



Communicating Across Divides

Rabbi Jan Uhrbach

Rabbi Jan Uhrbach is founding director of the Block / Kolker Center for Spiritual Arts. She brings her passion for prayer and teaching to the JTS community. Through her work as director of the Block / Kolker Center for Spiritual Arts, she has developed and overseen programs and discussions, as well as prayer services on Shabbat and festivals, for the JTS community and the general public.

Rabbi Uhrbach loves being in the classroom at JTS, where she teaches courses on the meaning of liturgy and a course she created titled The Art of Leading Prayer. She is a religious mentor to many of JTS' rabbinical and cantorial students. She served as Interim Dean of the Division of Religious Leadership for the 2021-2022 school year.

In addition to her role at JTS, Rabbi Uhrbach serves as the founding rabbi of the Gesher | The Bridge Shul in Bridgehampton, Long Island, enabling her to mentor many of JTS's rabbinical and cantorial students in a congregational setting. She has played a key role in the acclaimed Lev Shalem prayer book series, as associate editor of Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat and Festivals, published by the Rabbinical Assembly in 2016, and currently as associate editor of the forthcoming Siddur Lev Shalem for Weekdays. She also served on the editorial committee for Machzor Lev Shalem.

A distinguished teacher of Torah, she is also a member of the Wexner Heritage faculty, and has taught and served as scholar-in-residence in many synagogues.

Rabbi Uhrbach was ordained at JTS, where she was a Wexner Graduate Fellow. A graduate of Harvard Law School and Yale University, Rabbi Uhrbach served as Law Clerk to Federal District Judge Kimba M. Wood. She then joined the New York law firm of Satterlee Stephens Burke & Burke LLP, where she specialized in media litigation, becoming a partner of the firm in January 1996.

1. Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 37a

For this reason was the human created alone . . . to proclaim the greatness of the Holy Blessed One: for if a person strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another, but the Supreme Sovereign of Sovereigns, the Holy Blessed One, fashioned every person in the stamp of the first human, yet not one resembles their fellow. Therefore every single person is obliged to say: the world was created for my sake.

לפיכך נברא אדם יחידי, . . . ולהגיד גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם אחד - כולן דומין זה לזה, ומלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא טבע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון - ואין אחד מהן דומה לחבירו. לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר: בשבילי נברא העולם.

2. Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 17a

Rav Kahana says: A Sanhedrin where all saw to convict [the defendant in a case of capital law], they acquit him. What is the reasoning? Because we have learned as a tradition that suspension of the trial [overnight is required] to create [a possibility of] acquittal. And as those [unanimously agreed to convict they] will not see any further [possibility of] merit [to acquit] him.

Rabbi Yochanan said: None are to be appointed members of the Sanhedrin, but those of stature, wisdom, good appearance, mature age, with a knowledge of sorcery, and who are conversant with all the seventy languages of mankind, in order that the court should have no need of an interpreter.

Rav Yehudah said in Rav's name: None is to be given a seat on the Sanhedrin unless one is able to prove the cleanness of a reptile (cf. Lev. 11:29-39) from Biblical texts.

אמר רב כהנא סנהדרי שראו כולן לחובה פוטרין אותו מ"ט כיון דגמירי הלנת דין למעבד ליה זכותא והני תו לא חזו ליה

אמר רבי יוחנן: אין מושיבין בסנהדרי אלא בעלי קומה, ובעלי חכמה, ובעלי מראה, ובעלי זקנה, ובעלי כשפים, ויודעים בשבעים לשון, שלא תהא סנהדרי שומעת מפי המתורגמן. אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: אין מושיבין בסנהדרין אלא מי שיודע לטהר את השרץ מן התורה. אמר רב: אני אדון ואטהרנו

3. Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b

Rabbi Abba stated in the name of Shmuel: For three years there was a dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, the former asserting, The halakhah is in agreement with our views, and the latter contending, The halakhah is in agreement with our views. Then a bat kol issued announcing, These and these are the words of the living God, but the halakhah is in agreement with the rulings of Beit Hillel. Since, however, both are the words of the living God, what was it that entitled Beit Hillel to have the halakhah fixed in agreement with their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of Beit Shammai, and not only that but they mentioned the words of Beit Shammai before theirs.

אמר רבי אבא אמר שמואל: שלש שנים נחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל, הללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו. יצאה בת קול ואמרה: אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן, והלכה כבית הלל. וכי מאחר שאלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים מפני מה זכו בית הלל לקבוע הלכה כמותן - מפני שנוחין ועלובין היו, ושונין דבריהן ודברי בית שמאי. ולא עוד אלא שמקדימין דברי בית שמאי לדבריהן

4. Mishnah Avot, 5:17

Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven (*l'shem shamayim*), will in the end endure; But one that is not for the sake of Heaven, will not endure. Which is the dispute that is for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Hillel and Shammai. And which is the dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korah and all his congregation.

כָּל מַחְלֶקֶת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. וְשֵׁי אֵינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, אֵין סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. אִיזוֹ הִיא מַחְלֶקֶת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, זוֹ מַחְלֶקֶת הֵלֵל וְשַׁמַּיִ. וְשֵׁי אֵינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, זוֹ מַחְלֶקֶת קֹרַח וְכָל עֲדָתוֹ

5. Litany from the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, Sag Harbor, NY, November 21, 2024

This sacred earth is our home.

This precious nation and east end community is where we live.

I need to be safe and have my basic needs met;
you need to be safe and have your basic needs met.

I yearn to belong, to love and be loved;
you yearn to belong, to love and be loved.

My fate is intertwined with yours;
your fate is intertwined with mine.

Let these realities move us to value one another and live in peace,
as we preserve the earth, this nation and our community.