



Talking to the Other Side

On Monday, I accepted an invitation to speak to a room of 6th Formers. A Muslim journalist and I probed our bruised narratives, both in Israel and Gaza and here, and took questions. It was a tense, decent, honest exchange. The sort of thing that could, if exposed to the harsh criticism of the twittersphere, result in both of us being 'cancelled' for phrases or articulations that failed to meet the bar set by those who are only prepared to see two shades – black or white – to this narrative. I think it was important, I would do it again.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to meet with Israel's leading human rights lawyer and a founder of the anti-occupation movement, Shovrei Shtikah (Breaking The Silence). Both spoke not only of their concerns about what is happening in Gaza and the rise of settler power and violence in the West Bank, but also about incitement against Israeli voices looking to promote other ways to respond to the awfulness of 7th October. The men, both veteran peace activists, are part of a 'hub' of civil society organisations who have been subject to violence, threats and worse. Their central argument is that hostages will only be released as part of a diplomatic solution and that 7th October broke the possibility of relying on a policy of military protection from Palestinians who are offered almost no self-determination. "My greatest fear is that we will miss Hamas, when the next thing comes along," said one. "relying on military and technological advantage only works when you can guarantee 24/7 levels of protection and that promise lies broken," he added. Maybe these men are right, maybe they are wrong. But the voices of dissent need to be protected.

We need to listen to voices we disagree with to probe our own certainties and proclivities. That's as true of the awfully painful situation in Israel/Gaza as it is for every part of our national discourse. It's how we, as a human race, survive. Instead, there is this awful tendency to look to reduce the articulations of those who challenge us to their most simple, rebuttable, meme-able level – at which point we can dismantle not only the claims, but also the people behind them. I'm proud to be a Masorti Jew – perhaps most deeply because of our approach to complexity, our refusal to see Judaism, or life, in simplistic terms, because we have the tools and commitment to hold challenging, even contradictory claims in uneasiness. I'm aware that that means we can fail the modern test of 'simple is always better,' but I have faith, quite literally, that this is the only way.

I'm delighted to share that the sermon this Shabbat will be given by Rabbi Shoshana Cohen from Israel's Shalom Hartman Institute. A huge part of my own spiritual commitment to this complex work, I learnt in the classes and from the work of the SHI's founder, Rabbi David Hartman of blessed memory. Rabbi Shoshana is a worthy bearer of this message, coming to us from Israel. I urge us all to make every effort to attend.

On Wednesday we launched the new Izzun Megillat Ester in honour of our master Megillah reader, Lester. It was an exceptional Zoom event and it was wonderful to see so many members attend. The video can be seen [here](#) and is available as an audio [here](#). If you are interested in a NLS podcast based on audio from our classes and salons. Please let me know.

Shabbat Shalom