

LOCAL RABBIS SHARE PERSPECTIVES ON THIS TALMUDIC PASSAGE ABOUT CIVIL DISCOURSE

Text to share at your seder this year

We need to learn how to disagree Jewishly. When our Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, it was the rabbinic imagination that crafted a Judaism that would live in any time. We needed a framework to preserve disagreement lest an idea rejected today would be the idea that would save us tomorrow. To more deeply understand argument, our rabbinic heritage formulated this important phrase: "Both these and those..." asking us to understand our very disagreements as something spiritual and deeply theological.

We may think disagreement means we cannot maintain relationship with one another. But, disagreeing Jewishly, we recognize that each of us strives to represent the best of our God given capacity. If we are uniquely created in God's image, we are not all the same. It is our diversity that testifies to God's unfathomable creativity. Maybe then our conversation, on whatever topic, is not fraught with accusation but rather with exploration. When we disagree Jewishly, we may or may not change a mind, but we sew ourselves into the common communal fabric to warm, protect, and care for one another.

- Rabbi Eric Weiss

Jewish mysticism teaches us that we are all essential parts of the One Soul, each of us sent into our lives to fulfill our unique soul missions. Without each and every one of us, the Great Name, Sh'mei Raba, is incomplete. When we each speak our unique truths from a place of centeredness and integrity, our words are indeed the words of the Living God, infused with the quality of Divine inspiration. Dialogue then becomes a spiritual practice in which we see and acknowledge each other as sparks of the Divine. We consciously open our hearts wide enough to hold diverse opinions, even those which seem to be so opposite to our own that we cannot imagine resolution. In this sanctuary, mishkan, of our unified hearts, holding each other in love and respect, we create - with our sacred intention and deep listening - the possibility of shalom and reconciliation and we can birth radically new solutions, heretofore never even imagined.

- Rabbi SaraLeya Schley

**יצאה בת קול ואמרה:
אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים**

**A heavenly voice went forth
and declared, "Both these
and those are the words
of the living God."**

- Talmud Eruvin 13b

The rest of this quote from Eruvin 13b reads, "But (it was asked) since both are the words of the living God, for what reason was the School of Hillel entitled to have the law determined according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and humble, and because they studied their own rulings and those of the School of Shammai and even mentioned the teaching of the School of Shammai before their own." Hametz, leaven, comes from the Hebrew word to be puffed up. When we are puffed up or arrogant we become convinced that only we can be correct. Ridding our homes of hametz during Pesach reminds us to rid ourselves of such arrogance. Hillel was preferred over Shammai because he and the members of his school were humble and kind. They studied the opinions that differed from their own and showed respect by even quoting first what was of value in them. Pirke Avot(4:1) teaches, "Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone." Let us have the humility that gives us the freedom to learn from everyone, even those of differing opinions.

- Rabbi Richard Litvak

The oldest inscription in Jerusalem is the one found at Hezekiah's tunnel south of the Temple Mount. It dates back to the 7th century BCE.

And this is the way that the tunnel was cut through: Each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, there was heard the sound of a man calling to his fellow, and there was an overlap in the rock on the right and on the left. And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed the rock, each man toward his fellow, axe against axe,, and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir.

We who love Israel must cut through the rock from our separate tunnels, because Israel needs us, all of us. We must carve our way through angry rhetoric and ideological posturing to true dialogue. We must call out to each other with words of reason and concern, seeking common ground.

- Rabbi Daniel Pressman



For more information on the Year of Civil Discourse Initiative, contact Randi Dodick Fields at rdfields@jcrc.org

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