

RABBI'S MESSAGE

WHAT DO JEWS THINK? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

A New Year of Learning

People often ask me, “What do Jews think about...” It could be any one of a number of topics, from the afterlife to the origins of Talmud, to varying theories about theology, to alternative interpretations of Torah to the different movements within modern Judaism, to Jewish views about controversial topics, etc. Often these questions come from non-Jewish people, but there are many topics that remain mysterious even to the most learned Jews. It’s not unusual for someone to say, “Rabbi, I have a quick question for you.” Because there are so many nuances to pursue, they rarely get a quick answer. But the simple answer to the question, “What do Jews think about...” is: “It depends on the Jew.”

The common joke is, “When you have two Jews, you’ll have at least three opinions!” This is actually a true Jewish concept of learning. The Talmud, the Oral Law which was developed in the first few centuries of the Common Era, is filled with arguments and disagreements. Jewish practice is more connected with the Talmud than the Torah, because the Torah is cryptic and the Talmud elaborates on the details. When reading the Talmud, it seems like you are eavesdropping into a conversation. However, the rabbis who are quoted did not necessarily live at the same time. The conversations and disagreements could span decades or even centuries. And with modern Jews, the conversations continue.

Throughout my life, my studies and my rabbinic career, I have learned with Jewish people who were connected with Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal and Hasidic Judaism. I don’t claim to know all the answers, but I’ve heard a lot of the questions. I believe that learning is an ongoing process, and never truly ends. When one answer seems obvious, a new idea will surface. I personally enjoy exploring the different perspectives, and I invite you to join in the thought process.

So, for this New Year of Learning, I invite you to join me on Sunday mornings once or twice a month (depending on the Religious School calendar) to explore the various Jewish perspectives on topics that are important to the modern Jew, sharing the world with each other and our Gentile friends. **The first class will be on Sunday, September 15, 10-11 AM** – a good chance to get our heads and hearts ready for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. There is no RSVP necessary and no fee for the class (though optional donations are always accepted). But there is nothing to replace the interaction and camaraderie of a group learning together. This can help strengthen friendships and the community.

Pirke Avot (Ethics of Our Ancestors) teaches in Chapter 1: “Make for yourself a teacher; acquire for yourself a friend; and judge every person positively.” This class will model the

respect of learning together. Later, in Chapter 4, Rabbi Hanina says, “I have learned much from my teachers. Even more from my friends and colleagues. But most of all from my students.”

I’ve always enjoyed learning from you, and look forward to kicking off a new year that includes traditional information sprinkled with fresh insights.

L’shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon