's exactly what I was going to ask you. Is there a hero that you hold up who was deeply committed to his own religion but found it enriched by an encounter with another religion? And, Sherre, I think this might be our last question. Our time is winding up. I'm looking for a really exciting hero that you can send us home with.

Sherre Hirsch: He's maybe not exciting but he's famous in our family, which is my

your story of being introduced to religious diversity when you were a kid through Baptist preachers on television. I'm wondering how you would answer the question of when to introduce young people to religious diversity.

Sherre Hirsch: I think it's never too young. It's interesting because I sent my oldest child, at first, to a Jewish day school. And then we moved him to a non-Jewish school. And it's there he embraced his identity. So I think there's something magical that happens when you have to own your differences and when you learn that you're not so different, that you have things to teach but you also have things to learn. It's interesting because I've seen through all my children now as they're entering into secular schools, into non-Jewish schools, how much they're embracing their own Judaism and how I want them not to be threatened. Just a short story, my son actually was giving his winter pageant in the church and he asked me, "Do you think God would be upset?" And I said, "What do you think?" because every training in parenting throw's it back on them. He said to me, "Actually when I got in there it was so beautiful that I thought this must be a wonderful place of worship for people of the Christian faith." I thought, okay, we're done for this holiday season. We're clear! He's still a Jew but he gets it.

And the other thing I do, I was going to say, Eboo, is you can almost say anything in our house but you can't say the word "hate." Hate is the worst possible word you can say in our house and I think that is a learned word and a learned sentiment. You have to teach that it is non-acceptable, worse than almost any other word. Even, "I hate spinach" is not allowed in our house.

Christine Chakoian: That's radical!

Sherre Hirsch: Well, honestly, it extrapolates to something greater and I don't want it to.

Christine Chakoian: That leads me to ask what are some of the core values or ideas that you see in your own faith that are non-negotiable, if you will?

Sherre Hirsch: Well, obviously we don't believe in Jesus and that's a non-negotiable. And we don't practice traditions like Christmas and celebrate holidays like Easter because they're not our own and they're not our home. But we do share this essence of *tikkun olam*, of repairing the world and that you give of service. And *tzedakah*. People think it means charity. It actually means to make the world bright. And so we share that and we really try to emphasize that. We also invite a lot of the kids' friends in for all of our holidays. And we go elsewhere for holidays because I don't want our children to be afraid. Right? I want them to have the dialogue that is so open. I think, more than anything, is that they don't feel afraid.

Eboo Patel: You've spoken so beautifully about identifying devotion in another religion, your admiration for the Muslim form of devotion. You just told that beautiful story about your son and him finding beauty in another religious space. But I'm struck by what you just said about Judaism and *tikkun olam* and the social action path within Judaism. Has there been a social action dimension of another religion that you've encountered and

of the Book, a person of the mind, and then discovering this whole different element of experiencing God. How do you experience God now in your own life?

Sherre Hirsch: Well, Christine, as a child I thought it was very much through the book and the learning. And now it has just opened up so many ways. I do yoga, through music, through prayer. And prayer just isn't talking directly to God, prayer can be as simple as in the car, taking a deep breath and stopping. Also, my favorite place to pray is in the shower because I'm alone and with four kids you need a moment of privacy to talk to God otherwise...but that isn't even always private, to be honest.

Eboo Patel: I'm struck that even in addition to Christianity and Islam, which are also traditions of the book and monotheistic traditions, belief in one God, you mentioned Buddhism. Buddhism is a non-theistic religion. I'm wondering what you have learned from non-theistic religion that has enriched your own faith.

Sherre Hirsch: I spent a lot of time in Thailand and also in the East because I wanted to grapple with what Eastern tradition has to offer us. First of all, Jews are noisy and the Eastern faiths are very quiet. And I thought, we have to get quieter. I think the Eastern philosophy taught me so much to be quieter, to listen as opposed to talking. And we do, we talk a lot, that's what we do. But it was to be quiet, to listen and also to realize that there is a voice of God within you and that if you pay attention it may have a lot to say. I've found that in my own life.

Christine Chakoian: As you "try on for size" these other expressions you say beautifully that you are not giving up being a Jew, that this is still your central core. I don't exactly know how to put this, but how do these other traditions help you be a better Jew?

Sherre Hirsch: I think when you meet someone of faith you share something very powerful. You both share a belief that the world is better because there is something greater than you so you already have a link. It's just you don't know it because so often what society or the media points out is our differences because it's more media savvy, right? But actually what we really have in common is a shared belief that there is something greater in the world. I think when you see that, you look into the eyes of another human being and you know that they are an agent of God, that they are a child of God, and you can't behave the same way. You know, you can't yell at a clerk when you see in their eyes that they're an agent of God and I try to keep that in the forefront of my mind. Do I do that every day? I don't know, but I try my best to.

Christine Chakoian: Sometimes harder with children than with clerks!

Sherre Hirsch: You always treat your friends better than your family, which is true.

Eboo Patel: I lead an interfaith organization and it's an interfaith organization that works particularly with young people. One of the questions I get all the time is: is there an age that's too young to start introducing young people to religious diversity? I'm struck about

subject to debate; but it would not give me meaning, purpose and comfort.

The book of Deuteronomy says, “Love God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.” But in the New Testament, Matthew says, “Love God with you’re your heart, all your soul and all your mind!”

Might, Mind. Is there really that big of a difference? Deuteronomy is teaching us that we need might: physical, direct, visceral contact with God. And Matthew is teaching us that we need the mind: the wisdom and the intellect to comprehend God. The texts together are teaching us, with might and mind, heart and head, we can know and feel God in our lives. Judaism taught me to be a thinker, but living in the non-Jewish world taught me to be a feeler.

As a rabbi I teach people the power of learning, but also teach them the power of feeling. On Yom Kippur years ago, I brought back an old tradition in which Jews prostrate on the floor during the sacred *Aleynu* prayer. The first year I was considered an absolute heathen. The cantor and I were the only ones on the floor. But by year eight almost everyone in the sanctuary was face down. We moved our bodies in order to move our souls. And by changing how we prayed, we changed the way we related with God.

When was the last time you changed the way you communicated with God? When was the last time you visited another house of worship to learn something new? When was the last time you revisited your own religious practices?

Trying something new may feel incredibly uncomfortable at first. It did for me. But it has been the discomfort that has given me the possibility and the insight to believe more deeply. Don’t get me wrong, I am not suggesting that you abandon your beliefs for another one. I am saying, don’t be afraid to look at the wisdom of other traditions as a way to enhance your own.

I am sure my parents were worried then they saw me that first morning that one day I would announce: “I’ve decided to become a Baptist preacher!” But they should not have been concerned. I love being a Jew. Judaism is my home, it is my way of life, it is my entire identity.

But what I knew then, and what I know now for absolute certain, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, you name it, these traditions do not threaten my identity or weaken my beliefs. Rather they grow my soul, deepen my mind and mostly open my heart.

CONVERSATION

Christine Chakoian: If you’d like a printed transcript, audiotape or DVD of the message you just heard from Sherre Hirsch, we’ll tell you how to place an order at the end of the program. Or you can visit our website at 30goodminutes.org to watch the video or read the text anytime.

Now, let’s talk with Sherre Hirsch. Sherre, you talked so eloquently about being a person

States.

A few years ago Sherre stepped away from congregational ministry to concentrate full-time on writing and speaking. Her first book was “We Plan, God Laughs: What to Do When Life Hits You Over the Head.” She is currently working on a new book and is the Spiritual Life consultant for Canyon Ranch. Please welcome Rabbi Sherre Hirsch.

MESSAGE

Sherre Hirsch: I have a confession: as a child, when I was supposed to be watching Sunday morning cartoons, I watched the Christian preachers instead.

When my parents found out, they were not happy. They would have preferred that I was eating ice cream at seven a.m. and watching “Scarface” rather than these preachers. They did not get it. I was not watching for content. I was watching their style, their technique, how they captured everyone’s attention, but mostly how they were talking directly to God.

In my childhood, talking to God was a definite no-no. You could talk *around* God. You could talk *about* God. But you definitely did not talk *to* God. Jews are the people of the book. We read, we think, we study in order to understand. If belief comes, then great, but if not, you’re still a Jew. What matters most are the rituals. If you eat *matzoh* on Passover, fast on *Yom Kippur* and light the *Shabbat* candles, then you are a Jew. The concept that all Jews would agree on any one belief has become so foreign that it has become a common joke. If you put two Jews in a room, then you will have three opinions.

What links us together is not our central tenets of faith, rather our shared practices. We believe that there is one God, but who and what that God does is up for debate. So God is essentially the ingredient or one of the ingredients, but not the entire recipe.

Except as a child, I wanted so much more. I would stand in my closet and preach to my shoes, trying to emulate those Sunday preachers. I would tell them my fears, my desires, my hopes and my dreams. My clothes could not be critical. I could feel and say and do anything without reproach.

Fast forward, I am a teenager in Israel at the market. Without warning, the Muslims in line in front of me suddenly bow down on the floor in prayer. I was startled, I was intrigued and impressed all at the same time. In the middle of the market they were completely unafraid to show their devotion and love to God, regardless of who was in front of them or behind them. They were absolutely certain that God was in the market with them. They did not need a mosque, or a book or a perfect circumstance to talk to God. God was available to them essentially 24/7. It was then that I knew that the non-Jewish world was onto something.

These moments and many others taught me that knowing God is not enough. I needed to experience God. In times of joy and sorrow, intellectualizing God would give me a great

that does multi-faith action around malaria eradication. If you look at the eight millennium development goals you can really sit down and say malaria is either directly involved in or can have a positive effect on six of the eight. The Interfaith Youth Core is a reasonably young, non-profit in Chicago started here by local guy names Eboo Patel. It's really about bringing young people to the table to work together, do service projects, and in the process, sort of share values. If ever there's a way to effect positive change across the world and do it with any amount of interfaith cooperation, it's going to have to be some common idea of justice in helping people.

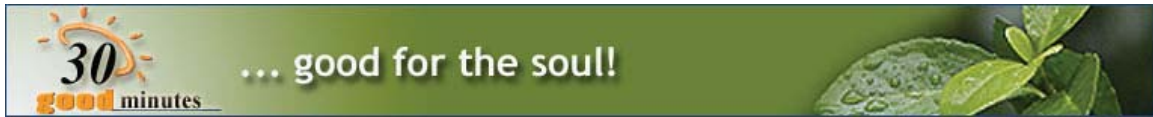
I grew up in a traditional Jewish household. I attended synagogue growing up. At particular points before I'd even gotten to high school I'd taken further religious stringencies upon myself, had become *shomer shabbos* right before my bar mitzvah by choice. I started keeping *kashrut* law, which is ritual dietary law, when I was ten. I ran track and cross-country and I basically couldn't compete because these things were all on Friday night and Saturday. I spent a year in Israel before I went off to college. It's really easy there, I think, especially at that age to be a practicing Jew, to be studying in *yeshivah*, a place of Jewish study. So I think I had been fed this particular way of looking at the world through a Jewish lens. I think at that point in my life I sort of thought about my own religious identity as part of my identity and that orthopraxy really played a part in it. I don't think it was until later when I really got to university, I got to college and I was really thinking about having a very different experience of faith. I felt that continuing to be observant was keeping me from growing, meeting people that were really going to challenge who I was and really expand and grow within myself.

Really my understanding of myself through my faith since then has really been very pinned on my connection to my family, historically and culturally, but also sort of looking forward as I'm beginning a family. And so I let it go by the wayside and I started to push outside of the way that I've been for a decade at that point. I ended up getting really interested in the origins of Hebrew bible and early rabbinic texts and even early Christianity. I then ended up at Harvard Divinity School to do more of that because it was just so fascinating and it has become such an important part of me understanding myself as a Jew and the context of a larger historical and religious sweep.

At the end of the day, it's not just about this ritual practice, this orthopraxy, it's not about some dead white guy with a big beard from 1200 C.E. telling me that I need to live my life in a particular way. It's really about this cultural heritage piece of it that really informs who I am and my connection to my family. It's something that I can't ignore.

SPEAKER INTRO

Christine Chakoian: Many thanks to Joey Shapiro for sharing his outstanding story. Now, let me tell you more about Sherre Hirsch. Sherre is a rabbi in the Jewish conservative tradition. Raised in Southern California, hers was a winding path to the ministry, from Smith College, to Northwestern University, to a detour through Asia, immersing herself in Eastern philosophy. Sherre found her way to the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City and, in 1998, became the first woman rabbi at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, the largest conservative Jewish congregation in the Western United



PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

Program #5319
One God – Part 1
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Christine Chakoian: Welcome to “30 Good Minutes!” I’m Christine Chakoian, and I’m happy you’ve joined us for part one of a special “30 Good Minutes” series “One God.” Over the next three weeks, we’ll explore life in interfaith America, with a particular focus on the Abrahamic faith traditions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. I’m delighted to be one of your co-hosts for this series, as well as a speaker in Part Three.

Sherre Hirsch: And I’m Rabbi Sherre Hirsch. Today I’ll be sharing my experience as one of a few Jewish girls in a Catholic school and how watching Christian preachers on Sunday morning television influenced my decision to become a rabbi.

Eboo Patel: I’m Eboo Patel. Next week, in Part Two of “One God,” I’ll share my experience as a Muslim-American growing up in the suburbs of Chicago and how volunteering with the Catholic Worker movement shaped my thinking about interfaith dialogue.

Christine Chakoian: And finally, in week three, I’ll share how my experience at table with Jews and Muslims opened my eyes to a fuller understanding of communion.

Eboo Patel: For the next three weeks, we’ll be joined by a wonderful studio audience, some of whom are my colleagues at the Interfaith Youth Core here in Chicago.

As people experience the richness of friendships with those from other religions, misunderstandings, misperceptions and misgivings begin to disappear. There are hundreds of millions of religious young people interacting in the world. But where so many of the stories of those interactions are about conflict, the Interfaith Youth Core tries to build relationships on the values we all share, and live out those values together to contribute to the betterment of our community.

Over the next three weeks, we’ll meet three of my Interfaith Youth Core friends, starting today with Joey Shapiro. He’s working on a joint program with the Tony Blair Faith Foundation called “Faiths Act,” a multi-faith, social action program that mobilizes people of faith to work together on issues of health and global poverty. Let’s watch.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Joey Shapiro: My name is Joey Shapiro. I’m a fourth generation Chicagoan, Jewish by faith, and happily married. I work for Interfaith Youth Core on an international project