

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SHJ HUMANISTIC JUDAISM, FALL 2018

“Civility, Certainty, Divinity, Diversity,” by Rabbi Denise Handlarski

Rabbi Denise Handlarski uses the example of Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to argue for a civilized discourse even among vigorous opponents. Where do you see the dividing lines in these polarized times? Rabbi Denise acknowledges that there are those she simply stays away from. The implication, however, is that openness and tolerance of others' views can be learning experiences for all involved and by themselves means of persuasion. What do you think about this? How does your group approach the problems of divisiveness inside the group, and in society in general?

“The Akedah,” by Eva R. Cohen

Eva R Cohen subjects the Akedah to a searching historical critique and argues that even the most charitable interpretations of Abraham's obedience to God's command that he slay his son Isaac stem from negative patriarchal attitudes that still exist today. She doesn't let God off for not really meaning it, and points to examples today of obeying "God's will" that include refusing children life-saving medical treatment and coercion of children whose sexuality doesn't fit the patriarchal mold. Her call is for a genuine humanistic Judaism. How well do you think HJ fulfils this role? What ways is it successful? How could it be improved?

“What Now from Kavanaugh,” by Rabbi Jeremy Kridel

Rabbi Jeremy Kridel examines the previous judicial opinions of newly appointed Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh as a guide to how he might affect future court cases. He points out that despite Kavanaugh and others saying there is "settled law", there is no such thing. (Kavanaugh said this in his confirmation hearing in relation to *Roe v Wade*.) Rabbi Jeremy says that organizing politically, from the local to the state to federal level, is needed to maintain and enhance the secular freedoms supposedly enshrined in the Constitution. How does your group, and/or how do you, take action in this area? Are there ways to be proactive and informative of fellow Americans rather than reactive?

“Enough is Enough,” by Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld

Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld gives a different interpretation of the story of Jacob and Esau than the usual, suggesting that Esau's reaction to meeting his brother after a long separation is worthy of emulation. He could have pursued his anger toward Jacob but instead let his anger go, and embraced and forgave his brother. How might we as individuals and groups let go of our anger toward those we feel have harmed us? What examples are there to look to in our daily and community lives?

“The Meaning of Hanukkah for Humanistic Jews,” by Natan Fuchs

Natan Fuchs urges a secular attitude toward Hanukkah that doesn't falsify history either from a religious view or a secular view. The miracle of the menorah is not less false than the idea that the Maccabees were anti-slavery and anti-Hellenistic. What matters, Natan says, is the idea of freedom and resistance to tyranny that both these myths incorporate. Can these ideas be made as rich and compelling as the traditional myths? How does your community celebrate these two important times? Can they be made better?

Community News

Reading the news from other communities, what ideas do you get for yours? What are you most proud of? How can your community reach out, support those in need, and grow?

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