

January 2019 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, prior to entering the rabbinate, I spent twenty years as a teacher and administrator. For roughly half those years I taught in general population schools and for the other half I worked in specifically Jewish settings. For most of my teaching career I focused on Religious Studies and Bible, but for two years at one of the Jewish schools where I served, I taught History. It was an interesting experience for me, because while one of my previous non-Jewish schools offered a course called “History of the Jews” (which I myself did not teach), no such course existed in the History Department of this Jewish school. There was American History, European History, World History, etc., but no “History of the Jews.” The reasoning behind this curricular decision speaks volumes.

“History of the Jews” was absent from the course catalogue not because Jewish history was ignored, but because Jewish history was never something “separate” or “other” that demanded a unique course to begin with. Jewish history, like all history, was understood to have taken place within a greater context. All history is interrelated and, as such, Jewish history was addressed not in a vacuum, but as an integral part of the world in which we live. Thus, for example, in a course called “20th Century America,” we learned about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in order to understand the development of labor unions. When we discussed the civil rights movement, we looked at modern understandings of the Passover story and we examined the contributions of Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Israel Dresner, and others who personified Jewish values in their activism. When we studied American jurisprudence, we traced the judicial philosophy and Jewish activism of Louis Brandeis.

This, in a nutshell, is how I understand the way Judaism fits into my own life – not as a compartmentalized portion of reality that requires an entirely different course of thought, but an essential integrated part of who I am as a complete human being. There is no “the rest of me” without Judaism, and there is no Judaism without “the rest of me.”

Now, to today... As I began kicking around the idea a few weeks ago of preparing a JCNWJ film series under the auspices of the Adult Education Committee, I began asking friends and colleagues for titles to be included. Not surprisingly, the suggestions were almost all of a similar type: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *School Ties*, *Hester Street*, *The Frisco Kid*, *Schindler's List*, *Chariots of Fire*, *The Chosen*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Exodus*, *Crossing Delancey*, *Blazing Saddles*, *Marathon Man*, *Yentl*, etc. While I absolutely, unequivocally recommend each and every one of these fantastic and important films, nonetheless, I found myself unsatisfied with the list, because I kept thinking back to my two year experience of teaching history. My goal was to include popular films that appeal equally to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike, but discuss them through a Jewish lens because that is how I live – as a human being

who experiences life as a Jew – and this is why I am excited that over the next five months we will watch and engage in Jewish discussion about *The Truman Show*, *Stranger than Fiction*, *Moonrise Kingdom*, *The Hunger Games*, and *A Serious Man*.

I look forward to this exciting series, which we are calling “[Reel Theology](#)” (a title chosen by Dr. Wendy Zierler, a professor of mine from Rabbinical School). Please join us for dinner beforehand, and a dessert discussion afterwards as we consider topics like Truth, Creation, God’s Authorship, Coming of Age Sacrifice, God’s Absence, Parable, Unearned Suffering, just to name a few.

More information is included elsewhere in this newsletter ([see the January 2019 Journal](#)), but please feel free to [reach out to me](#) if you have any questions or concerns.

Wishing you all a Happy and Rewarding 2019,

Rabbi Dubin

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