

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

### RIGHT AND WRONG AND SHADES OF GRAY

As you read these words, I am in Israel on a very unique journey. April 26-May 5, 2015 is a special mission organized by the Jewish Council on Public Affairs called "Interfaith Partners for Peace." Thirteen rabbis and thirteen Christian ministers from all over the United States are travelling together, to learn *with* each other and *from* each other, experiencing the Holy Land together first-hand. We will be exploring geography, philosophy, theology, politics and spirituality from the unique perspective of sharing our time with other clergy and community leaders. Our goals? To listen, learn and work toward understanding...and to hopefully, bring back to our communities a spirit of togetherness and brotherhood that will help Christians and Jews come closer to respecting those concepts that are most dear to our neighbors.

I remember the last time I went to Israel with an interfaith group, almost ten years ago. That mission was organized by the Houston chapter of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), who formed a sub-group called "The Coalition for Mutual Respect." Our group at the time was more than Christians and Jews. There were thirty participants, a blend of clergy, lay people, business leaders and academics. The group included Catholics, Protestants, Quakers, Muslims and Agnostics. We shared many differences, had a number of uncomfortable disagreements, but mostly shared our human-ness. We recognized that we can respect different beliefs and opinions even when we know that, on some issues, we will never agree.

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield recently published a book called *You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right: Finding Faith without Fanaticism*. Rabbi Hirschfield was a "settler" in the West Bank in Israel, a former activist committed to rebuilding the Jewish state within its biblical borders. Now he is devoted to teaching inclusiveness, celebrating diversity, and delivering a message of acceptance. Rabbi Hirschfield embarked on a spiritual journey in which he learned that he could respect the "other" viewpoint while continuing to feel strongly about his own.

Sometimes disagreements help us clarify our views to ourselves. When we are forced to consider another opinion, that's when we may begin to understand the underlying reason why we support the position we do. Most issues have the potential to be "black or white" – absolutely one way or another. So often, there is a gray area in which even those who are at opposite ends of the spectrum can find agreement...as long as they are willing to listen to each other and consider that their opponent might not be 100% wrong. When labels are attached to people and we assume that we know both their opinion *and* their motivation just by the label, we open ourselves up to allowing others to put those same limitations on us.

Our sages said in Pirke Avot: "Who is wise? Those who can learn from anyone. Who is to be honored? Those who can honor others."

I go to Israel this spring with an open mind and an open heart. I expect I will be as passionate about my beliefs as I am now, but perhaps with an enhanced spirit. I also expect that I will learn and teach, respect and be respected, be inspired and inspiring. I will return home with new friends and an enhanced sense of religious leadership.

See you soon!

*Rabbi Dan Gordon*

To see previous monthly messages from Rabbi Dan Gordon, visit  
<http://temple-beth-torah.org/our-rabbi/rabbis-monthly-message-archives/>