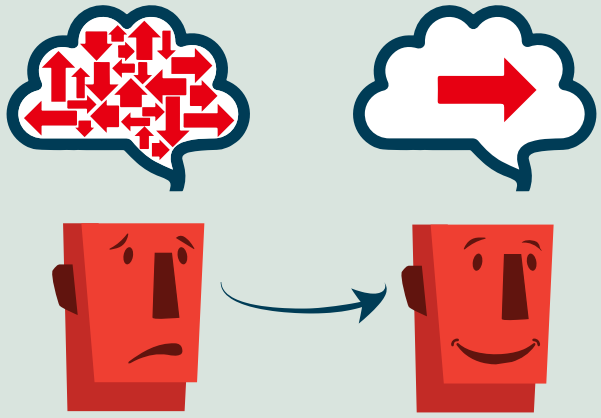
Pardes is grateful for the support of the EGL Charitable Foundation, which sponsored in part the creation of these materials.

Mahloket Matters:

Navigating Inner Challenges and Societal Discord through Jewish Text and Social Emotional Learning



Young adults have always had to navigate the tricky tension between forming an individual identity and the competing need for social belonging. However, today's toxic environment of political polarization, demonization of the other, and a global pandemic has pushed this tension into overdrive. How can we help our children and students meet these challenges?

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators believes that the integration of Jewish text study with Social Emotional Learning can help equip students with the cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal skills they need to better manage internal and external conflicts. As such, we have created new educational materials called **Mahloket Matters: Navigating Inner Challenges and Societal Discord through Jewish text and Social Emotional Learning**, which harness Jewish texts and Social Emotional Learning skills in an interactive and experiential manner.

The educational materials include three versatile units that can be used for in-person learning, distance learning, or adapted for home use. Each unit comes with an educator's guide, accompanying slides, and student materials.

For a limited period of time, PCJE is offering all three educational units free of charge to schools and youth groups in exchange for feedback. If you are interested in piloting the full program this year, please contact Sefi Kraut at sefik@pardes.org.il.

We are pleased to partner with The Jewish Education Project to share Unit 1 of this program, **"The Foundations of *Mahloket* (Disagreement)."** Please see the information table below to help you navigate the lessons in this unit.

Note: click on the links in the table to acces the accompanying slides and student materials.

Unit 1: The Foundations of *Mahloket* (Disagreement)	Lesson Title	Intended Age Group	Page # in Educator's Guide	Accompanying Slides CLICK HERE	Accompanying Student Materials CLICK HERE
Lesson 1	"The Value of 49/49"	Teens	p2–8	Slides #1–5	p1–5
Lesson 2	"Two Types of *Mahlokot* (Disagreements)"	Tweens & Teens	p9–13	Slides #6–9	p6–11
Lesson 3	"Understanding Ourselves and Others"	Teens	p14–20	Slides #10–21	p12–17

If you are interested in learning more about this Mahloket Matters program for teens, click here or contact Sefi Kraut at sefik@pardes.org.il.

Mahloket Matters:

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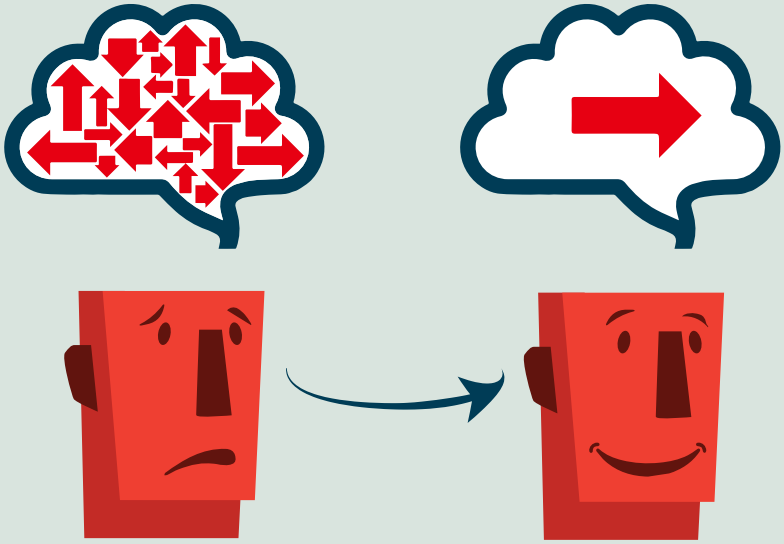

Overview: Unit 1- The Foundations of *Mahloket* (Disagreement)

This Educator's Guide for Unit 1 will create a framework to discuss the concept of *mahloket* (disagreement) based on Jewish texts and social psychology. We will explore some of the factors that distinguish between a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* (a disagreement for the sake of Heaven) and a *mahloket lo le-shem shamayim* (a disagreement not for the sake of Heaven). We will discover that a true *mahloket le-shem shamayim* can actually provide opportunities to develop human connection, deep mutual respect, and strong relationships.

Unfortunately, disagreement all too often turns destructive. We will explore some of the underlying factors that perpetuate *mahloket lo le-shem shamayim* and how we can try to adjust our mindsets toward cultivating *constructive* disagreements instead.

Duration:

There are 3 lessons in this unit. Depending on how much time you choose to spend on the discussion or activities, each lesson is approximately 50–75 minutes long. You may decide to split one lesson into multiple sessions, especially if you are teaching over Zoom.

Enduring Understandings:

- *Mahloket* (disagreement) can represent a positive opportunity for growth and deepening of relationships.
- Good people may have diametrically opposing views on moral issues due to a difference in *prioritization* of values rather than either side being devoid of values.
- The more we understand why others hold moral conclusions that are so radically different than our own, the more likely we will be able to engage with others productively.

Essential Questions:

- What is the point of interacting with people who disagree with me?
- What distinguishes a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* from a *mahloket lo le-shem shamayim?*
- Why do good people sometimes disagree with each other on moral issues?

If you are interested in learning more about this Mahloket Matters program for teens, click here or contact Sefi Kraut at sefik@pardes.org.il.

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Note to Educator:

This unit introduces a lot of important terms and concepts that will be referenced throughout the *Mahloket Matters* materials. Our hope is that this language will become a shared vocabulary that animates classroom discussion. Therefore, we suggest that you make a running list of terms and concepts on a poster or Google Doc for easy reference. Alternatively, you can reference Pardes-provided slide #1 for a full list of Unit 1 key terms and concepts.

Key vocabulary & concepts in Unit 1:

- 49/49 conversation (lesson 1)
- intellectual humility (lesson 1)
- intellectual curiosity (lesson 1)
- *mahloket le-shem shamayim* (lesson 2)
- *mahloket lo le-shem shamayim* (lesson 2)
- elephant/rider (lesson 3)
- moral foundations (lesson 3)

Lesson 1

The Value of 49/49

This opening activity is intended to generate student reflection and sharing about the value and impact of disagreements on a democratic society.

Activity: "Where Do I Stand?"

Materials:

- Tape
- Marker
- 2 large pieces of paper on which one is written "Democracies grow **stronger** when there is disagreement among citizens" and the other paper says, "Democracies become **weaker** when there is disagreement among citizens."

Instructions:

1. Before the activity, divide the classroom in half with a line of tape on the floor.
2. Using a marker, write "Democracies grow **stronger** when there is disagreement among citizens" on one large piece of paper. Write "Democracies become **weaker** when there is disagreement among citizens" on the second large piece of paper.
3. Hang one sign on a classroom wall, and hang the other sign on the opposite wall of the room.
4. Read the statements on both signs out loud or ask a student to do so. Give the students a few moments to silently reflect on the statements on both signs.
5. Instruct the students to choose the statement they most agree with and walk to that side of the room. Every student should find a partner on their side of the room and discuss why they believe that disagreement among citizens either strengthens or weakens democracy.
6. Ask two or three participants on each side of the room to share their reasoning with the whole group.

School Distance Learning Adjustment: Ask students to vote whether they think disagreement among citizens strengthens or weakens democracy. The voting can be done by a show of hands, Google form, Zoom poll, or another online polling tool. Ask at least one student who voted for each side to share their reasoning with the rest of the group.

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Alternatively, this activity can be conducted online using either "Padlet" or "lino board," which provide virtual post-it notes that can be moved around on a shared virtual bulletin board. Students should post their own views and then read and respond to the post-its of their peers.

A variation of this activity can be done with your family around the dining room table! On one large piece of paper, write "Democracies grow **stronger** when there is disagreement among citizens." On another large piece of paper, write "Democracies grow **weaker** when there is disagreement among citizens." Ask every participating family member to take a pen and write supporting arguments for each statement on the respective pieces of paper. Tell family members that you will read each of the supporting arguments out loud. Anyone who agrees with a particular argument should stand up as it is read out loud. Repeat this process for each argument and then discuss as a group.

Explain to students that they are about to learn a midrash from the 10th century that gives us a window into how our Jewish tradition frames the value of disagreement.

Text Study: Midrash Psalms, 12

Providing a copy of the text below, the educator can choose to lead the following text study with the whole class or divide the students into *hevrutot* (learning partners) in person or in Zoom breakout rooms.

Text 1.1 (see slide #2)

Midrash Psalms, 12 (900CE, Land of Israel)

*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.*

He (Moses) said to God: Master of the Universe, when will we know the truth of the matter?

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.

מדרש תהלים, מזמור יב

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.

אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, עד
מתי נעמוד על בירורו של דבר?

אמר לו: "אחרי רבים להטות."
רבו המטמאין - טמא. רבו
המטהרין - טהור.

Note to Educator:

It is up to you to decide which of the following discussion questions you would like to pose to your students and how deeply you would like to dive into the questions. We have given you a lot of potential talking points; please choose whatever suits you and your students best!

Discussion Questions:

1. According to this midrash, God intentionally gave the Jewish people a Torah that was NOT clear cut. Why?

   Students may suggest that a "clear-cut" Torah would create a tradition that is too rigid and unable to respond to new or changing circumstances. They might also note that God wants human beings to be partners in the process of bringing Torah into the world. Humans are meant to be involved in the decision-making process rather than simply receivers of a tradition given to them from on high.

2. What word(s) would you use to describe how Moses is feeling when he poses his question to God? Why do you think Moses is frustrated?

   One can imagine that after hearing God offer 49 reasons why a matter is classified as "pure" and 49 opposing reasons why the same matter is classified as "impure," Moses grows impatient. He has had enough of all of the pontificating and wants the bottom line. What is the *truth*? What should he *do*?

3. 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?

   Here it might be interesting to tell your students that the number 49 in this midrash is not random and see if they can detect how the number 49 acts as a clue to answering this question. You can also offer the hint that the number 49 is significant, because it is the number before 50.

   Why is the number 50 significant in Jewish tradition? 50 represents a closing or a completion. Here are two Biblical examples to illustrate this point.

   - Jubilee year, the 50th year in the Jewish agricultural cycle, is the closing of a time period. It functions as a "re-set" so that, according to Jewish law, all land returns to its original owners in the 50th year.
   - We count 49 days from the holiday of Passover and then we celebrate the new holiday of Shavuot, which begins on day 50.

   The Rabbis understood the symbolic significance of the number 50 and therefore integrated it into Rabbinic literature. For example, there is a midrash that states that the Israelites descended to the 49th level of impurity in Egypt. And it was at that precise moment that God decided to redeem them and to take them out of Egypt.

   Why did God redeem the Israelites specifically once they descended to the 49th level of impurity? Because God knew that 50 is a "done deal!" If the Israelites had been left in Egypt long enough to descend to the 50th level of impurity, they would have been beyond redemption at that point. There is no bouncing back from 50, because 50 represents a closing or a completion.

Now that we know that the number 50 represents completion, what is the significance of God giving a Torah that needs to be interpreted 49 reasons one way and 49 reasons the opposite way, before voting and ruling according to the majority?

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Activity: "Seeing Double"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slides #3–5
- Smartboard/projector/individual digital devices

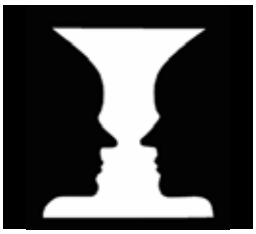
Instructions:

1. Direct students to slides #3–5. Show each slide one at a time and ask students what is the first thing that they see in each picture. Each of these pictures contains **multiple images**, and most people tend to see only one or the other image first and require more time to see the alternate image.

   Slide 3: a man playing the saxophone/ woman's face

   Slide 4: two human silhouettes facing each other/ a goblet

   Slide 5: clown/ sleeping man



2. Have the students try to help each other identify both images in the picture. You can ask students to come up to the board and use a finger (or a digital highlighter tool) to trace the images in the picture to help the class identify them.

Takeaway:

This activity illustrates that **talking to others can reveal things that you cannot see by yourself. In other words, no human being can see it all, know it all, or attain the complete picture - nobody holds all 50! We become wiser by recognizing the limits of our knowledge.**

Of course, we can and should educate ourselves on important issues and cultivate informed opinions. We might invest so much time and effort into researching an issue that we have "49" excellent reasons to support a particular side. Nevertheless, it is not humanly possible to attain *total* knowledge or *total* understanding.

What, then, is God trying to teach us in Midrash Psalms (text 1.1)? A person must have the **intellectual humility** to understand that they cannot posess total knowledge ("hold all 50"). One must also activate **intellectual curiosity** in order to be open to learning from the knowledge and experiences of others. Intellectual humility and intellectual curiosity are the ingredients necessary to engage in an authentic 49/49 conversation. A **49/49 conversation** is a conversation in which each party brings their own viewpoints - their own 49 - as well as a genuine interest in hearing the "opposing 49" of someone else with a different viewpoint. We need to have conversations with people who disagree with us, because they provide us with perspectives that we cannot access on our own.

The midrash suggests that one is permitted to vote on a course of action only after engaging in an authentic 49/49 conversation. Once a person has listened and considered perspectives different than his own, he is then free to choose whichever path he thinks is best. It is possible that the conversation will have persuaded him to change his mind or perhaps it further confirmed his original beliefs. Either way, it can be considered a successful 49/49 conversation if both participants emerge from it with a *deeper understanding* of the perspectives, needs, values, or

fears of the person on the other side of the table. When each side understands where the other is coming from, it has a humanizing effect which is a crucial first step to engaging in conversation with people who disagree with us.

Activity: "Considering the Other 49"

Materials:

- A copy of the "would you rather" worksheet (p4–5 in the student materials)
- Pen per student

Instructions:

1. Provide students with a worksheet that lists the following lighthearted "would you rather" debate topics from this website:
    - Would you rather live in a house shaped like a circle or a house shaped like a triangle?
    - Would you rather be the author of a popular book or a musician in a band who released a popular album?
    - Would you rather have a magic carpet that flies or a see-through submarine?
    - Would you rather everything in your house be one color or every single wall and door be a different color?
    - Would you rather be a wizard or a superhero?
    - Would you rather be able to jump as far as a kangaroo or hold your breath as long as a whale?
    - Would you rather be able to type/text very fast or be able to read really quickly?
    - Would you rather become five years older or two years younger?
2. You may want to give the class an opportunity to come up with one or two of their own "would you rather" options.
3. Ask each student to silently choose the thing they "would rather" by circling or highlighting their preference on the worksheet. The educator should tell the students in advance whether or not they will be asked to submit their worksheet at the end of the activity.
4. Give students a minute to write 2-3 reasons on the worksheet to support their preference (e.g., I would rather be a wizard than a superhero, because superheroes are never allowed to take vacation).
5. Select two students who voted for different sides of the "would you rather" scenario to present their case to the rest of the class in 60 seconds or less. Remind students that "intellectual humility" should prevent anyone from mistakenly believing that they have viewed the issue from every possible angle and that "intellectual curiosity" requires an interest to genuinely listen and try to understand the other viewpoint. The educator should decide how many "would you rather" scenarios should be presented to the class.
6. The students listening to their classmates present should take notes on the worksheet during the presentation. When hearing the presentation from the student who *disagrees* with them, the listener should write down 2–3 arguments that the presenter made to support their side of the issue. When hearing the presentation from the student who

agrees with them, the listener should add any new points to their worksheet or make a check next to any overlapping points.

7. Ask several students to share out loud an interesting argument they heard in favor of the OTHER side, and why they found that argument compelling (e.g., someone who would rather be a wizard will share an interesting argument made by the person who would prefer being a superhero).
8. Take a "public vote" on each of the "would you rather" scenarios. For example, the educator or student should read out loud, "Would you rather be a wizard or a superhero?" and ask all those who chose to be a wizard to raise their hands and then ask all those who chose to be a superhero to raise their hands. For fun, keep a tally of the votes for each scenario. You can also conduct this voting/tallying process by creating a Google form, Zoom poll, or another online polling tool.
9. Ask if any of the students changed their vote after hearing arguments for the other side. If students did change their votes, ask them what persuaded them to change their minds. If nobody changed their vote, take the opportunity to note that the goal here was to practice 49/49, intellectual humility, and intellectual curiosity, which, if executed authentically, should result in a *better understanding* of the opposing view even if not agreement with the other side.

This activity can be easily tailored for your family. Parents or children can suggest "would you rather" scenarios particular to your family. For example, "would you rather pizza night be Tuesdays or Thursdays?" This is a fun way to to launch a 49/49 conversation related to issues that come up in your household.

Written Reflection:

If you could sit down with anyone in the world to engage in an authentic 49/49 conversation, who would you choose? What would you hope to learn from the conversation?

Note to Educator:

The written reflection can be an in-class assignment, an exit ticket, or a homework assignment. It is a good idea to let students know in advance whether they will be expected to submit their written reflection to the teacher.

Lesson 2

Two Types of *Mahlokot*

Based on Midrash Psalms (text 1.1), we've established the concept of 49/49 and that sometimes God appreciates and even encourages *mahloket*, because it can be a source for growth. But there are also plenty of examples in which *mahloket* is a source of terrible pain and suffering.

Written Reflection:

Try to think of someone with whom you've had a disagreement at some point in your life. Did you experience that disagreement as constructive or destructive? What made it feel like a constructive or destructive disagreement? Has your perspective of that experience changed over time?

You may want to facilitate a family discussion about constructive and destructive disagreement using these questions, as opposed to using the questions as a written reflection prompt.

Note to Educator:

It is a good idea to let students know in advance whether they will be expected to submit their written reflection to the teacher.

Now that students have had a chance to reflect on their personal experiences with constructive and destructive conflict, the following activity will give them a chance to think it through together.

Activity: "Mahloket Mind-Map"

[This activity is an adaptation of the "Affinity Mapping" activity in *Quality Questioning* by Walsh and Sattes, p203]

Materials:

- Pen per student
- 10 sticky notes per student; 5 of one color and 5 of another color
- 1 large piece of paper that will be used by a group of 2–4 students to display the results of their thinking together
- 1 marker for each large piece of paper

Distance Learning Adjustment: This activity can be conducted online using either "Padlet" or "lino board," which provide virtual post-it notes that can be moved around on a shared virtual bulletin board.

Instructions:

1. Write the prompt "**What makes a *mahloket* constructive and what makes a *mahloket* destructive?**" on the white board or on a slide.
2. Tell students that the first part of this activity will be done individually and the second part of the activity will be done in groups. Let students know with whom they will be working.

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3. Designate one sticky note color as the "constructive *mahloket*" color and the other as the "destructive *mahloket*" color. In silence, students individually write one idea per sticky note using just a few words on the note.
4. After each student has had a chance to write down 4–6 of their own ideas, the members of each group silently place their sticky notes on that group's designated large piece of paper. During this posting, the students read each others' ideas and may write new ideas on a sticky note and add it to the large piece of paper if they'd like.
5. Once all of the sticky notes are on the large page, the group members now discuss which ideas relate to each other and move the sticky notes around to form clusters of ideas.
6. After clustering the sticky notes, the students work together to create a title for each set of ideas. They will use the marker to write the title of each set of ideas above the respective cluster of sticky notes.
7. Each group can share their ideas with the class or students can walk around the room to look at what the other groups came up with.
8. Students should identify common or repeated themes, as well as unique groupings.

The students have reflected on their own experiences and collaborated to consider what makes a *mahloket* constructive or destructive. Explain to them that they are about to learn a mishnah from the 3rd century that addresses the same question. The mishnah outlines two broad categories of disagreements: ***mahloket le-shem shamayim*** (disagreement for the sake of Heaven, i.e., constructive conflict) and ***mahloket lo le-shem shamayim*** (disagreement not for the sake of Heaven, i.e., destructive conflict).

Text Study: Mishnah Avot, 5:17 & Meiri, Avot Ch. 5

Providing a copy of the text below, the educator can choose to lead the following text study with the whole class or divide the students into *hevrutot* (learning partners) in person or in Zoom breakout rooms.

Text 2.1 (see slide #6)

Mishnah Avot, 5:17 (3rd Cen., Land of Israel)

*Any disagreement (*mahloket*) that is for the sake of Heaven (*le-shem shamayim*), will continue to exist (other translations of* sofah le-hitkayem*: 'is destined to endure'); and one that is not for the sake of Heaven, will not continue to exist.*

Which is a disagreement that is for the sake of Heaven? This is a disagreement of Hillel and Shammai.

And one that is not for the sake of Heaven? This is the disagreement of Korah and his group.

משנה אבות ה:יז

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:

Discussion Question:

1. What is NOT clear from this mishnah?
    - Why was the disagreement of Hillel and Shammai considered a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* (disagreement for the sake of Heaven) and the disagreement of Korah and his group considered a *mahloket lo le-shem shamayim* (disagreement not for the sake of Heaven)? What distinguishes between the two types of *mahlokot*?

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Students might come up with their own hypotheses to answer this question, especially if they are familiar with the 'characters' mentioned in this mishnah - Hillel, Shammai, and Korah.

Additional Background About Hillel, Shammai, & Korah

Hillel and Shammai were two sages who lived at the turn of the 1st century. They disagreed with each other on many issues. Rabbinic literature records even more disputes between the disciples of these two sages, known as Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai (the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai). One of their famous disputes revolves around how the *hanukiah* should be lit on the holiday of *Hanukkah*. Should we light one candle on the first night of the holiday and add one more candle on each subsequent night of the holiday (Beit Hillel)? Or should we light eight candles on the first night and take away one candle on each subsequent night of the holiday (Beit Shammai)? In this case, as in the majority of the disputes between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, common practice follows the opinion of Beit Hillel.

Who was Korah? After leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses and Aaron continued to serve as the Israelite leaders in the wilderness. Korah, a first cousin of Moses and Aaron, organized a rebellion of 250 people against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Ultimately, God caused the earth to open up and swallow Korah and his entourage (Numbers 16).

The 13th-century French commentator, Rabbi Menachem Meiri, addresses this question. He explains why Hillel and Shammai are considered the paradigm for *mahloket le-shem shamayim* and Korah and his group are considered the paradigm for *mahloket lo le-shem shamayim.*

Text 2.2 (see slide #7)

Meiri, Avot Chapter 5 [Meiri 1249–1310, France]

And which is the mahloket *that is for the sake of Heaven?*

That of Hillel and Shammai, for one would rule on a matter and the other would disagree with him in order to understand the truth and not just for the sake of provocation or (a desire) to win.

בית הבחירה למאירי, אבות פרק ה'

ואמר איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים?
[זו] של הלל ושמאי! שהיה אחד מורה הוראה והשני חולק עליו להודעת האמת, ולא לקנטר ולא לנצוח.

Text 2.3 (See slide #8)

Meiri, Avot Chapter 5

And which is the mahloket *that is not for the sake of Heaven?*

That of Korah and his congregation, for they came to complain about Moshe Rabbenu, may he rest in peace, about his leadership, (solely) out of jealousy and provocation, and (a desire) to win.

בית הבחירה למאירי, אבות פרק ה'

ואיזו היא מחלוקת שלא לשם שמים?
זו של קרח ועדתו - שבאו לקנטר על משה רבינו עליו השלום ועל הנהגתו מדרך קנאה וקנטור ונצוח.

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Discussion Question:

Based on the commentary of the Meiri (texts 2.2 and 2.3), how would you distinguish between a *mahloket* that *is* for the sake of Heaven vs. a *mahloket* that is *not* for the sake of Heaven?

> According to the Meiri, MOTIVATION is one distinguishing factor between a *mahloket le'shem shamayim* and a *mahloket lo le'shem shamayim*. Hillel and Shammai debated with each other in the pursuit of truth, not out of a desire to be right or to prove the other wrong. In contrast, Korah and his group were motivated by jealousy and power.
>
> No doubt that clarifying one's motive or intention before engaging in disagreement is an important first step on the road to constructive conflict. However, it is only one piece of a much more complex puzzle. Unfortunately, positive intentions do not always lead to positive impact.

Activity: "Missing the Mark"

Materials:

- The "Missing the Mark" scenario text (written below and on p.9 in the student materials)
- Optional: pen and paper to record written answers to the discussion questions

Instructions:

Read the scenario below and answer the discussion questions. This activity can be done as a whole class, in groups, or individually.

> John is a college student majoring in graphic arts. He applied for a very competitive summer internship at the prestigious design company, ProDesign Inc. Two weeks before his interview for the internship, John received an email from the company informing him that he must create a comprehensive design portfolio and be prepared to present it at his interview.
>
> Rob, John's roommate and friend, knows how badly John wants this internship. He told Rob several times that this internship could be the key to launching his career in graphic design.
>
> The day before the interview, Rob saw John's portfolio sitting on the coffee table. He looked closely through every page of his friend's work. John walked into the living room just as Rob finished looking at the last page of the portfolio. Rob remarked, "Dude, your portfolio looks great! I think it would be even better if you chose a flashier theme and used brighter colors in your drawings." John's face turned bright red. He walked straight to his bedroom and slammed the door behind him.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was Rob's intention in this scenario, and how did his comments impact John? Could Rob have done anything differently so that his positive intentions would have led to a positive impact?
2. Do you have any examples from your own life - home, school, or community - in which someone did or said something with good intentions but it had a negative impact on you? Can you think of a time when you said or did something with good intentions but it had a negative impact on someone else?

Note to Educator:

You may want to mention to your students that sometimes good intentions also produce *mixed impact*. Meaning, the intentions and subsequent action may cause some good consequences but also cause some bad consequences. The ratio of the good to bad consequences may or may not be equal.
Bonus question: If you suspect that your good intentions might produce "mixed impact," what factors would you take into consideration when deciding whether or not it is worth it to proceed with your intended course of action?

We've established that checking one's motivation is an important component of creating *mahloket le-shem shamayim*. We've also noted that positive motivations alone cannot cultivate constructive conflict. Several commentators on Mishnah Avot 5:17 (text 2.1) identified additional important tips for developing constructive conflict based on the relationship between Hillel and Shammai.

Please watch this 3-minute video (see slide #9) and write down the 4 *mahloket le-shem shamayim* "pro-tips" that we can learn from Hillel and Shammai.

- Debate the issues without attacking people and harming relationships.
- Check your motivation: are you trying to win or to solve problems?
- Listen to the other side and be open to admitting that you might be wrong.
- Consider that you might both be right, despite holding opposite positions.

Ask your students which of these 4 tips they think is the easiest to put into practice and which of these 4 tips they think is the most difficult to put into practice. Why?

Note to Educator:

This is a good opportunity to remind students that *mahloket le-shem shamayim* is hard to achieve. Sometimes we have the best of intentions, and it still goes wrong. But our goal is not to be perfect. After all, we already know that it is not humanly possible to be perfect, because nobody can be a "full 50!" Instead, our goal is to try to improve ourselves and the world around us by being lifelong learners. We will all inevitably make mistakes along the way, because that is part of the learning process.

Activity: "Making It Mine"

[This activity is taken from CASEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook, p42]

Materials:

- Optional: pen and paper to record written answers to the discussion questions

Instructions:

1. Ask participants to reflect on what they have learned, then ask, "Thinking about what you have learned today, what is one takeaway you want to try, and why? A takeaway can be an idea, a strategy, a tool, or an action step."
2. Give participants a minute of silent think time.
3. Debrief by pairing participants and setting a timer for 1–2 minutes for each person to share their takeaway and thinking with their partner. If time permits, invite several participants to share their own takeaway and thinking (not their partner's) with the whole group.

In lessons 1 and 2, we focused on *mahloket* through a Jewish lens. In lesson 3, we will add to our understanding of *mahloket* through the expertise of social psychologist Jonthan Haidt.

There are four components to this lesson:

- The Reactive and Rational Parts of the Brain
- The Impact of an Out of Sync Brain
- Roots of Difference
- Hot Topic Headlines

Feel free to select whichever sections of lesson 3 best suit your particular context.

Lesson 3 Understanding Ourselves & Others

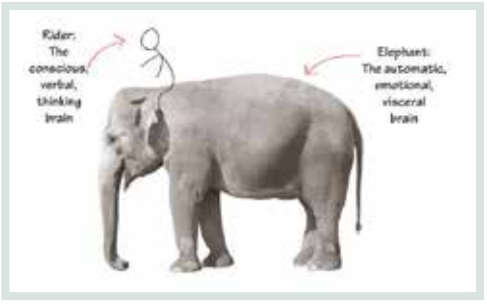
The concepts of 49/49 and *mahloket le-shem shamayim* represent several key Rabbinic ideas behind the *ideal* type of disagreement.

Why is *mahloket le-shem shamayim* so hard to achieve?
Why are so many disputes destructive instead of constructive?

We are going to look to the field of social psychology to help us address this question.

Social psychologist Dr. Jonathan Haidt published a best-selling book in 2012 called, *"The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics And Religion."* Haidt asks how it is possible that two good, well-informed people could arrive at radically different beliefs about fundamental issues of morality, politics, and religion. Furthermore, he wonders why neither of these good, well-informed people is able to convince the other to change his mind (see slide #10).

Haidt explains that the human mind is divided into 2 parts: the **Elephant** and the **Rider**. The elephant represents our quick, automatic intuitive thinking, and it is controlled by the part of the brain called the amygdala. The rider represents our slow, rational reasoning, and it is controlled by the part of the brain called the pre-frontal cortex (see slide #11).



Let's see our "Elephants" at Work:

- ask a random student, "what is your cell phone number?" [student offers immediate response]
- ask a random student, "what color are your eyes?" [student offers immediate response]
- ask a random student, "what is 2+2?" [student offers immediate response]
- ask a random student, "what is the name of Student X sitting to your right?" [student offers immediate response]

Emphasize that the students answered all four of those questions immediately, without having to pause to think. That quick, automatic response is the Elephant part of the brain doing its job.

Why is the automatic, intuitive function of the brain so important? Students may answer that it would be hard to keep up with the pace of life if we had to deliberately think about every little thing. Students might also say that quick, gut reactions are sometimes necessary to keep us safe. For example, the Elephant is what causes us to quickly remove our hand from a scorching hot pot.

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What is the function of the "Rider?" The Rider represents our slow, rational brain. This part of the brain is activated for tasks that require conscious thought and effort. For example, the Rider must be activated to help us solve the equation 56X124 in our heads or analyze the economic, social, and political causes of World War II.

What is the relationship between the Elephant and the Rider?

Activity: "In Sync & Out of Sync"

(this activity is taken from the Open Mind Platform)

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slides #12–14
- Smartboard/ projector/ personal tech device to see the slides
- Watch or clock with a second hand

Instructions:

1. This activity is meant to be performed together by the whole class.
2. Display slide #12 with the assignment instructions, "As quickly as possible, please read out loud the words below (read from left to right)." Tell the students to read the words out loud together. Keep track of how many seconds it takes the students to complete this task.
3. Display slide #13 with the assignment instructions for Round 2 of this activity: "This time, as quickly as possible, please say out loud the COLORS that you see. Do NOT say the word that is written. Instead, say the COLOR that you see (from left to right)."
4. Display slide #14 with the list of words. Tell the students to name the colors out loud together. Keep track of how many seconds it takes the students to complete this task.

Green	Red	Brown
Pink	Black	Yellow
Orange	Grey	Purple
Blue	Tan	Pink

Inform the students of how long it took them to complete the first assignment vs. the second assignment. Ask them why they think the second assignment was harder.

Explain to the students that in the first assignment, their Elephants and Riders were working *together* in total harmony. They were asked to read words out loud, and the automatic reaction upon seeing words in a language that you recognize is to read those words. However, in assignment two, they were asked to go AGAINST their natural instincts by naming the colors instead of reading the words. In that case, their Elephants and Riders were NOT in sync. It was much harder to complete this task, because the Elephant was directing the brain to automatically read the words and the Rider needed to OVERRIDE the Elephant in order for the brain to slow down, think, and complete the actual assignment.

The Role of the Elephant and the Rider in *Mahloket*

Disagreements typically involve not just the intellect but also the heart. Every person has their own sensitivities, beliefs, and values. When someone expresses a view that you perceive as offensive or as an attack on your values, you may feel threatened to your core. In the face of

that threat, you will likely feel unsafe. The Elephant part of the brain thinks you are in danger and often immediately goes into a reactive, defensive mode even if you are not in actual danger.

In a case where you feel threatened in conversation, the Rider has the very difficult job of trying to slow down your Elephant in order to enable you to continue to listen, process, think calmly, and even feel empathy or compassion for the other person. Unlike the carefree example of the words and colors, the disconnect between the Elephant and the Rider in this scenario has terrible consequences; it torpedoes our ability to listen and talk to people with whom we disagree.

We will learn skills in our next unit about how to stay in the driver's seat in contentious situations so that the Elephant does not run the show.

Understanding the Roots of Our Differences

The concept of the Elephant and the Rider helps us understand, scientifically, why it is so difficult for people to engage in rational conversation when they feel that their core beliefs or identity is under attack. Haidt argues that the more we understand *why* others hold moral conclusions that are so radically different than our own, the less likely we are to feel threatened by their views and, therefore, more likely to be able to engage with them productively.

We will begin our exploration of how people arrive at such different moral conclusions by starting with something that everyone has in common (see slide #15).

Explain to students that all human beings have the same 5 taste receptors on their tongues. Ask students to vote by a show of hands on the kinds of food that they like (salty, bitter, sweet, sour, umami). Though we all have the same taste receptors, people have different particular taste preferences. Ask students why they think different people prefer different kinds of food. Students will likely say that food preferences are a result of culture, habit, and upbringing.

Haidt draws a parallel between taste receptors and something he calls "**moral foundations,**" which is another way of saying "core values." He claims that all human beings share 6 moral foundations.

Read through the 6 'moral foundations' together as a class (see slide #16).

1. Care/harm

This foundation is related to our...ability to feel (and dislike) the pain of others. It underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance.

2. Fairness/cheating

This foundation... generates ideas of justice, rights, and autonomy.

3. Loyalty/betrayal

This foundation... 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."

4. Authority/subversion

This foundation... underlies virtues of leadership and followership, including deference to legitimate authority and respect for traditions.

5. Sanctity/degradation

This foundation... underlies religious notions of striving to live in an elevated, less carnal, more noble way.

6. Liberty/oppression

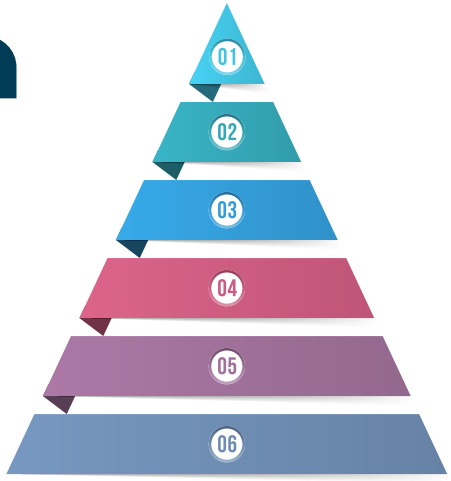
This foundation is about ...resentment people feel toward those who dominate them and restrict their liberty (freedom).

Haidt argues that these moral foundations serve as building blocks for morality just as our taste receptors serve as building blocks for our food preferences. In other words, though everyone possesses all 6 moral foundations, people prioritize the moral foundations differently from one another. For example, someone might view the moral foundation of "care" as their top priority regarding a particular issue while someone else might view the moral foundation of "authority" as their top priority regarding the same issue. The different prioritization of values in this case will likely lead each of these people to different moral conclusions about that particular issue.

Why do people prioritize the moral foundations differently? Culture, habits, and upbringing have a major impact on the way people prioritize their core values (similarly to food preferences). Humans continuously form groups that have their own ways of doing things, their own ways of looking at things, and their own ways of communicating. Those factors impact the way we see the world and, therefore, the way we prioritize our core values.

How would YOU prioritize the moral foundations?

Activity: "Prioritizing Your Moral Foundations"



Materials:

- Pardes-provided slide #17
- "Moral Foundations Pyramid" worksheet (p.14 in student materials)
- Pen per student

Instructions:

1. Ask each student to decide how they would prioritize the 6 moral foundations (see slide #17).
2. Each student should fill in the "moral foundations pyramid." Write the moral foundation that is your top priority at the top of the pyramid. Write your second most important moral foundation in the space second to the top of the pyramid, etc.
3. Each student should compare their pyramid with one classmate. The pair should discuss how their pyramids are similar and different and why they chose to prioritize the moral foundations as they did. Students should also discuss whether they can imagine a scenario that would cause them to prioritize their core values differently in that particular case.
4. If time permits, invite several participants to share their own takeaway and thinking (not their partner's) with the whole group.

Takeaway:

Two good people who are equally informed might come to opposite moral conclusions not because either of them *lacks* morals but because they *prioritize* their core values differently. If we recognize that concept then we can focus on trying to *understand* the other rather than simply dismissing and demonizing the other as evil.

How are different prioritizations of the 6 moral foundations reflected in some of the polarizing issues of today?

Activity: "Hot Topic Headlines"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slides #18–20
- Smartboard/ projector/ personal tech device to see the slides
- A copy of the 6 moral foundations for each student

Instructions:

1. Show slide #18. Tell students that they are meant to read the question but NOT to answer it: "If Donna's state was considering revising its welfare policies, which view would Donna be more likely to take?"

   a) We should be more generous, especially to people raising children.

   b) We should be more vigilant about cheaters who are "milking" the system.

2. Ask the students, "If Donna chose view A, from which moral foundation(s) is she likely drawing? If Donna chose view B, from which moral foundation(s) is she likely drawing?"

   (This example is taken from Open Mind)

Note to Educator:

Emphasize for the students that if Donna chose view A (care), that does not necessarily mean that she does not believe in the core value of fairness. And if she selected choice B (fairness), that does not necessarily mean that she does not believe in the core value of care. Donna might very well believe in BOTH the core values of "care" and "fairness." If so, she is faced with the tough task of deciding between **competing values**. Donna will have to decide which of her competing values - "care" or "fairness" - she will choose to prioritize on this specific issue of welfare policy. It is possible that if faced with the competing values of care vs. fairness regarding a different situation, Donna might prioritize her values differently in that particular case.

3. Before displaying the next "hot topic headline" question, inform students that the next slide will pose a question about a very contentious debate happening in America right now. In the spirit of *mahloket le-shem shamayim*, our goal is to try to understand both sides of the issue and why so many people feel so strongly about it one way or the other. Show slide #19. Tell students that they are meant to read the question but NOT to answer it: "Does Craig believe that it is appropriate to kneel during the US national anthem as a protest against racial inequality in America?"

   - Yes
   - No

4. Ask the students, "If Craig chose view A, from which moral foundation(s) is he likely drawing? If Craig chose view B, from which moral foundation(s) is he likely drawing?"

Note to Educator:

Emphasize for the students that there are more than 2 values in conflict here (A = care/fairness/loyalty/liberty, B = authority/sanctity). Once again, it is worth noting that whatever Craig's ultimate decision is on this issue does not necessarily reflect a rejection of the moral foundations that underpin the opposing position or a rejection of people who maintain the opposing position.

5. After identifying the moral foundations that likely underlie each position on this issue, give students the following two tasks:

    - Articulate in your own words why someone may think that it IS appropriate to kneel during the US national anthem as a form of protest against racial inequality in America and why someone else may think that it is NOT appropriate to do so.
    - Why do you think that this question has so significantly agitated the "Elephant" of people on both sides of the issue? In other words, why do you think that people on both sides feel so passionately about this issue?

In May 2020, a white Minnesota police officer killed a black man named George Floyd during his arrest. The police officer knelt on Floyd's neck for almost eight minutes while Floyd was handcuffed and lying face down repeatedly saying, "I can't breathe." The police officer ignored Floyd's pleas for his life. Floyd lost consciousness and ultimately died. The entire episode was caught on camera by witnesses, and the video footage went viral the next day. Floyd's death triggered mass protests against police brutality, galvanized the Black Lives Matter movement, and highlighted racial tensions in America.

The National Basketball Association (NBA) had suspended play from March 11–July 29, 2020 due to Covid-19. When the season resumed on July 30, the NBA supported a "unified" demonstration against racism in America. Most players and coaches knelt during the national anthem in the opening weekend of resumed play. However, a few players and coaches chose to stand during the national anthem.

Please watch this 2-minute video (see slide #20) of the national anthem ceremony before the San Antonio Spurs vs. Sacramento Kings basketball game on July 31, 2020.

Discussion Questions:

1. What did you notice about the players and coaches during the national anthem?
2. Did anything in this video surprise you?

Please read this Washington Post article from August 3, 2020 titled, "Why not everyone was kneeling during the NBA anthem demonstration."

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the behavior of the members of the NBA who are mentioned in this article reflect the principles of ma*hloket le-shem shamayim*?

Note to Educator:

If students don't mention it on their own, you may want to remind them of the *mahloket le-shem shamayim* tips that we learned from Hillel and Shammai (p10). The attitudes of the players, coaches, and referees quoted in the Washington Post article reflect principles 1, 2, and 4:

- They debated the issue without attacking people and harming relationships.
- They were not motivated by the desire to prove themselves right and the other wrong.
- They recognized that people holding opposing positions may both be right.

2. If you had been a member of the NBA when the season resumed on July 30, would you have chosen to kneel or stand during the national anthem? Why?

The Relationship between Moral Foundations and *Mahloket Le-shem Shamayim*

Since the most contentious issues are often tied to core values, they tend to trigger our elephants and make it difficult to engage in a 49/49 conversation. However, if we do not engage in conversation with people with whom we disagree, there is a real danger of thinking that we hold all knowledge/truth and, therefore, anyone who disagrees with us is obviously immoral.

In fact, we have discovered that good, ethical people can disagree with each other on moral issues. The basis for those fundamental disagreements are often rooted in a different prioritization of core values rather than a lack of core values.

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt suggests that when talking with people with whom we disagree on fundamental issues, we need to recognize that their opinion is built upon one or more moral foundations. We should focus on trying to understand their perspective within the context of their core values. What matters to them and why? This attempt to understand the other rather than to crush the other is a key component in creating an environment of *mahloket le-shem shamayim*.

Looking Ahead

We have learned a lot of important terms, concepts, and perspectives about *mahloket*. In our next unit, we will add the crucial dimension of what it means to *feel* our way through *mahloket*.

Our intellect is not our only resource for information or intelligence. There is an intelligence to our whole system - mind, body, heart - and we need to learn how to help the entire system work together in order to navigate challenges effectively.

How can we recognize and manage our emotions, which are all the more heightened in challenging times? What are some practical skills that we can learn to engage with others in a positive way and to transform conflict into opportunities to cultivate connections and learn more about ourselves and each other?

These questions touch on the five core Social Emotional Learning competencies represented in the graphic above (see slide #21, copied from CASEL core competencies). In the coming units, we are going to learn **practical skills** related to each of these competencies.

Activity: "I Am Curious"

[This activity is taken from the CASEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook, p39]

1. Ask students to complete this sentence: "I am curious to learn more about..." or "I am curious about..."
2. Give participants a minute or so to think and write a "note to self" that they will share aloud.

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