

Let's Talk About antisemitism

CALLING PEOPLE IN: FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

Presenter: Rabbi Julia Appel



Text #1: Avot de Rabbi Natan, 8:3

When two sit studying Torah and one of them makes a mistake in a matter of Halachah or of a chapter heading -- or says of the unclean that it is clean or of the clean that it is unclean, or of the forbidden that it is permitted or of the permitted that it is forbidden -- her companion will correct her. And where do we hear that when her companion corrects her and studies with her they are well rewarded for their labour? It is said, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour." (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

1. For this text, what is the value of studying with another person?
2. Is the ideal friend or study partner one that agrees with you or disagrees with you?
3. Have you ever had an important relationship that included correcting each other or setting each other back on track? What value did that aspect bring to the relationship?

Text #2: Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Likutay Moharan #282

"Know, a person must judge everyone favorably" (Avot 1:6).

Even someone who is completely wicked, it is necessary to search and find in him some modicum of good; that in that little bit he is not wicked. And by finding in him a modicum of good and judging him favorably... you genuinely elevate him from the scale of guilt to the scale of merit, until, as a result of this, he returns [to God] in repentance.

Likewise, a person must find [some good point] within himself. ...By searching until he finds a remaining little bit of good in himself, he genuinely moves from the scale of guilt to the scale of merit and can return [to God] in repentance.

1. How does Rebbe Nachman recommend we go about judging other favorably?
2. What difference does it make to someone else if we see the good in them?
3. How does this apply to our own view of ourselves?

Bonus Text: Genesis Rabbah, 8:5

Rabbi Simon said, "When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, 'Let him be created,' whilst others urged, 'let him not be created.' Thus it is written, Love and Truth fought together, Righteousness and Peace combated each other (Ps. 85:11). Love said, 'Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of love;' Truth said, 'Let him not be created, because he is compounded of falsehood;' Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, because he will perform righteous deeds;' Peace said, 'Let him not be created, because he is full of strife.' What did the Holy One do? He took Truth and cast it to the ground."

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GUIDELINES FOR FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS (A WORK IN PROGRESS)

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1. **Build relationships across difference in your community, before an issue arises that requires action.**

When you have trusted, honest, and robust relationships with people different from yourself, you always have someone to call to check yourself, to ask for or offer support, and to plan. Build these relationships in the spirit of genuine curiosity and wanting to be in community together. Repair breaks in these relationships when they occur.

2. **Challenge yourself to “call people in” in response to the presence of antisemitism, if possible.**

We always have choice in how to respond. If you are emotionally and energetically able, consider how and with whom you might engage in a relational process of pointing out what went wrong and working toward solutions together.

3. **Give yourself permission to be hurt, angry, shaken, and afraid.**

When we are brave enough to show our vulnerability, opportunities for connection open.

4. **Call upon your allies to act for and with you when antisemitism is present.**

Hopefully, in building relationships across difference, your colleagues and allies will reach out if antisemitism strikes our community. If they don't know how to respond, though, believe in their goodness and ask for their help in concrete ways.

5. **Proactively offer support to your allies when you know something has affected their community.**

It's not a relationship unless there's both giving and receiving! Don't let a week pass before saying something and offering support.

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CASE STUDIES IN CALLING PEOPLE IN

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Case #1

You work as a staff member for the Jewish student group on a major university campus. There is a student center on campus that hosts many kinds of arts, culture, and political events. A staff member of the student center, Jessica, makes a time to meet with you. Jessica shares that the center's social justice student committee, which she advises, has decided to show a movie about the founding of the State of Israel, and she is concerned that it may be antisemitic. In the publicity, the movie claims to be the "real story" behind the founding of Israel. The movie has no Jewish directors or production staff.

She relays that the students chose the movie during a programming brainstorming meeting, when one student suggested they show it, and the others agreed, not knowing much about it. None of the students on the committee are Jewish, and the committee didn't consult with any Jewish students or university community members before deciding to show the movie.

Neither you nor Jessica has seen the movie. Jessica is wondering what you would suggest to do next.

The student center is a new and important partner for your group on campus, and you are interested in partnering with them in the future. However, if the center shows this movie, you are concerned that you might not want to partner in the future: You don't want to lend support to an organization that would show a potentially antisemitic movie.

1. What would be a relational approach to this situation/"calling in"? What would be a more technical approach/"calling out"?
2. What do you decide to do?

Case #2

It is September. Next month, your son's public elementary school will be hosting a "Celebration of Diversity," in which they are dedicating a full school day to the exploration of various cultures, religions, ethnic identities, and countries of origin that are present in the school community. There will be various performances, speakers, and a culture fair of booths presenting different identities.

The Parents' Association has been working on the event all summer, and the teachers are planning to integrate some of the material into their first weeks of social studies. The head of the committee planning the "Celebration of Diversity" is named Phil, and he is the father of one of your son's friends. You aren't close friends with Phil, but you see him around and on occasional play-date drop-offs.

Phil calls you because he has just realized that they have no one creating a booth on Judaism. He knows you are Jewish and is wondering if you would create programming about Judaism for the "Celebration of Diversity." He says he knows it is a bit last minute, and he apologizes.

When he tells you the date, you realize it has been scheduled for Yom Kippur.

1. What would be a relational approach to this situation/"calling in"? What would be a more technical approach/"calling out"?
2. What do you decide to do?