

*“Any argument that is for the sake of heaven will ultimately endure,  
but an argument that is not for the sake of heaven will ultimately not endure...  
WHAT was a dispute for the sake of Heaven? The debate of Hillel and Shammai.  
What is a dispute not for the sake of Heaven? The argument of Korach and his band.”*  
[Pirkei Avot, 5:17]

MISHNA AVOT, [the second C.E. century compilation of classic sayings from the founding fathers of rabbinic Judaism] makes one thing clear from the start: Arguing is a Jewish art....  
Not only is there nothing wrong with heated debate,  
it is the Jewish way of dialogic learning that leads to greater discovery...  
In other words, we benefit from the back and forth—from not seeing eye to eye,  
and from sharing it. But HOW we share it makes all the difference.  
Our argumentation can affirm God’s Presence,  
or it can drive that Presence from this world.

WHO fashions an argument “For Heaven’s Sake?”  
Hillel & Shammai, the most famous dynamic duo of Talmudic teachers,  
the two greatest spiritual leaders of their day. Different as their approaches  
were to Jewish life and tradition, they both shared the same goal:  
to follow God’s Will—to live in Covenant. And because of it,  
there was no animosity between them...  
We are even told, despite their ideological differences, students who studied in  
Bet Shammai married students who followed Bet Hillel, and visa-versa...  
The mutual respect they shared was apparent in their humility,  
acknowledging they did not possess the only answer...  
They could literally love each other, and still passionately disagree.

And WHO is the model anti-Mensch whose argument is the ultimate offense?...  
None other than Korach, paradigmatic rebel, who accuses Moses,  
the most humble man on earth, of being a high & haughty leader...  
Korach was slick; a guy who grew up with privilege but came off as a common-man.  
He pulled on people’s heartstrings and tried to rally them with catchy,  
emotionally laden slogans... [Korach may have had a blonde comb-over for all we know!]  
But Korach’s rebellion, his argument against Moses, was all for personal gain.  
Shallow, even underhanded, there certainly no respect afforded Moses. Korach was  
ready to leave the great leader in the dust, along with the Torah he taught: a  
hellish, vindictive dispute not at all for Heaven’s sake.

With the world facing a question whose future outcome impacts us all, taking a reasoned, impassioned stand on the JCPOA [the Iran Deal] was not a problem...

You could be of the opinion that Kerry and company gave away the baby with the bathwater...

As conservative LA radio talk-show host & Jewish pundit Dennist Prager states emphatically:

“In light of all its weaknesses, any one of which renders the deal fraudulent, How could anyone who cares about America, not to mention Israel, support it?”

Not only does the deal with Iran leave its pathway open, as a Nuclear Threshold state—an arms control agreement that at best, postpones its ability to weaponize [with centrifuges waiting] for a decade and a half at the utmost...

At the same time it frees up the finances, that will soon enable the flow of billions of dollars, Not merely continuing but greatly enhancing Iran’s support of terror, Hamas & Hezbollah, not alone knocking on Israel’s borders, but our back door....No matter how you slice it, it will make our world less safe. OR...

You could see the agreement on the table as ‘good as it could get,’ An arrangement that will effectively prevent a nuclear Iran for 15 years, maybe more, buying us time for rapprochement...

With deterrence keeping development of Iran’s arsenal at bay, And with serious economic consequences always just around the corner, The P5 nations will inevitably develop relations with Iran, Slowly breaking down the walls their extremist Ayatollah has long kept in place. As the adage goes: Keep your friends close—your enemies even closer... It is the surest way to safeguard us, and Israel, for that matter.

Without this deal, without monitoring and constraints, Iran would be 90 days or less from producing the materials needed for a nuclear bomb.

[NY Times Op Ed, Jacob Lew, 8.14.15]

With the deal, if Secretary of State Kerry is correct, “we have a 20 year, 24-7 oversight of all centrifuge production, and 25 years where all uranium is tracked and traced...” Iran cheats; sanctions are back. YET, with the deal, notwithstanding nuclear development, Iran maintains the ability to engage in unlimited conventional weapons research, And, of course, is now at liberty to trade with Germany, to do business with China and Russia [chomping at the bit] which will re-establish economic ties, rebooting its economy with little concern for the oppressive regime behind it.

The L.A. Jewish Federation sent out a community appeal last month, its leadership stating: "The proposed agreement with Iran is not a partisan issue: It impacts the security of the U.S., the stability of the Middle East, the future of the state of Israel...the Iran deal threatens the continuity of the Jewish people..." No question, I thought...It's just not worth the risk....

A week later,

I read UJA-Federation of Greater New York's statement:

"One of our foundational values, bringing together the entirety of our community, is a deep commitment to Israel and its people.

We believe people who support Israel can have different ideas about how to achieve the goal of averting the threat of a nuclear armed Iran.

As community convener, we have hosted multiple forums representing different perspectives, and will continue to educate our community urging respectful dialogue regarding these complex, highly consequential issues." [8.13.15]

So, I thought: Totally agree; After weighing factors/feelings, we can't tell people what to think. It's an individual decision!

Introducing Congressman Elliot Engel at a WRT forum a few weeks ago, Rabbi Jonathan Blake affirmed:

"The unity of our community does not mean unanimity of perspective on the issue..."

Former Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks takes it one step further:

"The tradition of argument within Judaism requires respect for positions with which we categorically cannot agree."

THUS, my surprise at the Fox News catchphrase employed as PR by Bill O'Reilly: *Debate, not hate...*

### **Headline: Traitor Congressman Commits Treason Again**

"The only news in Congressman Jerold Nadler's backing for the Iran deal is that he extended his terror support from Al Qaeda terrorists in Gitmo to Iran's Shiite terrorists. Hypocrisy is nothing new to a politician as slimy as Nadler...The obese congressman fought much harder for investigation of criminal torture at Gitmo than he ever did for any Americans..."

### **Headline: #WarmongerChuck...[CredoAction]**

"Starting a war with Iran is apparently the top legislative priority for the next leader of the Senate Democratic Caucus. Schumer's decision to join Republicans in attempting to sabotage the Iran Nuclear Deal once again shows that he is unfit to lead Senate Democrats...Progressive activists cannot let Schumer's warmongering go unanswered."

...REALLY!?!...Name-calling...offensive labeling... hateful rhetoric  
Talk about blows below the belt!  
Such headlines take a page right out of Korach's Moses-Slam campaign!  
When it comes to this people Israel,  
the nature of our discourse makes all the difference...  
IF our conversation is impassioned—Amen  
But if its incendiary—It's not for Heaven's Sake...  
IF we can listen to points to the contrary—Amen  
IF we dismiss even before we discuss—It's not for Heaven's Sake...  
If we defend the right to differ—Amen  
If we defame character—It's not for Heaven's Sake...

Understanding that vantage point and nuance color our perspectives,  
The position our movement took made immense sense:  
"There simply is no clarity that would support taking a position "for" or "against"  
the JCPOA itself..."

Rather, the URJ insists that our focus must be on two questions:

1. How is it possible to address our concerns about the JCPOA?
2. IF the agreement is finalized, what happens "the day after" ...?

Instead of trying to deride the "other side,"

Our movement's leadership refuses to let prolonged debate  
weaken an already compromised U.S.-Israel alliance, or divide American Jewry.  
For no matter on which side of the vote you find yourself,  
With Iran's support for violence/terror a given, the questions of Middle East  
stability and Israel's security must be first & foremost.

THUS, my pride in Reform's reasoned, sane response:

5 Key Concerns for "The Day After"...

1. DETERRENCE: Not alone must the U.S. take no option off the table;  
It must provide Israel with the advanced weaponry to maintain a  
qualitative military edge.
2. Iran's SUPPORT of TERROR: Harsh sanctions should be adopted if new  
resources are funneled to the likes of Hamas or Hezbollah
3. INSPECTIONS: Since Iranian self-inspection would be like asking N.F.L.  
quarterbacks to test the air pressure in their own footballs [No Tom Brady  
accusations, please!] The inspections regime must be seriously tightened.
4. HUMAN RIGHTS: The administration should marshal international pressure  
to improve religious freedom and humane treatment of the Iranian people.
5. U.S. STANDING: Continued U.S. influence, especially with the P5+1  
Coalition, and the administration's active support for Israel is crucial...

MOST significantly, Reform's statement concludes:

"Our movement believes in vigorous debate, but that discourse must be civil and constructive...Our movement is deeply pro-Israel...and no one should be compelled to defend his/her Zionism...With such significant stakes, thoughtful debate is not only warranted but essential. That is what our tradition calls a *"Machloket I'Shem Shamayim—a Debate for the Sake of Heaven."*

WHAT is our connection to the State of Israel about, after all,  
If not a debate for Heaven's Sake?...

Have a significant number of Israeli security experts: IDF generals,  
Former heads of Shin-Bet and the Mossad, even with all its flaws, come out in  
support?...Ami Ayalon saying: "In the Mid-East, 15 years is an eternity."

AND on a teleconference a few weeks ago that I,  
along with 10k other American Jewish leaders, shared with Mr. Netanyahu,  
did he not label the deal as "fatally flawed," urging us to "judge the deal on its  
substance..." reminding: "10, 15 years goes by in the blink of an eye."

And though Robert Satloff, Exec Director of Washington's Institute for Near-East Policy, suggesting that a "No" could send back a "chastened Obama to toughen up an agreement which congress would more readily approve..."  
Kerry, who sat across the table, warned [in an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg]  
"congressional rejection will just prove the Ayatollah's suspicion that you can't trust America...and there's no way he's ever coming back to negotiate..." [The Atlantic, Jeffrey Goldberg, 8.5.15, pg 2]

Here's the truth folks: much as we surmise and strategize, we just don't know.  
YET if there's a single take-away from all this talk of "the deal"  
what we must know is this:

Our concern for the State of Israel remains unwavering.

SO...I share a revelation which might surprise you:

The greatest threat to Israel's future is not Iran; it is Israel.

Two events of horrifying violence and hate just late July/early August,

Among far too many, remind us that intolerance unchecked

Leads to terror from within—a terror that tears at the very fabric of society.

On a sunny Thursday afternoon, as over a thousand marched from Gan  
Ha'atzma'ut to Gan Ha-pa'amon, for Pride & Tolerance—from one park to  
another, amidst the love and laughter and solidarity, a crazed Charedi man,  
overflowing with hate and wielding a large knife, wounded six,  
Killing 16 year-old Shira Banki...

Many of the first-year HUC students were among the marchers,

And rabbinic student Danielle related her shock:

"Filled simultaneously with a deep sadness and an anger unlike any I've ever  
experienced, this man's Jewish values, diametrically opposed to mine,  
Chose hate/intolerance over love/acceptance.

The man took a young girl's life,  
and so took away my feeling of safety in the city."  
As Danielle described the scene and the location of the attack,  
I realized it was right in front of Susan & my first year in Jerusalem apartment,  
15 Keren HaYesod, the building that housed Israel's Ministry of Education...  
Can tolerance ever be taught?....

The very next day, in the wee hours of a Friday morning,  
Two homes in the West Bank Palestinian village of Duma were set ablaze,  
With graffiti scrawled on the wall next door: "REVENGE!"  
This "price tag" arson—a payback to the Israeli government  
For dismantling two settler apartment buildings  
constructed illegally on Palestinian land, paid the ultimate price:  
an 18-month old burned to death with his mother,  
burns over most of her body. She died as a result just last week.  
IDF spokesman Lt Colonel Peter Lerner was quick to condemn:  
"This attack against civilians is nothing short of a barbaric act of terror. A  
comprehensive investigation is underway to find the terrorists and bring  
them to justice." No one has yet to be found...

President of Hebrew Union College, Rabbi Aaron Panken,  
related the choice and the challenge 21<sup>st</sup> century Israel faces:  
"It can become a haven for fundamentalists...or it can step into a profound  
role of Jewish leadership as a country that enables ideological differences as  
an essential strength..."  
In the aftermath of early August's terror, past President Shimon Peres warned:  
"Dark, extremist forces are threatening to destroy Israel...from within."  
So he urged: Rise up; battle darkness with light...  
And even though recent policies, responding to Ultra-Orthodox party politics,  
retracted some of Progressive Judaism recent gains;  
light is defeating the darkness...

*The Light of Progressive Presence:*

That Reform & Conservative affiliated Jews are now about 12% of the Israeli  
population, exceeding the Charedi/Ultra-Orthodox at 9%,  
With some 45 growing Reform congregations across Israel.  
An authentic Israeli-Reform is taking root!...

*The Light of Recognition:*

As President Reuven Rivlin, the government's moral voice for tolerance today,  
Meeting with leaders of HUC in Jerusalem declared:  
"We are one family, and the connection between all Jews, all over the world,  
Is crucially important to the State of Israel."

*The Light of Sacred Justice:*

As, every day, IRAC—The Israeli Religious Action Center  
Lobbies in the K'nesset on behalf of bills that promote a more just, pluralistic,  
democratic society...

And on the street, fighting hate crimes against women who seek  
to practice their faith, Arab citizens denied rights,  
IRAC stands up for human dignity.

When a church was torched by fire-bombing charedi in the Galilee,  
IRAC was there to help...

When protests erupted over women wearing kippot at the Wall,  
IRAC was there to help...

When Shira Banki's family sat shivah,  
bringing the comfort of a condolence card signed by thousands,  
IRAC was there...

As Rabbi Jeff Salkin pointed out, unable to get the name out of his head,  
of the Palestinian Village where the terrible arson-murder occurred, he said:  
"It is called Duma, which in Hebrew means silence.

This is no time for silence, and the entire Jewish people know it."

*The Light of Bridge-Building:*

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism [Reform in Israel]  
Created "Meeting Neighbors,"—Israeli Reform communities connecting with  
nearby Arab towns, sharing cultural and current-day programs...

Getting together, breaking bread, talking & listening, laughing & crying...

To date four are up and running;

Life-altering in breaking down immovable barriers—quite literally...

And most significantly,

*The Light of Love...*

Bright as this might shine, it's brilliance is up to you.

Shmuel Rosner, Jerusalem Post journalist/editor

Understands our American Jewish connection with Israel as a marriage:

A relationship founded and sustained through love,

Requiring that kind of long-term commitment

That enables you to stand by your partner

Even when they sometimes behave badly

Even when they make decisions with which you could not disagree more...

Of course, there are moments when the relationship you share

touches your heart—times when you just know, no matter how rocky the road,  
your love will see you through...

BUT it's a marriage, and like any life-commitment, it's a choice.

As Rosner writes:

"You can choose a volatile, turbulent, loving tense, reciprocally beneficial, difficult, wonderful relationship, or you can give it up...In that case, Israel will lose, and so will the Jews of the world..."

WHAT is the secret to longevity in relationships?

WHY do some marriages last, so long as health remains, for a lifetime?...

Every other Sunday growing up, we drove to 133 Westford St in Lowell, Mass.

to visit my maternal grandparents, Nana & Zada. What do I remember most?

Zada's cooking, and Nana's kvetching...

There was never a visit without an argument. I just didn't get it.

But my Uncle Arnie, retired Prof. at American University who founded their

Institute on Drugs, Crime & Justice explained it to me:

"Jeffrey, so long as they fight, you know they still love each other." He was right.

When Zada died at 97 they had just celebrated their 68<sup>th</sup> anniversary...

So long as we fight

For a place for all Jews in the Jewish State,

A place for all who decide to dwell there...

A place where difference is celebrated and religious freedom elevated,

A place where there's no single way to be Jewish; no sole path to God...

We are arguing for Heaven's Sake...

So long as we challenge each other

In our differences on "the deal"

Empowered by sincere concern for Israel & the free world's well-being,

Respecting people with whom we fervently disagree,

Never dividing our community or demeaning another with hateful rhetoric,

And so diminishing our own humanity in the process,

Then we are arguing for Heaven's sake...

The late, great Theodor Bikel, Tevya incarnate,

reflected the heart of our relationship with Israel when he said:

"True partners are able to disagree, argue, even raise their voices—all in the interest of having this common enterprise flourish. What kind of partnership is it that accepts only yea-sayers and reacts with hostility to any signs of criticism..."

Let no religious divisions keep Jews apart. Who is to say that non-religious Jews have any less of an attachment, less of a stake in Israel's survival...

I firmly maintain: our strength lies not in unity but in our diversity.

What has kept our people alive was always the dialogue, mind pitted against

Jewish mind, and man ever wrestling with God..." [What Israel Means to Me, ed. A. Dershowitz]

We will conclude these awe-filled days with three sacred words,  
A phrase you associate with Seder's end,  
But that punctuate Yom Kippur's *Tekiah Gedolah* with an eternal hope.  
Of all the words we might utter, what do we proclaim?...

*L'Shanah Ha-Ba'ah B'Yerushalayim—Next Year in Jerusalem.*

The very first words out of our mouths,  
the bridge between this year's end and our new beginning is a singular hope:  
that we might yet witness an Israel which is whole...

Holy One of Blessing,  
With impassioned hearts and humility of spirit  
Knowing, as true partners, we are linked by a commitment in Covenant,  
A bond of mutual respect and love, both for one another,  
and for the light Israel continues to radiate,  
may our differences affirm the gift of our diversity,  
and may the arguments we undertake,  
no matter how heated or hard-hitting,  
always remain debates for Heaven's sake....

AMEN.



