To Bigotry No Sanction

In 1790, George Washington, the newly elected first president of the United States, accepted an invitation to visit the Hebrew Congregation of Newport. In his address there, he stated that “the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.”

He added this blessing: “May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants — while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid [cf. I Kings 5:5; Micah 4:4].”

We Jewish children of Abraham have, thank God, generally merited to enjoy the good will of America’s other inhabitants. What about the Arab children of Abraham? What about Muslims of all national origins, whose religion makes them children of Abraham by adoption? They often are treated as suspect foreigners who dress funny and pray in an odd language to a pagan god.

This misguided view is reinforced by the terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam. Not only lethal attacks, but also fundraising for terrorist organizations under the guise of charitable, educational or religious activity, cast a shadow on legitimate Arab-American and Muslim causes, and on the Arab/Muslim American community.

Learning about the actual religion and culture of Islam won’t make the problem vanish, but it can empower us in our effort to condemn radical Islam while reaching out to moderate Muslims. A fine primer is An Introduction to Islam for Jews, by Reuven Firestone, professor of Medieval Judaism and Islam at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. Firestone does for Islam and Jews what the late Samuel Sandmel did for Christianity and Jews: he helps us see the religion from its own perspective, showing where it runs concurrently with Judaism and where the two part company.

Understanding Jihad, by David Cook, associate professor of religious studies at Rice University, deals with the idea of jihad as holy war against non-believers, and with a later idea whereby jihad means struggle with one’s own evil tendencies (an activity that Jews call “fighting one’s yetzer ha-ra”). Cook helps us understand what makes someone long to die in the act of murdering large numbers of people.

In What Went Wrong?, Bernard Lewis, professor emeritus of Near Eastern studies at Princeton University, }
President’s Perspectives, February 2015

Our Collective Intelligence

I meet individually with our congregation’s former presidents, Lisa Lefstein-Berusch, Jack Valancy, and Scott Wachter, from time to time, as well as with many others who have close historical ties to our community. A clear message that I have both received and followed from these advisors and friends has been to encourage input from our members regarding most issues facing our congregation. I am a strong proponent of the wisdom of our congregation.

In James Surowiecki’s book, *The Wisdom of Crowds* he explains how, under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them. We often assume that the key to solving problems or making good decisions is finding that one right person who will have the answer. However, Surowiecki presents evidence that supports his theory that even if most of the people within a group are not especially well-informed about a particular topic, a group can still reach a collectively wise decision. In other words, when our imperfect judgments are aggregated and compiled in the right way, our collective intelligence is often excellent. The argument of this book is that chasing the expert is a mistake.

Surowiecki presents the example of a contestant on the game show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* When a contestant is stumped she can use one of three “life-lines”: (1) eliminate two of the four choices, (2) telephone a friend, or (3) poll the audience. The TV studio audience predicts the correct answer an astonishing 91% of the time. Telephoning a friend will provide the correct answer only 65% of the time. This means that a group of people who showed up to spend an afternoon in the studio audience of a game show can answer a random question better than someone selected as quite smart and presumably with access to the internet.

However, here is an important catch: The best way for a group to be smart is for each person in it to think and act as independently as possible. And, generating a diverse set of possible solutions isn’t enough. The crowd also has to be able to distinguish the good solutions from the bad. The simple fact of making a group diverse makes it better at problem solving.

The idea of the wisdom of crowds is not that a group will always give you the right answer, but that on average it will consistently come up with a better answer than any individual could provide. This is not an argument against experts, but against reliance on a single individual decision maker or committee chair. And the good news is that no one even has to try to reach a consensus. In fact, reaching a consensus is discouraged, as that would not be thinking independently.

We have the best chance of making the right decision when everyone is heard. My hope is that each of us will find a way to make our voices heard as the board finds the best ways to present the issues and compile and select our best strategies for charting our future.
Learn with the Rabbi  
Torah as a Living Organic System: Halachah, Aggadah, and How They Work 

Rabbi Moshe Adler is teaching a six-class series on “Torah as a Living Organic System: Halachah, Aggadah, and How They Work.” How do the Talmudic Sages and post-Talmudic authorities periodically reinterpret Torah law to keep it in conformity with the Torah’s own stated ideals? We look at examples of Talmudic constitutional interpretation and post-Talmudic landmark rulings. The remaining classes are scheduled on February 21, The Torah-Informed Conscience: Halachah and Social Justice, and March 7, Making a Fragmented Torah Whole: Where Are We Now? The classes are open to all and are offered free of charge. They meet after Kiddush in the Sanctuary. See the flyer attached to the October newsletter (downloadable from www.bethelheights.org) for further details of the remaining classes.

Learners’ Torah Discussions 

Join us to study and discuss selections from the weekly Torah portion. We consider commentaries, raise questions, and share tips for using the Chumash. Each week’s lesson is self-contained so come as your schedule permits. The sessions are accessible for non-Hebrew speakers or readers and open to people at all levels of experience. 

We meet in the room across from the Babysitting Room, after the Torah is taken out and the portion is introduced (about 10:20 AM to 10:30 AM), and rejoin the service in time for the d’var Torah. 

Questions? Contact Mia Buchwald Gelles: 216-321-6717 or miabgelles@gmail.com.

Upcoming Learners Torah Discussion Dates (every other week this winter): 

February 7 – Parashat Yitro
February 14 – No Learners’ Torah Group
March 7 – Parashat Ki Tisa

(To Bigotry No Sanction, continued from page 1) describes how, as the Ottoman Empire began to fracture in the 18th century, people stopped viewing its power and endurance as proof of divine approbation. They blamed the West, especially the Jews, for this debacle. In a later book, The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror, Lewis shows how radical Islam wrested the mantle of divine approbation from the crumbling Empire, creating the brand of extreme and violent Islam that ultimately produced the Muslim Brotherhood and its many evil offspring and imitators.

The Trouble with Islam Today was written by teacher, writer, feminist, and organizer Irshad Manji. A secularist who possesses knowledge of Islam, and respects it as interpreted in accordance with the moderate voices in the Islamic tradition, she believes that change can take place in Islam only if the Muslim public demands it and Muslim clergy issue authoritative rulings to implement it. Islam’s sacred scripture, the Qur’an, is required reading. The translation I use, by Ahmed Ali, was recommended to me by a friend who teaches Islamic studies at the University of Minnesota. Another respected translation is by Marmaduke Pickthall.

Would George Washington have visited a mosque, had there been one in the America of his time? Would he have included Arab and Muslim Americans among “the children of the stock of Abraham”? I don’t know, but I somehow think he would have assured them, as he assured us, that the United States gives “to bigotry no sanction.”

P.S. Lassana Bathily, the Muslim employee of a Paris kosher supermarket who hid shoppers during the deadly hostage siege, was motivated by moderate Islam – the kind that does not divide the world into radical Muslims (“heroes” and “martyrs”) versus infidels (everybody else).
I would like to take a moment to brag a little bit about my husband, Shaul Janes. Shaul and I moved to Cleveland Heights just over two years ago from Jerusalem. It has not been an easy move for him. I dragged him back to the States after he’d finally achieved a dream of his, to make aliyah and live in Israel. I had to come back to the States to work and, if we were going to build a life together, he would have to come back with me. But as difficult as that was, that perhaps wasn’t the hardest thing. Shaul has many skills and talents, from being a trained chef to painting and restoration, and more. Beyond that, Shaul is a people person. He likes to talk with people, help people and generally be of service to others. However, it was difficult to find a job here in Cleveland that could utilize his skills and also be something he could make a living from. Finally he got a break at Motorcars Honda. Being a car salesman has got to be one of the toughest jobs out there. People come in with the expectation that there will be a huge markup on the car, but that isn’t the case anymore, not with everything being on the Internet; the prices are all pretty much the same. And yet people feel the need to haggle. This isn’t Israel where people haggle over everything, but for some reason, with cars they do. And it isn’t the dealership that suffers; it’s the little guy, the salesman. Shaul frequently will put in many hours for a customer only to make a little bit on the sale. For him it’s even harder because we choose, as a family, not to work on Saturdays, to keep Shabbat. In this country it is very difficult to avoid working on Shabbat, especially in sales, since Saturday is the busiest day of the week.

When we arrived, Shaul immediately went to Montefiore to volunteer in hospice. This was something he had for done many years and enjoyed doing. Giving back to others is truly his gift. He was assigned a family in our neighborhood in Cleveland Heights that had a dying mother at home. He has gone regularly for a couple of hours every week to give the daughter a break. Hospice is something that is generally seen as short term. This has gone on for sixteen months.

And then it happened: The two worlds came together, and Shaul could do what he does best, make a difference. Chuck Gile, owner of Motorcars Honda told his employees that he would like to be a Secret Santa to someone in the community. Did anyone know someone who was in need? Shaul seized the opportunity to help the family that he had been working with. Having a dying mother at home had been a strain on the family both physically and financially. Here is a snippet of the letter that Shaul wrote:

The bed-bound mother suffers from dementia and has spoken no more than a few words since I began working with her. The daughter (her mother’s primary caregiver), who is in her mid to late 60’s, requires a walker, wheelchair, and a scooter to get around. Last week she was being fitted for leg braces! The daughter’s husband has been in physical rehab followed up with vocational assistance, but is still unable to work. To make matters worse, the boiler [for the heater] in their home is out of order and they now rely on space heaters to heat individual rooms. I can’t imagine what their electric bill will be! Additionally, the roof recently developed a leak, which adds to their daily misery. Also, they drive a twenty-year-old car that has been falling apart, and they are not sure how much longer it will last. Of course they know that I work at Motorcars Honda and have asked me about the cost of an oil change – I told them between $25 and...
$30. She then told me that they would have to save up for it and just hope the car can make to the dealership.

I can go on and on about their increasing plight, but I think you get the picture. I plan on re-gifting the Honey Baked ham that you are so kind to give me to them which will make a difference, but your generous Secret Santa could really make a much bigger impact on these people who are in desperate need.

And Chuck came through! Chuck read the letter and saw that this family was truly in need of a helping hand. Chuck approached Shaul and together they were off. A roofer was on his way to repair the roof. The boiler would be fixed as well. Shaul made sure that the repairmen showed up and the work got done. How about a Christmas tree? Perhaps Shaul was not the best person for that job; Chuck’s wife would handle that. And then Chuck decided that this wasn’t enough. A car was a necessity. He found good car for the family and delivered it to their doorstep, again with every step of the process being overseen by Shaul to make sure that it was all handled properly.

The news spread to the other co-workers and they too got into the giving, raising a cash donation on top of everything else that Chuck matched and turned into a larger-than-expected gift card for Giant Eagle.

Shaul wrote in a follow up email, “I delivered the car last night and the daughter was overwhelmed; she is truly grateful. Your generosity lifted a dark cloud that was hovering over her home and filled her heart with joy and hope for the future. While visiting today, she had the brightest smile I have ever seen. Your Secret Santa is a success!”

Will this make a difference in this family’s life? You betcha! Will it solve all of their problems? No. So Shaul will continue to go over there every week and sit with a woman who simply is hanging on to life, and give support to those who support her. His is an under-acknowledged job – I wanted to take a moment to recognize the differences he has made and continues to make to those around him.

A Whirlwind Birthright Trip to Israel

This winter, I went to Israel on a Birthright trip. Birthright, if you haven’t heard of it, is a program that sends Jewish people ages 18-27 to Israel for free. The people involved were from any school in Pittsburgh, so we had a few students from Carnegie Mellon, where I go, and most of the others were from University of Pittsburgh. I became closer to lots of people whom I wouldn’t normally have talked to, and met people from my area whom I’d never really met. It was a really great program, where we learned a lot as well as visiting many of the important places in Israel. We spent time at a kibbutz in the north, called Beit Alpha, and visited Sfat one day. We spent a few days around Tel Aviv exploring parts of the city, then a night in the desert at a Bedouin tent, a day at Masada, the Dead Sea, and Ein Gedi. We also spent some time in Jerusalem and a day at Yad Vashem and Mount Herzl. Though it was all of that and more squashed into ten days, it was an awesome trip.

~ Shoshana Klein
Mishna Study Group News

The Mishna Study Group completed their study of Tractate Challah and celebrated with a siyum (finish) party at the home of Menachem Shoham. They will next meet on February 7, after services, to commence the study of the book *Bride for One Night*, Talmudic Stories by Nurit Calderon.

(Photos by Menachem Shoham)

Yahrzeits, February 2015

Fannie Levine 13 Shin
Jacob Wilkenfeld 13 Shin
Pinkas Zavell 13 Shin
Sonny Lerner 14 Shin
Marilyn Protus Fischer 16 Shin 5748
Mary Malkin 17 Shin
Charles Auerbach 17 Shin
Isadore Fromson 17 Shin
Julius Kammen 17 Shin 5707
Madelyn Palevsky 17 Shin 5770
David Muszynski 18 Shin
Gayle Kuhr Sharpe 18 Shin
Anna Genuth 18 Shin
Beatrice Schweickert 18 Shin 5757
William Berkman 19 Shin
Abraham Margolis 19 Shin
Howard B. Cohen 19 Shin
Mathilda Mendelow 19 Shin
Jerome Bernstein 20 Shin
Rose Reiss 20 Shin
Abraham Louis Brudnick

Jules Pepper 25 Shin
Irving Bloom 29 Shin 5753
Emanuel Mills 29 Shin
Phil Mishinsky 29 Shin
Edith Bertman 30 Shin
Dorothy Samuels 30 Shin
Eleanor Gelfand 30 Shin 5773
Rabbi David L. Genuth 1 Adar
Sol Goldstone 1 Adar 5722
David Beckerman 1 Adar
Sam Buchwald 1 Adar
Mary Rachel Linden 1 Adar
Clara Miller 1 Adar
Rose Rock 2 Adar
Kurt Brandes 2 Adar
Frances Goldberg 3 Adar 5770
Helen Sonnenstein 3 Adar
Molly Glazer 4 Adar
Sylvia Protus 4 Adar 5731
Abe Hoicowitz 5 Adar
Julius Weinberg 5 Adar
Clara Adler 5 Adar
June Mandel 5 Adar II 5774
Marilyn Savino 6 Adar
Isaac Wachter 6 Adar
Max Seidman 6 Adar II 5725
Sonia S. Goldstein 7 Adar 5755
Saul Kammen 7 Adar 5771
Zali Schlesinger 7 Adar
Dr. Lawrence Katz 8 Adar 5773
Samul Taubman 8 Adar
Hannah Eifer 9 Adar
The Short Stories
by Jewish Authors
Reading and
Discussion Group will next
meet on Sunday, February 1,
4:00–5:45 p.m. (Note the change of
time!)

Our group has se-
lected South–African
author, Dan Jacobson,
and selections in
his book, *Through
the Wilderness and
Other Stories* (1968)
for our next
discussion.

We had read one of
Jacobson’s stories
several years ago:
The *Zulu and the
Jacobson’s work
often focuses on
moral and ethical
issues involving all
of humanity.

For information,
please contact
Sondra Jacobs,
216–397–1481
or sondrajacobs
@sbcglobal.net.
Yasher Koah to:

- Harvey and Karen Kugelman, whose daughter, Sonny Kugelman, who is studying at Tomer Devorah seminary in Jerusalem this year, helped lead the seminary to a third-place finish in this year’s Inter-seminary Choir Competition, out of a field of 22. This is the first time that the seminary has placed in the yearly competition.
- Shulamit Magnus, whose second volume of her translation and critical edition of Pauline Wengeroff’s *Memoirs of a Grandmother: Scenes from the Cultural History of the Jews of Russia in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford University Press), was published this past September. *Volume 2* was awarded the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute Translation Prize before publication. *Volume 1* received the National Jewish Book Award.

Wengeroff’s *Memoirs* are an unprecedented source by a woman tracing cultural and societal transformation and telling the story of an era in Jewish history. Wengeroff, an astute social observer and great writer, provides rich material about the religious and ritual lives of traditional Jewish women and about the tensions in family life – between generations and between wives and husbands – over tradition and acceptance of non-Jewish culture; between fealty to Jewish observance and the desire to succeed in the non-Jewish world. The Cleveland Public Library system has the works, as do local University libraries.

- Honey Massey, whose daughter-in-law, Debra Sagan Massey, Director of Education of Congregation Beth El, Berkeley, CA, was awarded the 2014 Shomrei HaKabbalah (Guardian of the Tradition) Award for Exemplary Contributions to Jewish Education. She was presented this award on January 14 by the Jewish Federation and the Jewish Community Foundation of the East Bay at a lunch for Jewish educators.

Thanks for your Contributions to:

- Sherry Ball and Marty Gelfand
- Michael Bloom and Peggy Sullivan, in honor of Rabbi Moshe Adler.
- Janice Carrick
- Stacia Dearmin and Jay Pressman
- Joel Falck and Julie Rabin
- Hope and Jay Fromson, in memory of Abe Fromson Z”L.
- Joel Genuth
- Ilene Gertman
- Anthony Gooch, in honor of Laura Gooch and David Kazdan.
- Laura Gooch and David Kazdan
- Joel Heller
- Harvey and Sondra Jacobs, in memory of Harvey’s father, Henry Jacobs Z”L.
- Philip Kalina and Donna Spiegler
- Ari Klein and Ditte Wolin
- Gerald and Marilyn Kramer, in thanks for High Holy Day tickets.
- Gary and Marilyn Magden, in memory of Sadie Magden Z”L.
- Richard Mandel, to the Roof Replacement Fund.
- Stephen Pepper and Linda Tobin, in memory of Linda’s father, Sidney Russack Z”L.
- Adam Probst
- Adam Probst, in memory of Yevgenia Baron Probst Z”L.
- Bernice and Morris Shanker
Great News!
What a Generous Community!

In the last six months, the Beth El – The Heights Synagogue community – both members and friends – have been incredibly generous. We contributed $38,321 in general contributions, $8,658 in Kiddush sponsorships, and another $47,000 for the roofs and building repairs! The building contributions, plus the insurance money we will receive for damages to the building, will allow us to refurbish the sanctuary in the coming year, knowing that the new roof will protect our investment.

What heartens me the most is that the general contributions show that support for the new roof was “plus giving.” You understood how important undesignated contributions are to operating the synagogue. Our policy that no one needs to pay to pray means that we depend heavily on general contributions to make our budget each month. To meet our operating budget for the remainder of the fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2015, we need contributions of at least $18,000 in order to finish in the black. Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush, remembering a Yahrzeit, honoring a friend or the memory of a loved one. Dedicate a mahzor or a siddur. Sponsor a Lunch and Learn or the upcoming Purim celebration.

Thank you!
Ilene Gertman, Development Chair
INVITE YOU TO CELEBRATE SHABBAT WITH A SERVICE AND DINNER.

Friday, February 13, 6:30 p.m.

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:30, Dinner at about 7:30. Dinner includes fish, vegetarian-friendly menu. Learning with a teacher to be announced.

Price: $10.00 per person.


Location: Beth El–The Heights Synagogue
3246 Desota Avenue
Cleveland Hts., OH 44118

This is a membership event — a great time to introduce potential members to our community, a little less formal and a lot shorter than Shabbat morning. So bring a friend — don’t be shy about asking!
Jews and Muslims have a scriptural and often visceral aversion to pork, while Hindus feel the same about beef; Americans generally hate meat from horses and goats; and most of the Western world despises insects. Various reasons for these tendencies have been proposed. Dr. Alan Rocke will lead a discussion of how these cultural attitudes came to be, as well as the various proposed historical reasons for the rise of Kosher proscriptions.

Alan Rocke is the Bourne Professor of History and Distinguished University Professor at CWRU. His field is the history of science and technology, and his particular research focus is the development of the science of chemistry in nineteenth-century Europe. The author of six books, he has taught at CWRU since 1978. He lives with his wife in Cleveland Heights.

...what better to follow a luncheon prepared by Executive Chef Marvin Palevsky than a discussion of why we eat what we do (or don’t)? Join us on February 28, after services.
Purim 2015

M’Gillah Reading
Hamentaschen and a Purim Spiel

Wednesday, March 4, 7:00 pm

written & Directed by Eran Shiloh

followed by

2013 Purim

Happy Purim