



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

Friday February 13, 2026 ~ Parshat: Mishpatim/Shabbat Shekalim

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

When Data Meets Dignity

As I have mentioned over the years, I have never been a fan of “themed” Shabbats. The only exception I make to this is policy is *Religion and Science Weekend* (formerly known as *Evolution Weekend*), a project of the Clergy Letter Project, a community of thousands of American religious leaders concerned about the assault on science in many corners of American political and religious life. *Religion and Science Weekend* is an opportunity for serious discussion and reflection on the relationship between religion and science. The goal is to elevate the quality of discussion on this critical topic, and to demonstrate that religion and science are not adversaries. Rather, they look at the natural world from different perspectives and ask, and answer, different questions. At a time when religion is all-too-often being equated with fundamentalism and when our nation is in a deep and troubling period of science-denialism in public life, it is critically important to engage this topic directly and substantively. That’s why each year the JCCP/CBT joins hundreds of other synagogues and churches across America to affirm something deeply important: science and religion are not adversaries. They are partners, each with their own domain, questions, and authority. Science asks:

How does this work?

What are the mechanisms?

What can be measured, tested, observed?

Religion asks:

What does this mean?

What is right and wrong?

How do we live with integrity?

How do we repair what we have broken?

Science and religion have different jurisdictions. Science investigates the natural world. Religion explores the moral and spiritual one.

These abstract distinctions become clearer when we see them play out in real human experience. This week, we saw a powerful reminder of that distinction in the story of Olympic biathlete Sturla Holm Laegreid. After winning a bronze medal, he publicly [confessed](#) to cheating on his girlfriend. His former girlfriend said it would be “hard to forgive” him — and that she did not choose to be placed in such a public position.

The Olympic Games are always a spectacle of world class athletic performances, compelling (and not so compelling) human interest stories, and world class [drama](#). Yet there was an aspect over the widely reported public confession by Laegreid that might shed light on the relationship of science and religion I want us to explore this Shabbat.

Science can explain what was happening biologically in that moment:

- The surge of adrenaline after competition.
- The emotional release after intense pressure.
- The psychological phenomenon of confession.
- The neurological relief that can come from disclosure.

Science can even analyze the dynamics of public apology and shame.

But science cannot answer the most important questions raised by this story:

- What does true repentance look like?
- Is public confession an act of courage — or another form of self-centeredness?
- What does forgiveness require?
- How do we protect the dignity of someone who did not choose public exposure?

Those are not scientific questions. They are moral and spiritual questions, and the answer to such questions will not be found under the lens of a microscope. They are answered by the wisdom, values, and insights into the human condition that religion offers.

Religion addresses what science cannot measure:

- The weight of betrayal.
- The vulnerability of the injured party.
- The sanctity of another person's dignity.
- The slow, sacred process of healing.

Science can tell us *how* the heart beats faster when we are ashamed.

Religion tells us what to do with that shame.

Science can measure tears.

Religion asks what those tears mean.

Science can analyze behavior.

Religion calls us to transform it.

On this Religion and Science Weekend, we affirm both realms. We are grateful for science, which heals disease, expands knowledge, and reveals the wonders of creation.

Judaism has never feared such inquiry. On the contrary, we celebrate learning as sacred.

But we also affirm that there are dimensions of human life — love, betrayal, forgiveness, dignity, covenant — that cannot be reduced to chemistry or data.

The Torah does not compete with science.

It speaks to the human heart.

On this *Religion and Science Weekend*, it is my hope and prayer that we use science to understand the world and the mysteries of creation. And at the same time, to use our Judaism to elevate it. May we remember that while science may teach us how to win medals, our Torah, and the teachings of our Rabbis of blessed memory, teach us how to live with integrity.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner