

Shim'u Na HaMorim: Rebels or Teachers?

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Central Synagogue

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Think back, for a moment,
to middle school.

[PAUSE]

I don't know about you all,
but I remember those kids,
the class clowns,
the ones who were disruptive,
hilarious,
too smart for their own good. //
Maybe some of you were that kid... //

Many years ago,
there was one such child
who struggled academically,
constantly challenging and **rebellious** against his teachers. //
That kid / was Albert Einstein. //

Einstein

(and most children growing up in the US)

were taught from an early age the value of conformity,

of showing deference and respect to their elders,

of submitting to authority, and

aiming for high achievement. //

And one can understand the logic behind this model! //

These are all important traits in a society. //

We can't have every citizen running around,

doing whatever they want;

there need to be rules, laws, and traditions. //

But by actively suppressing or discouraging

those who don't fit the traditional mold,

we might miss out on the opportunity to cultivate creativity,

innovation,

and out-of-the-box thinking,

as demonstrated by people like Einstein. //

This urge to put people in their place,
to make them conform,
is not new. //

This urge has existed for centuries,
and can even be found in our sacred texts. //



“SHIM’U NA HAMORIM!”¹ //

“Listen up, you rebels!” Moses cries,
fed up with the Israelites’ seemingly incessant complaints,
desperate for their cooperation
as they continued to wander in the desert. //

The word “*morim*,” or “rebels,”
is spelled *mem, reish, yud, mem* in the Torah text. //

I,
like the rabbis of old,
love a good Hebrew word play. //

¹ Numbers 20:10

If one were to add a *vav*,
the word “*morim*” could be understood to mean “teachers”
as well as “rebels.” //

In fact,

Midrash teaches us that “*morim*”
has various possible meanings, including:

“stubborn ones,”

“fools,” and

“those who teach their teachers.”² //

It is interesting to shift our perspective
from thinking of the Israelites as perpetual complainers,
regularly inciting rebellion,
to thinking of them as “righteous protesters,”
teaching their leaders
by giving voice to their physical, emotional, & spiritual needs. //

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² Bamidbar Rabbah 19:9

Many important figures throughout history have been rebels. //
Bill Gates dropped out of college –
the more traditional, and perhaps safer path to success –
and went on to become a giant in the tech industry,
forever changing the ways in which we interact with technology
and with one another. //

Gates used his rebellious, out-of-the-box nature
to create innovative products
that have impacted every corner of society. //

There are also rebels
who have made change through productive agitation. //
Take the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for instance. //
While it is tempting
to remember his leadership of the fight for civil rights
through rose-colored glasses,
focused on his commitment to peaceful, non-violent resistance,
it is important to note that,
at the time,
Dr. King was viewed as quite a provocative, incendiary figure,

especially to those who could not yet wrap their minds around
the changes taking place in their society. //

Dr. King disrupted the status quo,
which greatly angered many in our country
who saw his rebellion as a threat. //

People wanted things to stay the way they were,
but King knew
that working towards racial equality was not just about race;
it was about teaching our society
that all citizens of this nation
were created in the image of God,
regardless of their skin color. //

While Dr. King began as a rebel,
he is now regarded as one of our greatest teachers. //

Today, too, we need rebels –
now more than ever. //

There are thousands of immigrant children,
“huddling masses” entering our land,
trapped in camps on our border. //

These kids are thirsty –
for water,
for connection,
for respect, freedom, and opportunity. //

In the Book of Leviticus, God says to us:

“The stranger who resides with you
shall be to you as one of your citizens;
you shall love him as yourself,
for you were strangers in the land of Egypt...”³ //

We need rebels at the border who are agitating for change,
rebels who can teach & remind our leaders of our core values,
of our responsibility to love our neighbors as ourselves,
to help “the stranger,
the orphan,
and the widow who are in our gates.” //

³ Leviticus 19:34

We at Central Synagogue,
those of us who are here in person
and those in our virtual community,
have the power to be rebels and teachers. //

We can donate money or airline miles
to organizations like KIND
that are doing work on the ground
to help these immigrant children and their families. //

We can gather in prayer with our community,
participating in an interfaith prayer vigil
that will be held in the Pavilion
here at Central this coming Tuesday night at 7 pm. //

We can take action by volunteering,
working with organizations such as HIAS
to do our part in helping to repair the world. //

AND,

we can muster up our best Einstein, Gates, and King,

summoning as much righteously rebellious creativity,

insight,

and innovation as we can

to come up with new and important ways to incite change,

to teach our leaders,

and to help our society grow. //

Our ancestors did this millennia ago,

and I believe that we can and we will do so today too. //

Kein y'hi ratzon. //