

At the beginning of the video, Daddy says, “You know what the problem was with your last animation about “Judging Others Favorably”? Everybody already thinks that they are judging others favorably! So, you’re not teaching them anything.”

If we look honestly at the way we talk about those with whom we deeply disagree, we will notice that we often justify our response to their *approach* by demeaning and demonizing *them*, often as a group. We see the people in *that group* as a menace and a threat to our safety and well-being. This feeling emerges from a powerful and sometimes legitimate fear that *their way* threatens our very existence. These seemingly impenetrable conflicts threaten to destroy our families, our communities, and our country. To live together peacefully, however, we must learn to judge others favorably, even others with whom we disagree.

How might Jewish tradition provide guidance?

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, *From Enemy to Friend*, page 126

“...to be true to the tradition’s own teachings on living with disagreement, we have no choice but to engage in the regular spiritual practice of introspection. We must regularly question our own assumptions about which views are truly evil and dangerous. We must consider whether we are responding with arrogance or competitiveness to another’s legitimate point of view. We must remind ourselves again and again of the finitude of our own knowledge and vision, cultivating humility in the presence of views widely divergent from our own.”

How does one cultivate “humility in the presence of views widely divergent from our own”?

How might you develop a “regular spiritual practice of introspection” to help you discern when you are “responding with arrogance or competitiveness to another’s legitimate point of view”?

This video and study guide are designed to help you answer these questions.

Winning and Safety Versus Dignity and Respect

DADDY: *We focus exclusively on the winner. But they focus just as much—on the loser. It’s a question of dignity and respect. And that is essential if you’re trying to resolve an argument.*

HANAN: *Of course, I respect the person I’m arguing with, Daddy, but I*

also need to make sure I’m not taken advantage of...I’m just saying that you also have to be careful...You have to make sure you’re safe. That’s number one. Safety is a basic, even primal need.

DADDY: *People who are fighting, Hanan, always say that giving up something is not safe. But one thing I know for sure, Hanan, you never get safety if you want to control everything. Trust is all about taking risk.*

When engaging with someone whose ideas feel dangerous to us, we should consider these two big issues:

- **Goal:** What is my goal for engaging with those with whom I disagree profoundly? **Do I want to “win,” or do I want to learn and find a way forward together?** If my goal is to win, then I will lose. Others do not “win” when they try to convince me that they are right. Why would I “win” if I approach them in the same way?
- **Safety:** Is this other person’s existence a true threat to me? If so, how can I stay safe? **What does safety mean in this instance? What is my real fear?** Am I afraid the other person will take advantage of me? If so, does that fear really put me in danger? **What is the other person’s real fear? Am I curious and brave enough to find out?**

A Key To Conflict Resolution Is the Willingness To Be Vulnerable

Vulnerability can be dangerous. **The paradox of vulnerability, however, is that it also provides an opportunity to connect and move forward.**

The Hebrew word for vulnerable is פגיע. The root is פ.ג.ע, meaning *to contact*, usually in a hurtful manner. Thus, פגיע makes sense as a translation of *vulnerable*—exposed to being contacted in a hurtful manner. But getting hurt is not the only possible result of being vulnerable. On the contrary, *vulnerability has been singled out* as the gateway to creativity and connection. <https://ulpan.com/say-vulnerability-hebrew/>

- **Think of words you associate with the word “vulnerable.”** Ask others what words they associate with it. The words fall into two categories:
 - Unpleasant, unwanted emotional or physical danger
 - Some type of connection, growth, and positive change
- **How do you make sense of these two categories?** How are they connected? How are they different? How are social, economic, or other types of structural power or lack of power connected to these two categories? What is the role of choice in these two categories?

- **Have you ever chosen to make yourself vulnerable with another person?** When? Why? What happened?

Ariel Burger, *Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel's Classroom*, pages 65 & 67 (Quotes by Elie Wiesel)

"David, on his way to fight Goliath, was given the king's armor. For a battle this unequal, with life-and-death stakes, armor made sense. But David removed the armor, for it didn't fit him. This image has stayed with me as a symbol of a key concept: that vulnerability is the greatest weapon if you are brave enough to use it."

"I always teach with an open heart. Not just for moral reasons, but for pragmatic ones—a teacher's open heart makes it possible for students to open their hearts as well."

"When evil threatens the weak, we must fight back. And yet it is true that sometimes the only way to disarm a threat is to be vulnerable, to share our common humanity, in hopes of awakening the humanity of the other."

Two of the preceding sentences are crucial:

- "[V]ulnerability is the greatest weapon if you are brave enough to use it."
- "And yet it is true that sometimes the only way to disarm a threat is to be vulnerable, to share our common humanity, in hopes of awakening the humanity of the other."
- Why would Elie Wiesel, a world-renowned Holocaust survivor and spokesperson, argue for vulnerability in the face of threat? Does this approach seem counter-intuitive after surviving such unspeakable horrors?
- Have you ever been brave enough to use vulnerability to awaken the humanity of another? If so, what happened? Can you think of times you have seen or read about when that approach worked?

Ariel Burger, *Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel's Classroom*, page 65

"In spite of his experiences during the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel sheds his armor every day, opens himself up to his students, students he didn't even know, listens to their dreams and hopes, continues to argue for faith and friendship. He says, 'Love is possible. Hope is possible.'"

Why Take a Chance at Vulnerability? For the Sake of Our Own Happiness

DADDY: At a certain point, Hanan, I came to realize that we're all in this together. Even the person I am arguing with...we're all in it together. We're neighbors. And if my neighbor is unhappy, then I will be unhappy—because my neighbor has become my enemy.

Leviticus 19:18

ויקרא יט:יח

Love your neighbor as yourself. I am God.

אָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹדְ אָנִי ה'

Most people, including Daddy, quote only the first half of this verse. But the second half of the verse might help us think about the meaning of the first half.

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, *From Enemy to Friend*, page 50

"We are commanded to love the other—not only those with whom we agree—as a whole person. Like ourselves, the other is far more than his or her political, religious, or ideological opinions. The other is a whole divinely inspired being, just as we are."

If we are unable to see those with whom we deeply disagree "as whole divinely inspired being[s], just as we are," what happens to us? What kind of people do we become? Daddy suggests that having enemies like this results in our own unhappiness. Do you agree? Might this help you better understand Wiesel's approach to vulnerability?

Rabbi Eilberg asks us to look at our enemy as a whole person. Are there people with whom you disagree in one area but respect in other areas? Is it possible that a person with whom you disagree and even fear has aspects that you might respect and even love if you were curious enough, and felt safe enough, to learn more about?

Disputes Are a Normal and Potentially Healthy Part of Human Existence

Role models: Hillel and Shammai

We see the potential value of disputes in the disagreements between two great sages, Hillel and Shammai. The tradition recognizes a difference between disputes "for the sake of Heaven" and those "not for the sake of Heaven."

<i>Pirke Avot</i> 5:19	פרקי אבות ה:ט
Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will in the end endure. But one that is not for the sake of Heaven will not endure. Which is the controversy that is for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Hillel and Shammai. And which is the controversy that is not for the sake of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Korach and all his congregation.	כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, סופה להתקיים. ושאינה לשם שמים, אין סופה להתקיים. איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי. ושאינה לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת קרח וכל עדתו:

<i>Eruvin</i> 13b	עירובין יג:
Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: For three years the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel disagreed. These said: The law is in accordance with us, and these said: The law is in accordance with us. A Divine Voice emerged and proclaimed: These and those are the words of the living God. However, the law is in accordance with the school of Hillel.	אמר רבי אבא אמר שמואל: שלש שנים נחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל, הללו אומרים: הלכה כמותנו, והללו אומרים: הלכה כמותנו. ויצאה בת קול ואמרה: אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן, והלכה כבית הלל.
Since both these and those are the words of the living God, why were the school of Hillel privileged to have the law established in accordance with their opinion? They [Hillel] were agreeable and forbearing, showing restraint when affronted, [and when they taught the law] they would teach both their own statements and the statements of the school of Shammai. Moreover, they prioritized the statements of the school of Shammai to their own statements.	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.

There are many commentaries that compare the schools of Hillel and Shammai to Korach and his congregation. Here are some distinctions to consider:

Hillel and Shammai	Korach and his congregation (See Numbers, Chapter 16)
Hillel and Shammai are two different groups living in relationship with each other, both aiming to understand something larger than themselves.	Korach and his congregation are a group of somewhat disconnected people, all working together against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The only connection between Korach and his congregation is a desire for power.
Hillel and Shammai are listed as two sides of a larger picture. They learn from and respect each other. We are taught elsewhere that, although they disagreed on many issues, their children married one another and they ate in each other's homes.	Korach and his congregation are on the same side of a power struggle that they initiate. When Moses tries to meet with them to discuss their concerns, they refuse. There is no curiosity on their part. They have already decided that they have all the answers.
The law goes according to the school of Hillel because of how they behave towards Shammai, including acknowledging Shammai's position respectfully before stating their own. In this way, Shammai's students know they have been heard.	Korach not only does not acknowledge Moses's position, but he is not interested in learning about it.

- What might “argument for the sake of Heaven” mean? How does that phrase connect to the idea of an “enduring argument” as a positive description of an argument?
- What do you learn from the way the schools of Hillel and Shammai argue with each other that might be helpful as you talk to people with whom you strongly disagree?
- Can you think of other distinctions between Hillel/Shammai and Korach/his congregation? (To learn more about Korach, read Numbers, Chapter 16.)
- Korach is viewed in a negative light in Jewish tradition. Can you think of legitimate reasons why Korach might have responded as he did to the leadership of Moses? (Note that Korach is a cousin of Moses and Aaron. There may be some family issues at play here.)

- What do you learn from Korach about what does not work when trying to challenge a power structure? Even if Korach's arguments are legitimate, how might he have raised them in a way that is "for the sake of Heaven"?

A Potentially Revolutionary Approach: Disagreement Built into Creation Is a Necessary Ingredient for Growth

In the following text, Rabbi Nachman describes a Jewish mystical view of creation in which God contracts God's Infinite Presence to create a Vacated Space. Through God's Words, our world is created in that Vacated Space. But now the world is devoid of God's Presence. God must find a way to re-enter the space that now holds our world.

In this understanding of creation, the metaphor for God's Presence is a Light so strong that it must be distilled into our world through God's Words. These Words bring God's Light into the world in the form of vessels that tragically break apart because of the overwhelming power of the Light. The broken vessels are called "*Klippot*" or, literally, shards. The shards represent "evil forces" that exist in our world.

Evil forces originally came about because too much powerful Divine Light entered the world at a crucial moment in creation. As a parallel in our human existence, **evil forces continue to enter our world today because of too many spoken human words, even if those words are words of Truth. Even Torah scholars, and by extension all people with wisdom and good intent, must contract to make space for the creation of something new and bigger than themselves. They can do so by creating opportunities for the sharing of different viewpoints and by distinguishing between the time for speaking and the time for silent curiosity to learn and grow from the viewpoints of others.**

Likutai Moharan 64:4 (by Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, 1772-1810, Ukraine; translation based on Sefaria)

4. Know, too, that dispute is the aspect of Creation. For the world was created mainly by means of the Vacated Space...This is because without it there would have been nothing but *Ein Sof* [God's Infinite Presence], with no place for the creation of the world...God therefore contracted the Light to the sides, and the Vacated Space was made. Within it, God created the entire creation—i.e., time and space—by means of the spoken word...: "By the Word of God the heavens were made..."

The same is true of the aspect of dispute. If all the Torah scholars were one, there would be no place for the world's creation. However, because of their dispute and their separating from one another, with each one withdrawing to a different side, the aspect of the Vacated Space is made between them. This is the aspect of the contraction of the Light to the sides, within which the world is created by means of the spoken word.

This is because whatever each one of them says is only for the sake of creating the world, which they bring about within the Vacated Space that is between them. For the Torah scholars create everything through their words...Just as I make Heaven and Earth through My Word, so you do the same (*Zohar*, Introduction, pages 4b-5a).

Nevertheless, they must take care not to say more than is necessary; only as much as is needed for the world's creation, no more. Because of an overload of the Light, the vessels, which could not bear the overload of Light, shattered. From the Shattering of the Vessels, the forces of evil [*klippot*/shards] came into existence. **So, too, if one speaks overmuch; one thereby brings the evil forces into existence.** For [a person's speaking] is the aspect of an overload of the Light, because of which there was the Shattering of the Vessels that led to the forces of evil coming into existence.

לקוטי מוהר"ן סד:ד

ד וְדַע, כִּי מַחְלָקַת הִיא בְּחִינּוֹת בְּרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם. כִּי עָקַר בְּרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם - עַל־יְדֵי חֲלָל הַפְּנוּי כְּנִ"ל, כִּי בְּלֹא זֶה הָיָה הַכֹּל אֵין סוּף, וְלֹא הָיָה מְקוֹם לְבְרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם כְּנִ"ל, וְעַל־כֵּן צְמַצְמַס הָאוֹר לְצַדִּדָּיו, וְנַעֲשֶׂה חֲלָל הַפְּנוּי, וּבַתּוֹכּוֹ בְּרָא אֶת כָּל הַבְּרִיאָה, הַיְנוּ הַיָּמִים וְהַמְּדוֹת, עַל־יְדֵי הַדְּבָר, כְּנִזְכָּר לְעֵיל: בְּדָבָר ה' שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ וְכוּ'.

וְכֵן הוּא בְּחִינַת הַמַּחְלָקוֹת, כִּי אֵלוֹ הָיוּ כָּל הַתַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים אֶחָד, לֹא הָיָה מְקוֹם לְבְרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם, רַק עַל יְדֵי הַמַּחְלָקַת שְׁבִינִיָּהֶם, וְהֵם נִחְלָקִים זֶה מִזֶּה, וְכָל אֶחָד מוֹשֵׁף עֲצָמוֹ לְצַד אֶחָד, עַל יְדֵי זֶה נַעֲשֶׂה בִּינֵיהֶם בְּחִינּוֹת חֲלָל הַפְּנוּי, שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינּוֹת צְמַצְמוֹס הָאוֹר לְצַדִּדָּיו, שְׁבוּ הוּא בְּרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם עַל יְדֵי הַדְּבָר כְּנִ"ל.

כִּי כָּל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁכָּל אֶחָד מֵהֶם מְדַבֵּר, הַכֹּל הֵם רַק בְּשִׁבְלֵי בְרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה עַל יָדָם בַּתּוֹךְ הַחֲלָל הַפְּנוּי שְׁבִינִיָּהֶם. כִּי הַתַּלְמִידֵי־חֲכָמִים בּוֹרְאִים אֶת הַכֹּל עַל יְדֵי דְבָרֵיהֶם מֵה אֲנִי עֲבָדִי שְׁמָיָא וְאַרְעָא בְּמַלּוּלֵי, אִף אַתָּם כֵּן (כ"ט בּוֹהַר בַּהַקְדָּמָה דף ה').

אִף צָרִיךְ לְהִזָּהַר שְׁלֹא לְדַבֵּר יוֹתֵר מִדִּי, רַק כִּפִּי צָרִיךְ בְּרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם, לֹא יוֹתֵר. כִּי עַל יְדֵי רַבּוּי הָאוֹר, שְׁלֹא הָיוּ הַכֵּלִים וְכוּלָּם לְסַבֵּל רַבּוּי הָאוֹר, נִשְׁתַּבְּרוּ, וּמִשְׁבִּירַת הַכֵּלִים הָיָה הַתְּהוּוֹת הַקְּלִפּוֹת; כֵּן אִם אֶחָד מִרְבָּה לְדַבֵּר, מִזֶּה גּוֹרֵם הַתְּהוּוֹת הַקְּלִפּוֹת, כִּי הוּא בְּחִינַת רַבּוּי הָאוֹר, שֶׁעַל־יְדֵיָּהּ הָיוּ שְׁבִירַת הַכֵּלִים, שֶׁעַל־יְדֵיָּהּ הַתְּהוּוֹת הַקְּלִפּוֹת:

Study Guide by Beth Huppin

Conflict Resolution

- This text suggests that words have extraordinary power to create both good and bad outcomes. How does hearing or reading the words of others impact your own words, for good or for bad?
- Do you agree that words spoken at the wrong time or in the wrong way, even if they are true and wise, can bring “forces of evil into existence”? Have you experienced this?
- What might the “Vacated Space” described in this text look like in our human world?
- What makes it possible to create space for people who disagree with each other to sit together in mutual respect, believing in the value of each other?
- When that kind of space does not exist, or if only one person is willing to listen, can a person still learn and engage? What roles do curiosity and silence play in creating this space?

What Kind of Silence Do We Need?

<i>Chullin</i> 89a	חולין פט.
Rabbi Ile’a says: The world endures only in the merit of one who restrains [<i>shebolem</i>] oneself during a quarrel, as it is stated: “God hangs the Earth upon nothing [<i>belima</i>]” (Job 26:7).	אמר רבי אילעא אין העולם מתקיים אלא בשביל מי שבולם את עצמו בשעת מריבה שנאמר תולה ארץ על בלימה

Elie Wiesel, from his acceptance speech receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, 1986
“I swore never to be silent whenever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere.”

There are many types of silence. The restraint from speaking referred to in *Chullin* 89a is not the silence of ignoring injustice nor the silence of apathy. It is a silence that reflects true curiosity, respect, and desire for growth.

- We must “speak up” in the face of injustice, as Elie Wiesel says in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. What is the difference between the silence that Wiesel rightly condemns and the silence that Rabbi Ile’a and Rabbi Nachman ask us to practice?

- Name different reasons that you have been silent. Can you think of times when you have practiced the silence described by Rabbi Ile’a and Rabbi Nachman? What happened?

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, *From Enemy to Friend*, page 47

“The real problem is when we confuse genuine dialogue with its opposite, thinking we are relating to another when in fact we are speaking and listening only to ourselves.”

Does This Approach Work When There Is a Power Imbalance?

DADDY: They were speaking from a position of power. They were looking down, feeling bad for me. But I needed them to be with me...

Deep listening from a place of curiosity is difficult to achieve when there is a power imbalance. The following text addresses that issue:

<i>Rosh HaShanah</i> 25b	ראש השנה כה:
Fortunate is the generation in which the “greater” [in knowledge/power] listen to the lesser. For then, even more, the lesser will listen to the greater. [There is an objection to this advice:] But isn’t it an <i>obligation</i> [for the lesser to listen to those who are greater than them]? Rather, [it means that] when the greater listen to the lesser, the lesser will then [eventually feel safe enough to] apply that lesson to themselves [and will be more likely to listen to those in power/ the leaders of the generation].	אשרי הדור שהגדולים נשמעים לקטנים קל וחומר קטנים לגדולים קל וחומר חיובא הוא אלא מתוך שהגדולים נשמעים לקטנים נושאים קטנים קל וחומר בעצמן:

This text calls on leaders to take initiative to create a space in which they listen closely and with curiosity to those they lead. The silence described here and in Rabbi Nachman’s text may be a useful strategy for those in power. In this way, eventually, people without power feel heard and understood. At a minimum, using this strategy allows those in power to learn more about the fears held by those they lead. Leaders can then work to address those concerns in new ways. Remember Rabbi Nachman’s advice: too many words, even if true, will be the source of “evil forces.”

Amanda Ripley, journalist, in her article, "[Complicating the Narratives](#)"

"Humans need to be heard before they will listen."

- How do power imbalances impact the ability of people on both sides of a power scale to listen to each other from a place of curiosity and safety?
- Are you aware of situations in which people in power were able to sit quietly, listening with true curiosity, to those over whom they had power? What made those situations possible? What happened next?

Why Go To All This Trouble? Because We Need Meaningful Connection

Martin Buber speaks of the "Vacant Space" referred to in the Rabbi Nachman text. Buber describes that space as the foundation of human relationships:

Martin Buber, Jewish Philosopher, 1878-1965

"Our relationship lives in the space between us. It doesn't live in me or in you or even in the dialogue between the two us. It lives in the space we live in together, and that space is sacred space."

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, *From Enemy to Friend*, page 46

"For Buber, what is most important about our lives is not what is contained within us, but what happens between us and other people in what he calls the sphere of 'the between.' It is in the 'interhuman' dimension of life where we become ourselves, where truth and meaning are created, where I and Thou meet, and where we may glimpse the divine."

Daddy shares the same message:

DADDY: *Hanan, if we manage to be vulnerable enough to empathize with the person we are arguing with, we can't help but acknowledge them, their humanity, their dignity, and we begin to connect.*

Just as I see a reflection of my own face when I look into water, **I can see a reflection of my own heart if I am brave enough to look, with vulnerability and curiosity, into the heart of another.** Connecting in this way with another person allows me to observe my own soul in a new light. I become aware of a sacred spark within my soul that is inaccessible to me until the moment when I perceive, with love, the reflection emanating from within that other person's heart.

Think of someone with whom you disagree on many topics, but also love deeply. How do you understand the source of the love that you feel for this person? What do you learn about yourself from this person? In what ways have your disagreements helped you both grow?

DADDY: We need conflict, Hanan, because every conflict, every argument is an opportunity to connect and reconnect with the other person, *and by doing so, we get to know the other person and ourselves in a deeper way. As partners, the two of us can create something new that's bigger than our individual selves. But this is very important, so please listen to this carefully:* until you truly love your neighbor as yourself, until you have the humility and vulnerability to think about their happiness, their dignity, their humanity, just as much as you are thinking about your own, you will never resolve conflict.

Proverbs 27:19	משלי כז:יט
As face answers to face in water, so is it with one person's heart to another's.	כַּפְּנֵי הַפָּנִים לְפָנִים כְּנֹ לְבַיְהֶאָדָם לְאָדָם:

A Personal Note from Script Writer and Animator Hanan Harchol

In my research for this animation on conflict resolution, I encountered many fascinating and complex theories, principles, and strategies on the subject. My study materials included a brilliant educational workshop series entitled *Mahloket Matters* on the “*Beit Midrash Way*” of how to disagree constructively, from the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies. I spoke with Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth, one of the authors of the series, who is also the director of *Mosaica* – The Religious Peace Initiative. Rabbi Roth introduced me to Rabbi Dr. Howard Kaminsky, author of *Fundamentals of Jewish Conflict Resolution: Traditional Jewish Perspectives on Resolving Interpersonal Conflicts (Studies in Orthodox Judaism)*. This 500-plus page masterpiece breaks down conflict resolution from a theoretical and Jewish perspective. I also spoke with a professional peace activist and researched the methods of a former hostage negotiator. And, of course, I studied with numerous rabbis and text scholars and read and studied countless texts. Throughout all my research, I kept coming back to one realization: If the parties who were in conflict did not empathize with the opposing side, if they did not truly stand in the other person’s shoes, then even the best strategies and theories failed to resolve the conflict in a meaningful and lasting way.

On its surface, the concept of empathy seems simple. בראשית רבה כד: רבי עקיבא אומר: “ואהבת לרעך כמוך” (ויקרא יט:יח) זה כלל בתורה “Rabbi Akiva said: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18). This is a great principle of the Torah” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 24:7). However, empathy requires a person to become vulnerable, to become exposed. This exposure elicits fear, especially around someone whom you perceive as your enemy. As a result, as much as we aspire to love our neighbor as ourselves, we tend to avoid doing so.

This point leads me to one of the most significant lessons I came to in my research: There is a substantial personal cost to our avoidance of vulnerability and empathy. Our fear of making ourselves vulnerable, exposing ourselves, and showing our true feelings to others; our fear of truly standing in another person’s shoes; and our fear of truly empathizing with another human being’s predicament—all for the sake of “protecting” ourselves—get in the way of forming meaningful connections with our adversaries and resolving conflict. *In addition, our avoidance of vulnerability and empathy gets in the way of forming deep and meaningful connections with the people whom we love, prevents us from truly knowing ourselves, and interferes with our connection to God.* I believe this is so fundamental to the human condition and to Judaism that it is clearly spelled out in the very first chapters of the Torah.

In *Bereishit* 2:25, we read, “**The two of them were naked**, the man and his wife, **yet they felt no shame.**” I interpret this nakedness as being exposed, a type of vulnerability.



16 ויצו יהוה אלהים על־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגָּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat;

17 וּמֵעֵץ הַדְּעִיַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.”

25 וַיְהִי שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יָתְבַשְׂשׂוּ:

The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.

Only after they eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil were “...the eyes of both of them...

opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths” (*Bereishit*

3:7). This passage demonstrates that shame is something that is learned. You must have knowledge to feel shame. The Torah goes on to describe how they “hid.” When God asks, “Where are you?” the answer is “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and **I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid.**” (*Bereishit* 3:10). This is also the first time the Torah describes man feeling fear. God goes on to ask: “**Who told you that you were naked?**” (*Bereishit* 3:11).

6 וַתִּרְאֵהוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֹאכָל וְכִי תֹאמֶה־הוּא לְעֵינַיִם וַנִּחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׂפִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיָו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם־לְאִשְׁתָּהּ עִמָּה וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

7 וַתִּפְתַּח־נָהָ עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֲרוּמִם הֵם וַיִּתְפְּרוּ עֲלֵהּ תְאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חִגְרֹת:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

8 וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מְתַהַלֵּךְ בַּגָּן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגָּן:

They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

9 וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַיֶּכָּה:

The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

10 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־קוֹלִי שָׁמַעְתִּי בַּגָּן וַאֲנִי כִּי־עָרַם אֲנִי וְאֶחָבָא:

He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."

11 וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הִגִּיד לְךָ כִּי עֵרִים אָתָּה הַמִּוֹדֵעִין אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לְבִלְתִּי אֲכָל־מִמֶּנּוּ אֲכָלָתָּ:

Then He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?"

I interpret "Who told you that you were naked?" as God questioning the assumption of nakedness itself. Who told you that this condition that you freely accepted before is now "nakedness"? Maybe nakedness (i.e. vulnerability) is a good thing as opposed to something that causes shame and fear.

I believe the Torah is presenting this learned behavior (our avoidance of being vulnerable, our unwillingness to expose ourselves, our shame and fear of "nakedness") as the reason Adam and Eve hid from God and eventually led to the "fall." Only once we can truly love our neighbor as ourselves and overcome our fear of being vulnerable (exposed, naked) enough to empathize with the other person can we truly connect with that person. That connection, in turn, allows us to connect with our deepest selves and, ultimately, with God. Rabbi Nachman and Rav Kook believe that we need conflict because we need the opposing side to help us create and build something new and larger than ourselves. But this is going to require both vulnerability and empathy. Maybe this is what the rabbis were talking about when they wrote about *Olam Ha-Ba* (the World to Come) or a return to *Gan Eden* (the Garden of Eden).

Hanan Harchol

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