DATA of Plano

Parshas Shemos | 21 Teves 5779 | December 29, 2018

Friday Evening

Candle lighting and Mincha: 5:10

Shabbos Day

Shacharis: 9:00

Latest time for shema: 9:59

Learners' Service will not be held

Kiddush following services

Mincha: 4:45

Maariv / Shabbos ends: 6:14

Kol Hane'arim: 7:25

From the Desk of Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

G-d Loves Those Who Argue

I have become increasingly concerned about the assault on free speech taking place throughout the West, particularly in university campuses.[1] This is being done in the name of "safe space," that is, space in which you are protected against hearing views which might cause you distress, "trigger warnings"[2] and "micro-aggressions," that is, any remark that someone might find offensive even if no offence is meant.

So far has this gone that at the beginning of the 2017 academic year, students at an Oxford College banned the presence of a representative of the Christian Union on the grounds that some might find their presence alienating and offensive.[3] Increasingly, speakers with controversial views are being disinvited: the number of such incidents on American college campuses rose from 6 in 2000 to 44 in 2016.[4]

Undoubtedly this entire movement was undertaken for the highest of motives, to protect the feelings of the vulnerable. That is a legitimate ethical concern. Jewish law goes to extremes in condemning *lashon hara*, hurtful or derogatory speech, and the sages were careful to use what they called *lashon sagi nahor*, euphemism, to avoid language that people might find offensive. But a safe space is not one in which you silence dissenting views. To the contrary: it is one in which you give a respectful hearing to views opposed to your own, knowing that your views too will be listened to respectfully. That is academic freedom, and it is essential to a free society.[5]

As George Orwell said, "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

John Stuart Mill likewise wrote that one of the worst offences against freedom is "to stigmatise those who hold the contrary opinion as bad and immoral men." That is happening today in institutions that are supposed to be the guardians of academic freedom. We are coming perilously close to what Julian Benda called, in 1927, "The treason of the intellectuals," in which he said that academic life had been degraded to the extent that it had allowed itself to become an arena for "the intellectual organisation of political hatreds."[6]

What is striking about Judaism, and we see this starkly in this week's parsha, is that *argument and the hearing of contrary views is of the essence of the religious life.* Moses argues with God. That is one of the most striking things about him. He argues with Him on their first en-

counter at the burning bush. Four times he resists God's call to lead the Israelites to freedom, until God finally gets angry with him (Ex. 3:1-4:7). More significantly, at the end of the parsha he says to God:
"Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Why did You send me? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all." (Ex. 5:22-23).

This is extraordinary language for a human being to use to God. But Moses was not the first to do so. The first was Abraham, who said, on hearing of God's plan to destroy the cities of the plain, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:25).

Similarly, Jeremiah, posing the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people and good things to bad people, asked: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (Jer. 12:1). In the same vein, Habakkuk challenged God: "Why do You tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Hab. 1:13). Job who challenges God's justice is vindicated in the book that bears his name, while his friends who defended Divine justice are said not to have spoken correctly (Job 42:7-8). Heaven, in short, is not a safe space in the current meaning of the phrase. To the contrary: *God loves those who argue with Him* - so it seems from Tanakh.

Equally striking is the fact that the sages continued the tradition and gave it a name: argument for the sake of heaven,[7] defined as debate for the sake of truth as opposed to victory.[8] The result is that Judaism is, perhaps uniquely, *a civilization all of whose canonical texts are anthologies of arguments*. Midrash operates on the principle that there are "seventy faces" to Torah and thus that every verse is open to multiple interpretations. The Mishnah is full of paragraphs of the form, "Rabbi X says this while Rabbi Y says that." The Talmud says in the name of God himself, about the conflicting views of the schools of Hillel and Shammai, that "These and those are the words of the living God."[9]

A standard edition of Mikraot Gedolot consists of the biblical text surrounded by multiple commentaries and even commentaries on the commentaries. The standard edition of the Babylonian Talmud has the text surrounded by the often conflicting views of Rashi and the Tosafists. Moses Maimonides, writing his masterpiece of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah, took the almost unprecedented step of presenting only the halakhic conclusion without the accompanying arguments. The ironic but predictable result was that the Mishneh Torah was eventually surrounded by an endless array of commentaries and arguments. In Judaism there is something holy about argument.

Why so? First, because only God can see the totality of truth. For us, mere mortals who can see only fragments of the truth at any one time, there is an irreducible multiplicity of perspectives. We see reality now one way, now another. The Torah provides us with a dramatic example in its first two chapters, which give us two creation accounts, both true, from different vantage points. The different voices of priest and prophet, Hillel and Shammai, philosopher and mystic, historian and poet, each capture something essential about the spiritual life. Even within a single genre, the sages noted that "No two prophets prophesy in the same style."[10] Torah is a conversation scored for many voices.

Second, because justice presupposes the principle that in Roman law is called *audi alteram partem*, "hear the other side." That is why God wants an Abraham, a Moses, a Jeremiah and a Job to challenge Him, sometimes to plead for mercy or, as in the case of Moses at the end of this week's parsha, to urge Him to act swiftly in defence of His people.[11] Both the case for the prosecution and the defence must be heard if justice is to be done and seen to be done.

The pursuit of truth and justice require the freedom to disagree. The Netziv argued that it was the prohibition of disagreement that was the sin of the builders of Babel.[12] What we need, therefore, is not "safe spaces" but rather, civility, that is to say, giving a respectful hearing to views with which we disagree. In one of its loveliest

passages the Talmud tells us that the views of the school of Hillel became law "because they were pleasant and did not take offence, and *because they taught the views of their opponents as well as their own, indeed they taught the views of their opponents before their own*."[13]

And where do we learn this from? From God Himself, who chose as His prophets people who were prepared to argue with Heaven for the sake of Heaven in the name of justice and truth. When you learn to listen to views different from your own, realizing that you are not threatened but enlarged, then you have discovered the life-changing idea of argument for the sake of heaven.

This article originally appeared on Aish.com

NOTES:

1. I first wrote about this ten years ago in my book, *The Home We Build Together* (2007), in the chapter entitled "The Defeat of Freedom in the Name of Freedom," 37-48. The situation has become significantly worse since then.
2. See on this, Mick Hume, *Trigger Warning: is the fear of being offensive killing free speech?* London, William Collins, 2016.
3. See http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/10/10/oxford-college-bans-harmful-christian-union-freshers-fair.
4. Jean M. Twenge, *iGen*, Atria, 2017, 253.
5. I salute the University of Chicago, Princeton and other universities, that have taken a strong stand in defence of free speech on campus; and Professor Jonathan Haidt and his colleagues at the Heterodox Academy, founded to promote intellectual diversity in academic life.
6. Julian Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, Transaction, 2007, 27.
7. Mishnah, Avot 5:17.
8. Meiri to Avot ad loc.
9. Eruvin 13b.
10. Sanhedrin 89a.
11. See Pesachim 87a-b for a remarkable passage in which God criticizes the prophet Hosea for not coming to the defence of his people.
12. *Haʿamek Davar* to Gen. 11:4.
13. Eruvin 13b.

- **Crash Course in Hebrew Reading**– Monday evenings beginning January 7th.
- **Women's "Soup and Swap"** – Wednesday evening, January 9
- **DATA Teen Club Holocaust Museum Tour–** January 13
- **Next Men's Partners in Torah**– Wednesday evening, January 16
- **Women's "Wine and Paint Night"** - February 2
- **DATA Teen Club Yoga for Girls–** February 3
- **Women's NY Trip**– Febraury 29 - March 4
- **Dallas Stars Kosher Game Day**– March 17th

Noted in sorrow…

We wish condolences to Ophir and Sharron Laizerovich on the loss of their mother,

Sarah bas Gershon

And to the Laizerovich family:

Ben, Ethan, and Shayna

As well as the extended family:

David Laizerovich

Orone and Traci Laizerovich and family

Leeron and Erin Laizerovich and family

Neta-lee and Adam Belmont and family

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

May the Omnipresent comfort you among the rest of the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem

CRASH COURSE IN HEBREW READING

Learn Hebrew in just over a month.

MONDAY EVENINGS
BEGINNING JANUARY 7TH | 7:30-8:30 PM
3251 INDEPENDENCE PARKWAY, PLANO

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This course is free for qualified registrants. For more information or to register, email enissel@dataofplano.org.

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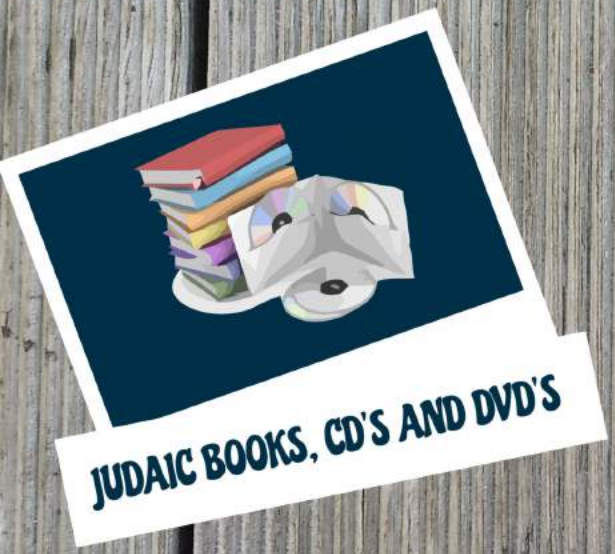
SOUP AND SWAP

January 9th – 7:30 pm
DATA of Plano Youth Center

Enjoy a ladies' evening out with a hearty soup bar, a Judaic and accessory swap, and the inspiring story of Shifra Robkin's recovery from illness.



RSVP to tnissel@dataofplano.org

Complete program information and rules will be provided upon registration

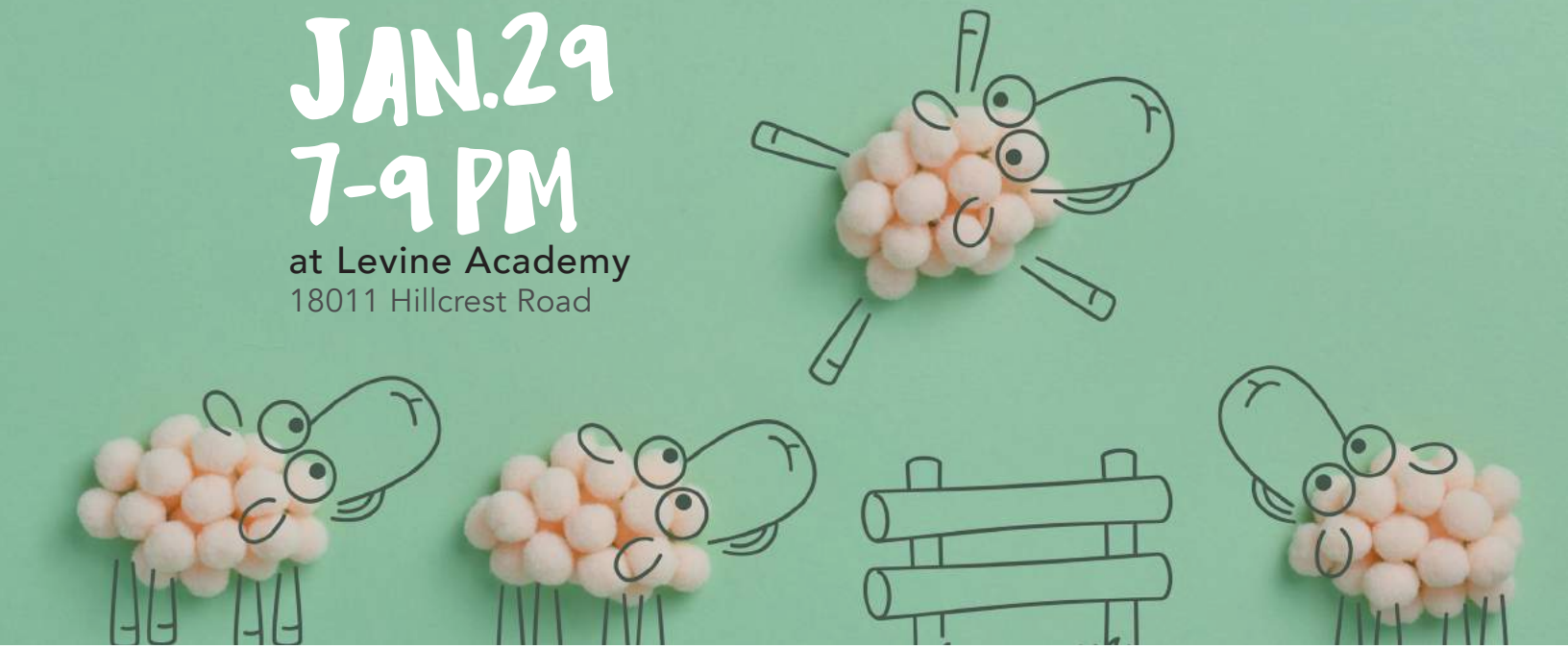
N A F S H I PRESENTS

zzzzz SLEEP SAVVY

Practical solutions to address the sensory issues that keep us from getting the rest we need.

JAN.29
7-9 PM

at Levine Academy
18011 Hillcrest Road



N A F S H I

ANN & NATE Levine Academy

FEATURED PANELISTS

Rabbi Mike & Nikki Friedman CO-FOUNDERS, NAFSHI
Shifra Robkin LICENSED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST
Carolyn Feder FOUNDER, SENSORY INTERIOR DESIGN

ADMISSION **Free** for Levine families; $10 for the public
REGISTER nafshiwellness.org
CONTACT info@nafshiwellness.org or (972) 896-0519

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WOMEN'S
NEW YORK TRIP

FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 3

- Exquisite Restaurants
- New York Shopping
- Private Meetings with Jewish Womens' Leaders
- Volunteering
- Broadway Show

COST: $500 per person (plus airfare). Includes accommodations, transportation and attractions.
For more information, contact dzakon@dataofplano.org

DATA TEENS

Connecting with Judaism and each other

TEEN CLUB

Monthly club meetings to discuss relevant teen topics with a Jewish twist and engage in meaningful projects with other Jewish teens.

Co-Ed Programs

Holocaust Museum *January 13*

Israel Advocacy *March 31*

Feed my Starving Children *August 25*

Girl Talk

Yoga and Dealing with Life's Stresses *February 3*

Krav Maga: Protecting Yourself Physically and Emotionally *March 24*

Mother-Daughter Communication Workshop *May 19*

Membership Fee: $50

www.dataofplano.org

Committee

HEATHER BEHR · VIRI FELDMAN · JULIE GOTHARD · YANA MINTZKOVSKY · LILY ROUSSO · CORRIE SHORES · DEVORAH ZAKON

DATA Teens

Holocaust Tour

AT THE DALLAS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

2PM TO 4PM

SUNDAY JAN 13, 2019

RSVP REQUIRED: OFFICE@DATAOFPLANO.ORG

Join Jewish Dallas-area teens ages 13-15 on a private tour of the museum, including the curent exhibit "Let Me Be Myself: The Life Story of Anne Frank". Afterward, experience a meeting with a holocaust survivor and hear his story.

DATA TEENS