



Pardes | פָּרְדֵּס  
North America

March 6–12, 2022



## 9 ADAR

### The Week of Constructive Disagreement

We are living through a moment when we are challenged by a profound breakdown in American civil discourse. This shows up almost daily in our families, our communities and in our larger society. Unable to listen to each other – let alone understand each other – we are stuck in our own echo chambers. Many fear speaking up, lest we be judged or “canceled.” We cannot even agree on a shared set of facts or norms to govern our discourse. These problems are creating a toxic environment that breeds distrust, lack of unity, and lack of empathy.

We are not the first Jewish community to experience a period like this. During the early rabbinic period the community became so factionized, and the public discourse grew so toxic, that the Talmud describes an eruption of violence between the students of Hillel and the students of Shammai. This ended with the loss of 3,000 lives (Jerusalem Talmud, tractate Shabbat 1:4 3c). That tragic day was the 9th of Adar. The sages of that time proclaimed a fast to express their sense of loss and mourning.

Today, Pardes North America wants 9 Adar to be more than a day to remember past turbulence. Rather, we declare 9 Adar to be the start of a designated week devoted to healing the broken discourse that challenges us today.<sup>1</sup> 9 Adar begins a week to discover new meaning in ancient wisdom and use it to restore respect in how we speak with one another. It will be a time to mend relationships that may have frayed along the way and to usher in a more constructive form of public discourse.

<sup>1</sup> *This tradition of celebrating the week of 9 Adar was started by Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth, the founder of the Pardes Center for Jewish Conflict Resolution.*



## IT STARTS WITH US

Trying to engage in a conversation about a difficult topic or with someone with whom we deeply disagree is profoundly hard to do. The more difficult and personal the topic is, the harder it is to keep it constructive and “show up” as our best selves. It is easy for any of us to get triggered, angry, or hurt. Once we do, it is natural to raise our voices, to say something hurtful, or simply to shut down and stop listening. All of this leaves us feeling less connected to others and less hopeful that our families, our communities, and our society can function in the way we need them to.

Hillel the Elder, known for his ability to engage in disagreements with others in a manner that was respectful and constructive, understood this danger all too well. He famously taught in Pirkei Avot 1:12 that there are two attributes that a person needs to cling to in order to help build a more peaceful society (Mishnah Avot 1:12). He names these attributes, saying one must be both an *Ohev Shalom* (a lover of peace) and a *Rodef Shalom* (a pursuer of peace), without ever defining them further. The 16th-century commentator, known as the Midrash Shmuel comes centuries later to help us understand the depth and nuance of what Hillel was implying.



# MIDRASH SHMUEL, AVOT 1:12

## מדרש שמואל, אבות א:יב

*When [Hillel] said: one should be a lover of peace (Ohev Shalom)- [he is referring to making peace] within oneself and in one's home. And [when Hillel says] to pursue peace (Rodef Shalom) - [he was referring to making peace] between others, of one who strives to make peace among friends and between spouses. And this is the meaning of the word "Rodef," of one who pursues peace and goes with their own feet to their friend's home to make peace...*

*But first one must become a lover of peace (an Ohev Shalom) in their own lives. Only [a person who learns to see peace] as a good thing in their own eyes and after one grows to love [peace] for themselves, [only then] can one be drawn to go and bring peace between others.*

ואמר (הלל): "אוהב שלום" - לעצמו ובביתו. ו"רודף שלום" - לאחרים, ליתן שלום בין אדם לחבירו ובין איש לאישתו. וזהו לשון "רודף" שהוא רודף והולך ברגליו לבית חבירו...

וצריך תחילה שיהי הוא אוהב שלום לעצמו. וכיון שהוא דבר טוב השלום בעיניו ואהב אותו לעצמו, ימשך לו מזה גם כן שיתן שלום בין אחרים.

We may have thought these two qualities, *Ohev Shalom* and *Rodef Shalom*, were one and the same. However upon deeper examination they are indeed quite different. *Ohev Shalom* is an attitude, *Rodef Shalom* is an action. *Ohev Shalom* requires governing our own behavior, *Rodef Shalom* involves mitigating the behavior of others. One could even argue that *Ohev Shalom* entails having a proactive mindset, while *Rodef Shalom* is reactive.

The Midrash Shmuel believes that before any of us can become change agents helping to foster a more peaceful and constructive dialogue in the larger world, we have to do some work on ourselves. We cannot help make peace for others until we achieve a level of peace and understanding within ourselves and our own families. This means that we have to get to the bottom of what is triggering us: How does the anger, fear, and resentment inside us make it hard to relate to others? What personal baggage or outdated biases are weighing us down? How do we attend to our own needs so that we can show up with generosity and curiosity, even with those with whom we disagree?

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*What is something you wish you could let go of when coming into a conversation with someone you disagree with? What gets in your way?*

*What rules do you wish to put in place for yourself ahead of time to help you show up as your best self when entering into a difficult conversation?*

*How would you like others to show up?*



# BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

While introspection is essential, all of us also need practical tools that will help us navigate real life situations that arise. 9 Adar is part of a larger learning series at Pardes North America called “Mahloket Matters: Healing our Broken Discourse” that applies Jewish wisdom and secular scholarship to the challenges we all face in learning how to talk to each other and disagree more constructively.

One of the most effective ways of fostering a more productive style of dialogue, is to reframe the way we see each other. Rather than simply labeling and judging those with whom we disagree, social psychologists like Jonathan Haidt offer a tool that can help us see each other in a more nuanced way. These social psychologists argue that all people are born with six innate moral foundations or values, which they coined the Moral Foundations Theory ([moralfoundations.org](http://moralfoundations.org)). They argue that like tastebuds, these six moral foundations are something that all people share, however each value gets prioritized differently by each individual, depending on their particular life experience. By studying these six moral foundations below, we can approach a dispute with the necessary nuance and self awareness that lends itself to healing broken discourse. We have listed these six values and paired them with their equivalent Jewish value:



# VALUES

<b>חסד</b> <b>CARE/HARM</b>  This foundation is related to our long evolution as mammals with attachment systems and the ability to feel (and dislike) the pain of others. It underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance.	<b>צדק</b> <b>FAIRNESS/CHEATING</b>  This foundation is related to the evolutionary process of reciprocal altruism. It generates ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy.	<b>אחדות</b> <b>LOYALTY/BETRAYAL</b>  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."
<b>מסורה</b> <b>AUTHORITY/SUBVERSION</b>  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.	<b>קדושה</b> <b>SANCTITY/DEGRADATION</b>  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).	<b>חירות</b> <b>LIBERTY/OPPRESSION</b>  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.

## READ THROUGH THE SIX MIDDOT/MORAL FOUNDATIONS LISTED.

*Which of these values do you relate to most strongly?*

*Which of these do you most gravitate to when confronting a given issue?*

*Think of someone in your life who you had a recent disagreement with on a given issue. Which of these foundations may have guided their thinking?*