



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday February 10, 2023 ~ Parsha: Yitro

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Don't Ignore Science

This weekend is Religion and Science Weekend, or what used to be called Evolution Weekend. Over 200 synagogues, churches and other religious institutions throughout the nation will devote some time this Shabbat, (or the Sabbath or the Lord's Day) to discussing science and religion. I found out about Evolution Weekend about 11 years ago and we have participated ever since. I am not a big fan of "themed Shabbats" but there are exceptions to every rule. This is one of them.

Normally my sermons or messages on previous Evolution Weekends are a ringing defense of scientific truths and their impact on our lives. I talk about how science and religion don't so much overlap as much as they co-exist. Each has its truths, each has its parameters and boundaries, and each has its own orthodoxies. But as opposed to those who say that you can have one or the other but not both, America needs responsible religious leaders to preach the value, worth and necessity of both! Now let's face it. It is not, thank God, that hard to make that case in our circles. Everyone reading this Shabbat message is on some medication or another. Those medications were not produced by the patriarchs, the matriarchs, or our Rabbis of blessed memory. They were produced by doctors, pharmacists, technicians, who in all likelihood were far more steeped in scientific methods and inquiry than they are in Torah and Talmud. And that's okay. In fact, it's very good and it's perfectly consistent with faith. Because science gives us truths. Science gives us options. But only religion can help us judge which of them are moral and just. Like I said, this is the 11th year I have committed to discussing this topic with the congregation. So I want to go back several years, to a time before the pandemic began. Do you remember that before COVID became a household word, that measles

was one of the bigger health concerns in the USA. Scientists tell us that you need a 93% vaccination rate to prevent the spread of measles. But outbreaks occurred in various cities throughout the country, including places like Monsey and Brooklyn. Knowing how dangerous measles is, and knowing that it is also one of the easiest diseases to prevent - remember 20 years ago it had been eradicated in North America because of universal childhood vaccinations - what could have prevented nice, normal, and primarily middle-class people from vaccinating their children? It is the assault on science, typified by social media driven propaganda asserting a link between childhood vaccinations and autism, and believe it or not, a movement that objects to vaccination on religious grounds.

Conversations about the importance of religion and science and the relationship between them are not abstract theological musings, like "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?", or whether or not to eat *kitniyot* (legumes) on Passover. However interesting or not these discussions might be, no matter what you decide, no one is going to die. But when you reject hard evidence, and years of research and inquiry, you are literally jeopardizing human life. Aren't we the ones who don't sacrifice children for nonsense wrapped up in theological guise? Can there be a more basic Jewish value than that?

And that, my dear friends, is why each year I commit the synagogue to the Evolution Shabbat, now renamed Religion and Science Weekend. Ignoring rejecting science and its truths can kill you. And Judaism sanctifies life. So science, which saves lives, is sanctified as well.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner