

Mahloket Matters: The Value of Constructive Disagreement

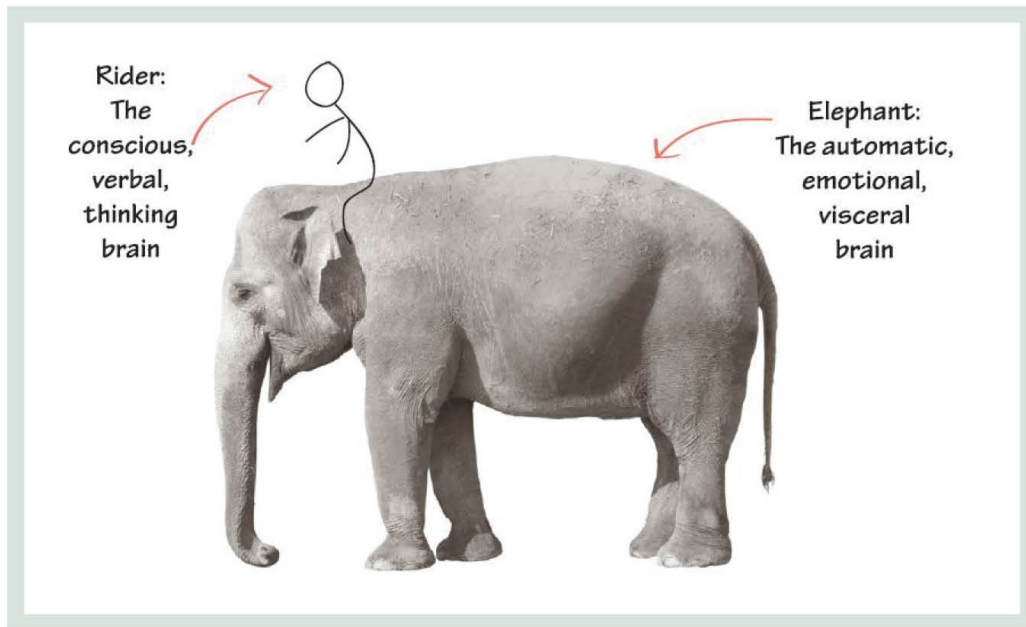
I. How does God feel about disagreement?

Midrash Psalms 12 (900 CE, Land of Israel)	מדרש תהילים, מזמור יב
<p>Rabbi Yanai said: The Torah was NOT given in a clear-cut manner, rather on every statement God said to Moses, God would say 49 reasons (panim, lit. faces) the matter could be pure, and 49 reasons why the matter could be impure.</p> <p>He (Moses) said to God, Master of the Universe, when will we know the truth of the matter?</p> <p>God said to him (Moses): 'Go according to the majority' (Exodus 23:2). If the majority rules it is impure – it is impure. If the majority rules it is pure – it is pure.</p>	<p>אמר רבי ינאי: לא ניתנו דברי תורה חתוכים אלא על כל דיבור שהיה אומר הקב"ה למשה היה אומר מ"ט פנים טהור ומ"ט פנים טמא.</p> <p>אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, עד מתי נעמוד על בירורו של דבר?</p> <p>אמר לו: "אחרי רבים להטות." רבו המטמאין - טמא. רבו המטהרין - טהור.</p>

- According to this midrash, God intentionally gave the Jewish people a Torah that was NOT clear cut. Why?
- What word(s) would you use to describe how Moses is feeling when he poses his question to God?
- It is clear from this text that God values debate and wants us to consider opposing views before ultimately voting on a course of action. But WHY does God think that a person must bother to talk to someone with whom they disagree before deciding on a course of action?

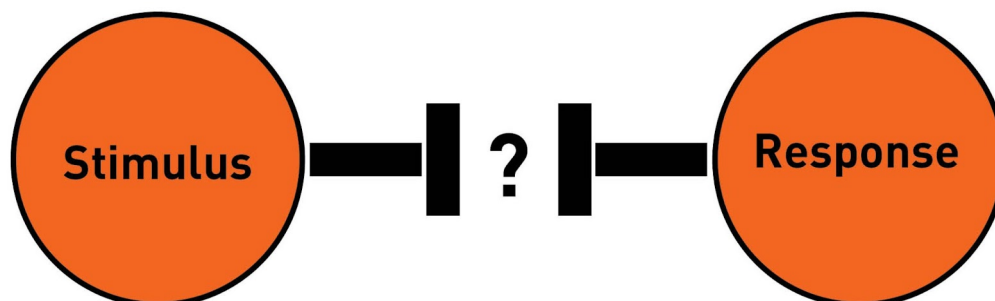
II. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND MAHLOKET: Elephant and Rider

[Jonathan Haidt, author of “The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion,” 2012.]



III. Tools to Rein In the Elephant

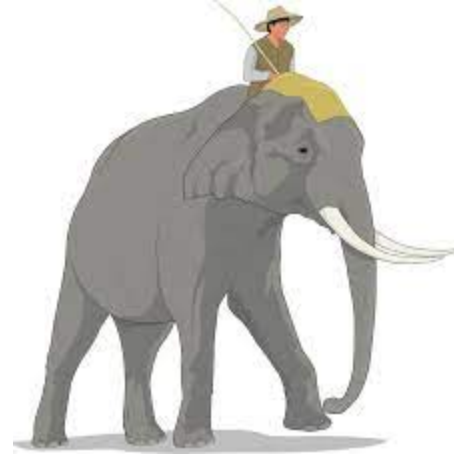
Victor Frankl:



Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.

How can I return to the Driver's Seat?

1. Notice the clues your body sends you when things are heating up.
2. Choose to pause.
3. Take a deep breath... or 5, or 10, or more!



IV. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND MAHLOKET: Moral Foundation Theory

[Jonathan Haidt, author of "The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion," 2012.]

- a) **"Innate"** = Nature provides a first draft, which experience then revises... 'Built-in' does not mean unmalleable, it means 'organized in advance of experience.'
- b) **Moral Foundations:**
 - **Care/harm:** This foundation is related to our long evolution as mammals with attachment systems and an ability to feel (and dislike) the pain of others. It underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance.
 - **Fairness/cheating:** This foundation is related to the evolutionary process of reciprocal altruism. It generates ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy.
 - **Loyalty/betrayal:** This foundation is related to our long history as tribal creatures able to form shifting coalitions. It underlies virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the group. It is active anytime people feel that it's "one for all, and all for one."
 - **Authority/subversion:** This foundation was shaped by our long primate history of hierarchical social interactions. It underlies virtues of leadership and followership, including deference to legitimate authority and respect for traditions.
 - **Sanctity/degradation:** This foundation was shaped by the psychology of disgust and contamination. It underlies religious notions of striving to live in an elevated,

less carnal, more noble way. It underlies the widespread idea that the body is a temple which can be desecrated by immoral activities and contaminants (an idea not unique to religious traditions).

- **Liberty/oppression:** This foundation is about the feelings of reactance and resentment people feel toward those who dominate them and restrict their liberty. Its intuitions are often in tension with those of the authority foundation. The hatred of bullies and dominators motivates people to come together, in solidarity, to oppose or take down the oppressor.

c) Prioritizing Your Moral Foundations

Instructions

1. On each of your colored post-it notes, please write down the moral foundation that matches the post-it color key on the slide.
2. Decide how YOU would generally *prioritize* the 6 moral foundations.
3. Write your prioritization # on each of your post-it notes. (e.g. I would write #3 on my green post-it if I have ranked “loyalty/betrayal” as 3rd on my list).
4. Write your name on the post-it that you ranked as #1 in your moral foundation list.
5. Compare your lists at the designated Moral Foundation Galleries! (Sefi will explain :)

6. Please consider the following discussion questions with the other Gallery Participants at your table:
 - In what way(s) are the group’s moral foundation prioritizations similar or different from each other?
 - Why did you choose to prioritize the moral foundations that way?
 - Can you think of any natural tendencies that may have contributed to your prioritizing these core values this way?
 - Can you think of any particular experience that may have contributed to your prioritizing these core values this way?
 - Is there a scenario where you can imagine prioritizing the moral foundations *differently*?

V. THE ROLE OF MORAL FOUNDATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY POLARIZING ISSUES:

The following story is taken from the book "Stories For the Sake of Argument," by Robby Gringras and Abi Dauber Sterne. Please visit their website for more information:

www.forthesakeofargument.org

Story #1: THE GOOD MAN

There once was a good man. A religious man. An orthodox man.

He spent his entire life helping sick people receive the medical treatment they needed.

He didn't care if they were good people or bad people. He didn't care if they were men or women, Jewish or Muslim, religious or secular. He looked after anyone who needed help, because he saw this was what he had to do, as a religious man.

One day he began organizing his annual fundraising event, and succeeded in getting all sorts of pop stars to perform on stage. Lots of pop stars meant lots of donations. Lots of donations meant even more sick people receiving the care they required.

The good man was delighted. Publicity was sent far and wide.

But with the publicity out, all could see that every single pop star on the bill was a man. It was almost as if women were being kept away from the stage deliberately. It turned out that they were. The good man was a religious man, an orthodox man - and just as his orthodox values led him to blessed charity work, his values also held that women should not sing in front of men.

Everyone told the good man that he could not have a public event that refused to let any women on stage. It would be like saying that women don't matter.

But the good man's supporters knew that it would be crazy to expect him to ignore his religious beliefs when raising money for a charity built on those beliefs.

Gradually, one by one, the artists began pulling out of the event. They said they were happy to perform, but only if women could perform too. But the good man could not agree to host an event that undermined his own values.

Everything was at a knife-edge.

Would an event take place that consciously and deliberately excluded women? Or, alternatively, would the event be canceled, ensuring that far fewer people would be helped by the man who wished to help them?

The argument had only just begun...

Pardes Discussion Questions:

- a) Identify the moral foundation(s) in tension. [Try to use Haidt’s moral foundation categories. But if that does not work for you then feel free to come up with your own language for the values in tension].
- b) Which of the values that you identified would you prioritize in this situation? What do you think this reflects about your own prioritization of values?
- c) Can you imagine a scenario in which you would prioritize these particular values differently?

Some Context to the Story

This refers to a true story about Rabbi Elimelech Firer and his organization *Ezra LeMarpe - Help Towards Healing*. In November 2019 his fundraising concert in Tel Aviv that would have refused a platform to women was indeed canceled after public uproar.

At the time, there were many artists, including women, who were outraged about the cancellation of Firer’s event. Margalit Tzanani, a female singer and TV personality commented: “Of course I’m against the exclusion of women, but let’s be clear: What’s more important? The huge wonderful acts of kindness of Rav Firer, a unique genius, or one particular show where women won’t perform?” The Education Minister at the time, himself an orthodox religious man, complained: “A man who aided and contributed so much to Israel’s sick, suffers a media bulldozer and a campaign against the show in his honor, and all because of his way of life.”

On the other side, journalist and TV presenter Einat Galili expressed her outrage at the exclusion of women ironically: “I find it so moving when men, despite the difficulties involved, are willing to swallow their pride, bite their lips, and give up on my rights.”

This was not the only public event in Israel that does not allow women on stages: The official lighting of the Chanukiah at the Kotel excludes women, and in the Fall of 2019 there was even an event for the Empowerment of Women in Ramla with no women on the stage.

VI. A Matter of Perspective: Genesis 32:4-8

Genesis 32:4-8 (The New JPS)

4 Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, 5 and instructed them as follows, "Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and remained until now; 6 I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves; and I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor.'" **7 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau; he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him."** 8 Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety...*

בראשית לב:ד-ח

(ד) וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו, אֶל-עֵשָׂו אָחִיו, אֶרְצָה שְׂעִיר, שְׂדֵה אֲדוֹם. (ה) וַיֹּצֵא אֹתָם, לֵאמֹר, כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן, לְאֲדֹנָי יַעֲקֹב: כֹּה אָמַר, עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב, עַם-לֶבֶן גֵּרְתִּי, וְאַחַר עַד-עָתָה. (ו) וַיְהִי-לִי שׂוֹר וְחֹמֹר, צֹאן וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה; וְאֲשֻׁלְחָה לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי, לְמִצְאֶחֶן בְּעֵינָיִךְ. (ז) וַיָּשָׁבוּ, הַמַּלְאָכִים, אֶל-יַעֲקֹב, לֵאמֹר: בָּאוּ אֵל-אָחִיךָ, אֶל-עֵשָׂו, וְגַם הֵלֵךְ לִקְרֹאתְךָ, וְאַרְבַּע-מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ. (ח) וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד, וַיִּצָּר לוֹ...**

Bereishis 32:4-8 (Artscroll/Stone Edition)

4 Then Jacob sent angels ahead of him to Esau his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. 5 He charged them, saying: "Thus shall you say, 'To my lord, to Esau, so said your servant Jacob: I have sojourned with Laban and have lingered until now. 6 I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, servants, and maidservants and I am sending to tell my lord to find favor in your eyes.'" **7 The angels returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother, to Esau; moreover, he is heading toward you, and four hundred men are with him."** 8 Jacob became very frightened, and it distressed him...**

- What is UNCLEAR about this text?

Don Isaac Abarbanel, Commentary on Genesis 32, (Answer to Question 4)

(Rabbi Don Isaac Abarbanel, 1437 – 1508, Portugal, Spain, Italy)

'And he is coming toward you': And it seems from the messengers, that they did not know Esau's hatred toward Jacob, and so when they went to him and spoke to him regarding their mission, he replied to them, 'behold he is coming toward you.' And they thought that he was coming toward him to honor him, and because of this they went back to Jacob and said to him, 'we came to your brother, to Esau', meaning 'why should you call him: "my master", and he is none other than your loving loyal brother, and behold he is also coming toward you, meaning it is not enough that he should receive your messengers, but he himself is going and coming toward to you, to receive you, and four hundred men are with him to honor you. But Jacob, who knew the truth, and (knew about) his (Esau's) wickedness, (See Genesis 27:41-45) he alone was not convinced of this matter, and was very afraid of his coming, "and concerned" about the four hundred men he was coming with, because he knew that he was coming for the purpose of war.

אברבנל בראשית לב, (תשובה לשאלה ד')

יגם הולך לקראתך: והנראה מהשלוחים שלא היו יודעים משטמת עשו מיעקב ולכן כאשר הלכו לו ודברו אליו שליחותם הוא השיבם הנה הוא הולך לקראתו. וחשבו שהיה הולך לכבדו ומפני זה שבו אל יעקב ואמרו לו באנו אל אחיך אל עשו כלומר למה תקראהו 'אדוני' והוא אינו אלא כאח אוהב נאמן כי הנה גם הוא הולך לקראתך ר"ל לא די שיקבל שליחותיך אבל גם הוא בעצמו הולך ובא לקראתך לקבל אותך וארבע מאות איש עמו לכבדך. אבל יעקב שהיה יודע אמתת הדבר ורשעתו לבדו לא נתפתה בזה ויירא יעקב מאד מביאתו ויצר לו מדי מאות איש שהיה מביא עמו כי ידע כי למלחמה הוא בא.



Image courtesy of Sinai Publishing.

Shadal, Genesis 32:7 (Rabbi Samuel David Luzzatto, 1800 – 1865, Italy)

"And he is coming toward you": For they believed that Esau was only coming to honor and protect him on his way. And perhaps this really was Esau's intention, and perhaps they also understood from Esau's answer that he did not have in his heart any evil or hatred for his brother, and perhaps they also told Jacob all these things that he said to them, words of peace and brotherhood. However, Jacob did not trust all of this, for he was afraid when he heard that he was coming with four hundred men, and Scripture did not want to expand upon the conversation of Esau and the messengers, since they did not have any benefit to him, because Jacob did not trust them.

ש"ל בראשית לב:ז

וגם הולך לקראתך: כסבורים שאין עשו בא אלא לכבדו ולשמרו בדרך. ואולי כן היתה באמת כוונת עשו, ואולי גייכ הבינו מתשובת עשו שלא היה בלבו רעה ושנאה על אחיו, ואולי גייכ סיפרו ליעקב את כל הדברים אשר דיבר אליהם דברי שלום ואחוה. אמנם יעקב לא בטח בכל זה, כי פחד בשמעו שהוא בא אליו בתי איש, והכתוב לא רצה להאריך בדברי עשו והמלאכים, מאחר שלא הועילו כלום, כי לא בטח בהם יעקב.



- About what do the Abarbanel and Shadal AGREE?
- About what do the Abarbanel and Shadal DISAGREE?