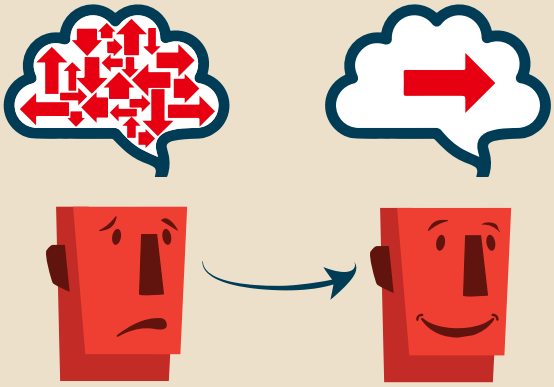

Mahloket Matters:

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

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Overview: Unit 2 - Showin' Up!

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators

Now that we have established key vocabulary and cognitive concepts related to *mahloket*, Unit 2 focuses on important **practical skills** to help our students navigate through *mahloket*. Each skill falls within one or more of the five core social emotional learning competencies represented in the graphic below (see slide #1). Click here for a more detailed breakdown of each core competency as explained by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Collaborative (CASEL).

Unit 2 Learning Objectives:

- Students will explore how to recruit their whole selves – mind, body, and heart – to work together to navigate challenges effectively.
- Students will learn tools to recognize and manage their emotions, which are all the more heightened in challenging times.
- Students will gain practical skills to transform conflicts into opportunities for self-growth and forming positive connections with others.

These crucial skills will empower teenagers in their current stage of life and as they develop their personal and professional lives in the future.

Duration:

There are 4 lessons in this unit. Depending on how much time you choose to spend on the discussion or activities, each lesson is approximately 60–90 minutes long. You may decide to split one lesson into multiple sessions, especially if you are facilitating distance learning.

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Enduring Understandings:

- Difficult conversations can be an opportunity for understanding, learning, and growth.
- There are particular internal, interpersonal, and external conditions that are necessary in order to set the stage for a difficult conversation to be productive and beneficial.

Essential Questions:

- Who or what torpedoed the potential conversation between Moses, Dathan, and Abiram in the Book of Numbers, Chapter 16? (lesson 1)
- What physiological clues can help me identify whether or not my brain is ready to engage productively in a difficult conversation? If I am not ready, how do I become ready? (lesson 2)
- When I am emotionally triggered, how can I re-regulate my nervous system so that I can access reason, empathy, and critical thinking? (lesson 2)
- How can I identify my needs and motivation in order to create a clear and productive intention for engaging in a difficult conversation? (lesson 3)
- How do I craft an invitation to a difficult conversation that is welcoming, honest, and non-aggressive? (lesson 3)
- How might the setting – where, when, how, and who - impact the development or outcome of a difficult conversation? (lesson 4)

Lesson 1 The Conversation That Never Happened

Key vocabulary and concepts in lesson 1: (see slide #2)

- Textual Ambiguity
- Tragic Misunderstanding

This opening activity is intended to demonstrate the potentially ambiguous meaning of the written word in order to set the stage for the subsequent text study.

Activity: "Communication Confusion"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slides #3–7; student materials p.2

Instructions:

1. Tell students that they are about to see a series of slides and that each slide will feature a phrase or sentence without punctuation.
2. Explain that depending on the punctuation and tone in which each of these sentences is read out loud, the sentence will have a very different meaning or connotation.
3. After displaying each slide, ask one student to read the sentence out loud with whatever tone/punctuation the student chooses. Then ask the other students to interpret the meaning of the sentence based on the tone/punctuation they heard when it was read out loud. For example, a student reads the words "You're going too" as "You're going too?!" in an **excited tone**, which the listeners interpret to mean that the question-asker genuinely WANTS the other individual to join them.
4. Then ask another student to read the same sentence with a different tone and/or punctuation. After the sentence is read out loud, ask the other students to interpret the meaning of the sentence based on this alternate tone/punctuation. For example, this time the words "You're going too" are read as "You're going too?!" with a **disgusted tone** of voice, which the listeners interpret to mean that the question-asker does NOT want the other individual to join them.
5. If time permits, ask the students to write down their own sentences or phrases that require tone and/or punctuation in order to identify the intended meaning of the speaker. Students can continue the exercise above with their own examples.

Remind students that the Bible is a written text. One major *advantage* of a written text is that it is more likely to be preserved and passed down for generations. Indeed, the fact that the Bible was written down is a big reason why it has been a "bestseller" around the world for thousands of years. However, as we've just demonstrated, a written text also creates the very real possibility of **textual ambiguity**. Meaning, without the tone of the original narrator or clear context, we cannot always be sure of the text's intended meaning.

We are about to learn a dramatic story from the Book of Numbers that contains an ambiguous phrase. Your interpretation of that ambiguous phrase considerably impacts how you will understand the characters' actions and reactions in the story. Let's learn the story and hear what you think of it.

Note to Educator:

If you would like to explicitly link the concept of textual ambiguity to the previous unit, you may want to pose the question, "Do you think that textual ambiguity in the Bible is a good thing or a bad thing?" Of course, there is no right or wrong answer to that question. However, raising the question enables you or your students to point out that *textual ambiguity encourages multiple interpretations*.

The fact that the text is NOT clear cut has made it the subject of great debate for centuries! As a result, there are hundreds of interpretations of the Bible from thousands of years ago until today. Each commentator (including your students!) has the opportunity to bring their own "49" to the reading of the text, and learn from someone else's "49." Perhaps, then, the textual ambiguity of the Bible was intended to encourage multiple interpretations!

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.

Note to Educator:

- It is up to you to decide whether the students can/should focus on any, all, or parts of the Hebrew text. Either way, students should be directed to identify the ambiguities in this text, particularly in verse 12. They should compare the two translations of verse 12 to help them identify the ambiguities.
- Here is a bit of context that may benefit your students before beginning this text study: God had commanded Moses and his brother Aaron to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and to guide them through the wilderness into the land of Israel. In the wilderness, a man named Korah, first cousin of Moses and Aaron, organized a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Korah recruited a few men to help him persuade other Israelites to join the rebellion. Two of those men were from the tribe of Reuben and their names were Dathan and Abiram. In this text study, we will focus on the interaction between Moses and his challengers, Dathan and Abiram.

Text Study: Numbers 16:1–3, 12–15

Text 2.1 (see slide #8; student materials pp.3–4)

Numbers 16:1–3, 12–15 (The New JPS)

1) Now Korah, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, betook himself, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—descendants of Reuben—

2) to rise up against Moses, together with two hundred and fifty Israelites, chieftains of the community, chosen in the

במדבר טז:
א–ג, יב–טו

א) וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן־
יִצְהָר בֶּן־קְהָת בֶּן־
לֵוִי וְדָתָן וַאֲבִירָם
בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן־
פֶּלֶת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן:
ב) וַיָּקֻמוּ לִפְנֵי
מֹשֶׁה וַאֲנָשִׁים
מִבְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
חֲמִשִּׁים וּמָאתָיִם
נְשִׂיאֵי עֵדָה קְרֻאֵי
מוֹעֵד אַנְשֵׁי־שֵׁם:

Numbers 16:1–3, 12–15 (Artscroll/Stone Edition)

1) Korah son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi separated himself, with Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, the offspring of Reuben.

2) They stood before Moses with two hundred and fifty men from the Children of Israel, leaders of the

assembly, men of repute.

3) They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the LORD is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the LORD's congregation?" ...

12) Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come!

13) Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us?

14) Even if you had brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and given us possession of fields and vineyards, should you gouge out those men's eyes? We will not come!"

15) Moses was much aggrieved and he said to the LORD, "Pay no regard to their oblation. I have not taken the ass of any one of them, nor have I wronged any one of them."

ג) וַיִּקָּהֲלוּ עַל־
מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב־
לָכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה
כֻּלָּם קְדֹשִׁים
וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמַדּוּעַ
תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל־קְהַל
ה' : ...

**יב) וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה
לִקְרֹא לְדָתָן
וְלַאֲבִירָם בְּנֵי
אֱלִיאָב וַיֹּאמְרוּ
לֹא נַעֲלֶה:**

יג) הַמְעַט כִּי
הֶעֱלִיתָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ
זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבַשׁ
לַהֲמִיתֵנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר
כִּי־תִשְׂתָּרֵר עָלֵינוּ
גַּם־הִשְׂתָּרֵר:
יד) אַף לֹא אֶל־
אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלָב
וּדְבַשׁ הֱבִיאֹתָנוּ
וַתִּתֶּן־לָנוּ נַחֲלַת
שָׂדֶה וָכָרֶם הֲעֵינֵי
הָאֲנָשִׁים הָהֵם
תְּנַקֵּר לֹא נַעֲלֶה:
טו) וַיִּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה
מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־ה'
אַל־תֵּפֶן אֶל־
מִנְחָתָם לֹא חֲמוֹר
אֶחָד מֵהֶם נָשָׂאתִי
וְלֹא הֲרֵעֹתִי אֶת־
אַחַד מֵהֶם:

assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown.

3) They gathered together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, "It is too much for you! For the entire assembly - all of them - are holy and Hashem is among them; why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?"...

12) Moses sent forth to summon Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We shall not go up!

13) Is it not enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the Wilderness, yet you seek to dominate us, even to dominate further?

14) Moreover, you did not bring us to a land flowing with milk and honey nor give us a heritage of field and vineyard! Even if you would gouge out the eyes of those men, we shall not go up!"

15) This distressed Moses greatly, and he said to Hashem, "Do not turn to their gift-offering! I have not taken even a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them."

Discussion Questions:

1. Based on verse 3, what complaint do Korah and his entourage make against Moses and Aaron?

   Korah and his 250 supporters claim that the *whole* nation is holy and connected to God. Then they accuse Moses and Aaron of taking too much power for themselves.

2. What is the ambiguous phrase in verse 12? How does the interpretation of that phrase impact your interpretation of the interaction between Moses and Dathan/Abiram?

   The phrase "**וישלח משה לקרא לדתן ולאבירם**" is difficult to translate in this context. The word **שלח** in many other places in Tanakh can be translated simply as "send." But the context here makes the translation far more complicated. Why?

   The text is ambiguous about Moses's *intention* when reaching out to Dathan and Abiram, which directly impacts the way you would translate this phrase. Therefore, any translation of this phrase also functions as an interpretation.

   When comparing the two translations of this phrase, we see that the New JPS translation says that "Moses **sent** for Dathan and Abiram" whereas the Artscroll translation says, "Moses sent forth to **summon** Dathan and Abiram." There is a big difference between sending an invitation versus a summons! An invitation, at the very least,

implies a courteous environment. On the other hand, a summons is a demand from a superior party on an inferior party. Which did Moses intend and why does it matter?

Imagine that your mom or dad says the words, "Please come here so we can talk." Do you interpret that sentence as an open invitation for dialogue or have you really just been summoned by your parent to sit and listen while your mom or dad chastises you for having done something wrong?

You would almost certainly be more inclined to show up to that conversation with your parent if you believed that it would be a real 'give and take' conversation rather than a dressing down. And you would probably rely on your knowledge of your parents, the context, and the tone of the statement to determine which type of "talk" this is going to be.

But our written text in Numbers 16 does not provide us with tone or enough context clues to determine with certainty whether Moses intended to engage in a genuine 49/49 discussion with Dathan and Abiram about their grievance or if he intended to scold them.

What was Moses's intention in reaching out to Dathan and Abiram? How did Dathan and Abiram perceive Moses's intention? Do you think that Dathan and Abiram should have appeared before Moses after he "sent" for them?

Activity: "Your Take"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slide #9; student materials p.4

Instructions:

1. This activity may be done individually or in small groups.
2. Direct your students to slide #9 for the following activity instructions:

   "You are an Israelite in the desert with an active Instagram following. You just witnessed Dathan and Abiram refusing to accept Moses's invitation to meet with him. You need to update your followers with your take on this latest desert drama!

   Please take a photo and create a caption for the photo that captures your understanding of Moses's intention for reaching out to meet with Dathan and Abiram and their reason for refusing to do so. (You may recruit other actors to appear in your photo!)"
3. Tell your students how and where you would like them to save and/or submit their Instagram posts.
4. Provide an opportunity for students to see each other's Instagram posts. Students can present their posts to the whole group. Alternatively, the posts can be pulled together as a running slide show that students watch in one shot.
5. You or the students should keep a running tab of how many of the Instagram posts promote a pro-Moses stance, a pro-Dathan and Abiram stance, or a neutral stance. Discuss the "stats" with the whole group after the students have seen all of the Instagram posts.

Now that the students have had a chance to share their interpretations of the situation, we will see how Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888, Germany) understood this episode between Moses and Dathan and Abiram.

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 Study: Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Numbers 16:12

Text 2.2 (see slide #10; student materials p.5)

Hirsch, Numbers 16:12
(Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, 1808–1888, Germany)

"Sent to call to" - In no way [does this verse] involve a dictatorial 'order' coming from a superior, but rather it is used to designate a friendly invitation....

Moses in the most friendly way had asked them to come to him, but they took the invitation as a 'summons,' and answered, "We are not coming up to 'my lord' (i.e., we do not take orders from him); it is a presumption on his part to order us about to come to him. He has no right to give commands, 'we are not coming up to him.'"

רש"ר הירש, במדבר טז:יב

"שלח לקרא ל-" איננו מציין קריאה היוצאת כפקודה מטעם השליט. אין זו הזמנה לדין או לבירור אלא זו הזמנה ידידותית...
משה קרא להם בצורה ידידותית וביקש מהם לבוא אליו. אך הם שיוו להזמנתו את האופי של הזמנה לבירור וענו: "לא נעלה אל האדון!" - הוה אומר: לא נשמע לפקודתו, זו יהירות מצידו לצוות עלינו לבוא אליו, אין לו זכות לתת פקודות, "לא נעלה אליו."

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Rabbi Hirsch, what was Moses's true intention in reaching out to Dathan and Abiram? How did Dathan and Abiram understand Moshe's request?

   According to Rabbi Hirsch, this episode is a classic instance of a **tragic misunderstanding** between two parties. Moses intended to send a friendly and open invitation to Dathan and Abiram. However, they interpreted it as a summons meant to further subjugate them to his authority. Thus, they rejected Moses's offer to meet up and accused him of being a corrupt leader. In turn, Moses was "much aggrieved"or "distressed" (Numbers 16:15) and pleads his innocence to God against their accusation. This part of the story comes to a devastating end when the ground miraculously opens up and swallows Dathan and Abiram, along with Korah and his 250 supporters.

2. What was the source of this grave misunderstanding between Moses and Dathan and Abiram? Do you think that the outcome of the story would have been different had the adversaries engaged with each other face to face?

Written Reflection:

Thinking about the facts of the story that we *do* know, write at least one suggestion for how Moses could have handled the situation better and one suggestion for how Dathan and Abiram could have handled the situation better.

Note to Educator:

If students do not point it out, it is worth noting that, no matter how you interpret the word שלח, the text is clear about the fact that Moses sent a go-between and did not approach Dathan and Abiram directly. It is also worth noting that Dathan and Abiram responded to Moses's message with an emphatic and insulting "no" rather than offering constructive suggestions about what would bring them to the negotiating table. Of course, we cannot know for sure whether or not a different approach from any of the characters would have led to a different outcome of the story. But we do know that both parties could have at least tried harder to engage in direct discussion with each other.

Unfortunately, this sad Biblical story illustrates a common historical and contemporary reality. *Mahloket* often launches a futile cycle of accusations, defensiveness, miscommunication, or lack of

communication. This typically results, at the very least, in a lot of hurt, pain, and disappointment for the parties involved. However, if certain conditions are in place, a challenging 49/49 conversation can actually be an opportunity for understanding, learning, and growth.

What are the conditions that need to be in place in order for a difficult conversation to be productive? There are different categories of conditions that all play a role in establishing a fruitful conversation.

Those conditions relate to our own **internal readiness** to engage in a tough conversation, the quality of our **interpersonal communication**, and the **external circumstances** at the time of meeting.

In our next lesson, we will focus on the *internal conditions* necessary to show up ready for a difficult conversation.

Lesson 2

Internal Conditions: It Starts With Me!

Key vocabulary and concepts in lesson 2: (see slide #11)

- *Ohev Shalom/ Rodef Shalom*
- Brain Stem & the Limbic Area of the Brain (elephant)
- Prefrontal Cortex (rider)
- 'Flipping the Lid'
- React vs. Respond
- Mindfulness
- Mindful Breathing
- Self-regulation

This lesson teaches skills associated with the SEL competencies of self-awareness and self-management.
Click here for details about each competency.

In lesson 1, we learned the story from Numbers 16 in which Dathan and Abiram refused to meet with Moses in person. What factors might a person consider when deciding whether or not to show up to a conversation?

Activity: "Think – Pair – Share"

Materials:

- Whiteboard, whiteboard marker and/or Pardes -provided slide #12; student materials p.6
- Pen per student

Instructions:

1. Write the following question on the whiteboard (or display Pardes-provided slide #12) for all the students to see:

   In what circumstances would you decide **to show up** to a potentially difficult conversation, and in what circumstances would you decide **not to show up** to a potentially difficult conversation?

2. Tell students that they will participate in a Think – Pair – Share activity.

3. **THINK**: Take one minute to think and write down 2–3 circumstances in which you would decide to SHOW UP to a potentially difficult conversation and 2–3 circumstances in which you would decide NOT to show up to a potentially difficult conversation.
4. **PAIR**: Take 2 minutes to discuss your written lists in small groups of 2–4 students. Students can discuss with their *hevrutot* in person or in Zoom breakout rooms.
5. **SHARE**: Designate one person from your *hevruta* to share 1–2 highlights from your *hevruta* discussion with the whole group.

Note to Educator:

Students' answers to this question will likely revolve around their opinion of the *other person* with whom they would be having this theoretical conversation or, perhaps, their perception of what the *other person* thinks of them (see examples below).

- I would show up if I respect the other person.
- I would show up if I think that the other person respects me.
- I would show up if I am interested to hear what the other person has to say.
- I would not show up if I dislike the other person.
- I would not show up if the other person has terrible values.
- I would not show up if I already know what the other person is going to say.

When considering whether or not to engage in a difficult conversation, we tend to consider factors that relate to our knowledge, assumptions, or fears about the *other person* in the conversation. Those factors may certainly be important and relevant. However, the first step in considering whether or not to show up to a difficult conversation should really be to consider *ourselves*. Why?

We will learn a mishnah from the 3rd century that raises two different approaches to peace. The mishnah and its commentary will help us understand the need to consider **our own frame of mind** before jumping into a challenging conversation with someone else.

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 Study: Mishnah Avot, 1:12 & Midrash Shmuel on Avot 1:12

Text 2.3 (see slide #13; student materials pp.6–7)

Mishnah Avot, 1:12 (3rd Cen., Land of Israel)

... Hillel says:
be the students of Aaron,
a lover of peace (ohev shalom),
and a pursuer of peace (rodef shalom);
a lover of people
who brings them closer to Torah.

משנה אבות א:יב

... הִלֵּל אוֹמֵר:
הֱוֵי מִתַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן,
אוֹהֵב שָׁלוֹם,
וְרוֹדֵף שָׁלוֹם;
אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת,
וּמְקָרְבָן לַתּוֹרָה:

Discussion Question:

1. Why do you think that this mishnah must instruct us to be both *ohev shalom* (lover of peace) and *rodef shalom* (pursuer of peace)? What might the difference be between "*ohev shalom*" and "*rodef shalom*?"

   Students will likely suggest some of the following answers:

   - *Ohev shalom* is an attitude and *rodef shalom* is an action.
   - *Ohev shalom* is not getting into fights, and *rodef shalom* is breaking up the fights of others.
   - *Ohev shalom* is proactive, and *rodef shalom* is reactive.

The 16th-century commentator known as the Midrash Shmuel (Shmuel de Ozeda from Tzefat, Israel) addresses this question. In addition to distinguishing between *ohev shalom* and *rodef shalom*, he addresses which of these two traits we should try to attain first and why.

Text 2.4 (see slide #14; student materials p.7)

Midrash Shmuel, Avot 1:12

And he (Hillel in the mishnah) said:

"ohev shalom" – (this means) within oneself and in one's home.

And "rodef shalom" – (this means) among others, to bring peace among people and between husband and wife.

And this is the meaning of the word rodef, for he pursues (rodef) and goes with his own feet to his friend's home to make peace between him and his wife.

And he needs first himself to be "ohev shalom" for himself. Since it (peace) is a good thing in his own eyes and he loves it for himself, he will be drawn to go and bring peace between others.

מדרש שמואל אבות א:יב

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 ליתן שלום בינו לבין אשתו.

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.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the difference between "*ohev shalom*" and "*rodef shalom*" according to the Midrash Shmuel? Is this distinction similar to the distinction you came up with?

   The Midrash Shmuel believes that "*ohev shalom*" means making peace in one's own personal life and "*rodef shalom*" is going out to one's friend and making peace.

2. Why does the Midrash Shmuel claim that it is important to be "*ohev shalom*" **before** being "*rodef shalom*?"

   The Midrash Shmuel suggests that one must first achieve a certain degree of internal peace or calm (*ohev shalom*) before trying to make peace with others (*rodef shalom*). When a person is consumed with anger, resentment, or fear, it is virtually impossible to engage in a productive and genuine 49/49 conversation. Nothing good is likely to come out of showing up to a conversation when beset with those extreme feelings.

   However, if a person arrives at a difficult conversation having first attained a basic level of peace or calm in themselves then they will be much more capable of making peace with others. When these internal conditions are met, it is much more likely that a *mahloket* will be constructive and beneficial for everyone involved – a true *mahloket le-shem shamayim*.

How can I determine whether or not I have achieved the necessary level of internal peace or calm such that I am ready to engage in a difficult conversation with someone else? If I am not ready, how can I become ready?

In order to address these questions, we first need to acknowledge that conflict is difficult and it often takes a major toll on us. Why is conflict so challenging?

Engaging in conflict is difficult because it triggers us emotionally. It often touches a nerve on multiple levels, including our core values/moral foundations, sense of safety or belonging in the world, or sense of self and identity. Sometimes we react strongly when we hear something that we disagree with, because it challenges one of these very core parts of us without us necessarily even being aware of it!

When these core parts of ourselves feel threatened, our emotions tend to take over and we feel out of control. When there is so much internal turmoil, how can we possibly engage in a 49/49 conversation?! When we are feeling highly agitated on the inside, how can we possibly be open to another person's point of view or think critically to solve a complex problem?! We can't. In other words, **one condition for creating a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* environment is to achieve a certain degree of calm BEFORE engaging in a difficult conversation.**

Let's think back to the interaction between Dathan, Abiram, and Moses in Numbers Chapter 16. Were any of those characters calm enough to engage in a 49/49 conversation together? Perhaps Moses should have given Dathan and Abiram more time to cool off before reaching out to them. Perhaps Dathan and Abiram should have taken some time to cool off before responding to Moses.

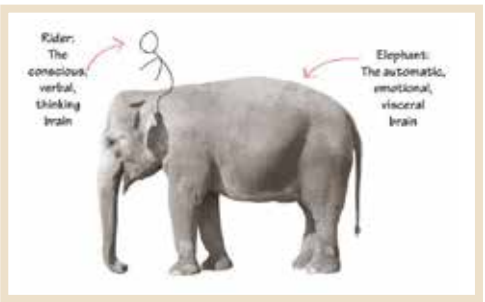
Note to Educator:

Invite students to share a story about a conflict in their lives. It could be something that happened at home, at school, or in social or political spheres. Encourage them to reflect on why it was difficult. Did the conflict challenge their core values? Did it make them feel unsafe or as though they somehow did not belong? Did it challenge their sense of self or identity?

As painful and destabilizing as conflict can be, the good news is that basic brain science can help us understand *why* we get so riled up when faced with conflict. Once we understand scientifically why it happens, we can learn how to manage our emotions so that they will not have the power to consume and control us.

Understanding the Relevant Brain Science

In the previous unit, we learned about Dr. Jonathan Haidt's metaphor of the elephant and the rider (see slide #15; student materials p.8). The elephant represents our quick, automatic intuitive thinking. The rider represents our slow, rational reasoning. When the elephant and rider are not working together, it can be really difficult to engage with others and to solve problems.



The elephant and rider from that metaphor actually correlate to parts of our brain that are connected to our autonomic nervous system. Understanding how these parts of the brain work and the role they play in emotional regulation helps us to notice when that elephant is in control and what we can do to get the rider back into the driver's seat. Therefore, this knowledge of brain science is the key to self-awareness and self-management skills that are super important for us to be able to navigate challenging interactions in a productive, skillful, and compassionate way.

Let's dive deeper into some basic brain science to understand what is happening in our brain when we are faced with a conflict.

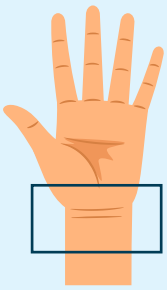
Please watch this 2.5 minute-video (see slide #16) by Dr. Dan Siegel, director of the Mindsight Institute. His innovative 'hand model' of the brain will help us learn about the parts of the brain that are activated in moments of conflict.

Check for Understanding and Discussion Questions:

(see slide #17; student materials pp.8–9)

HAND MODEL OF THE BRAIN

CONCEPT CREATED BY DR. DAN SIEGEL



1. SPINAL CORD

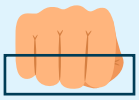
Leads up to the skull

2. BRAIN STEM & LIMBIC AREA

Detect danger and set off an 'alarm' to alert the rest of the body to the danger

3. CORTEX

Allows us to perceive the outside world, think, reason



4. PREFRONTAL CORTEX

Regulates the brain stem and the limbic area

5. "FLIP YOUR LID" PHENOMENON

Sometimes strong emotions can enter the brain stem & limbic area and override the prefrontal cortex part of the brain that is meant to regulate those emotions. The emotions take over so that we no longer feel stable. Instead, these "big feelings" make us feel out of control and sometimes cause us to act in ways that are scary to others. Sometimes we even scare ourselves.

If we 'flip our lid,' we CAN bring ourselves back in line.

1. a) In which part of the brain is the 'elephant' found? (Students should add the word 'elephant' to correspond to the brain stem/limbic area.)
   b) In which part of the brain is the 'rider' found? (Students should add the word 'rider' to correspond to the prefrontal cortex.)
2. Dr. Dan Siegel claims at the end of the video that by being able to name the 'flip the lid' phenomenon, you can successfully "tame it." Why do you think that naming it is a step toward taming it?

Summary of the Relevant Brain Science

To summarize, we can simplify this hand model of the brain into two basic brain parts. The **prefrontal cortex** is where the rider sits. The **brain stem/ limbic area** of the brain is where the elephant sits.

The limbic area of the brain is the first part of our brain to develop. It develops when we are just babies! What happens when a baby does not get what he or she wants? She throws a tantrum and struggles to calm down. That's because the limbic brain is reactive and instinctive, and the

other parts of her brain that help to regulate the limbic brain have not yet developed.

The limbic brain has a really important job: it detects danger and keeps us safe. It helps us survive by functioning like an alarm that goes off when we are in danger. For example, if we are being chased by a wild dog that wants to eat us, the limbic brain will immediately kick in and tell us to RUN (see slide #18). Thank goodness for the limbic area of the brain!

However, the problem is that our brain is hardwired to react as if we are in danger even when we are NOT ACTUALLY in danger. For example, sometimes our 'alarm' starts going off when we are in an argument with someone. It makes us react the same way we would to a life-threatening situation, though that argument does not actually put us in danger. That is the elephant taking control of our brain.

The limbic area of the brain (elephant) becomes agitated when we are stressed or emotionally triggered. To our nervous system, it can feel as if alarms are going off all the time. It's exhausting!

When that 'alarm' or 'elephant' part of the brain becomes super activated, it can become disintegrated or disconnected from the **prefrontal cortex**, which corresponds to the rider in our metaphor. The **prefrontal cortex** is the part of our brain that can think rationally and critically, solve complex problems, and even feel empathy and compassion for other people.

'Flipping our lid' is Dr. Siegel's term to describe what happens when these two parts of the brain – the limbic brain and the prefrontal cortex - become disconnected. The alarm has gone off, the elephant has taken over, and we no longer have access to our prefrontal cortex. As a result, our ability to think rationally and critically is extremely compromised.

Takeaway:

When we are in a state of emotional reactivity, we have compromised access to the part of our brain that is capable of thinking rationally and solving problems. This is NOT the time to try to engage in a constructive conflict or solve complex problems. Instead, it is the time to reintegrate the brain and to 'get back into the driver's seat' so that we can **respond** to the challenge consciously rather than **reacting** from a place of emotional trigger. No doubt, that is easier said than done. We will learn some important skills to help us meet the challenge.

Written Reflection:

a) Please write down an example when you "flipped your lid" during a heated moment and reacted in a way that you may have later regretted.

b) Imagine that you had been able to access your prefrontal cortex and *responded* consciously in that moment rather than *reacted* to the emotional trigger. What would you have said or done differently?

Now that we have this scientific knowledge about how the brain works, we are left with two crucial questions:

1. How can we become aware that we are about to "flip our lids" and prevent it from happening?
2. If we do "flip our lid," how do we re-regulate our system and reintegrate our brain in order to get back into the driver's seat?

Mindfulness teaches us self-awareness and self-management skills that help address both of these questions.

Introduction to Mindfulness

Does anyone know the definition of "mindfulness?"

We are going to use a definition created by **Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn**, the creator of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):

"Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment without Judgment."
(see slide #19; student materials p.10)

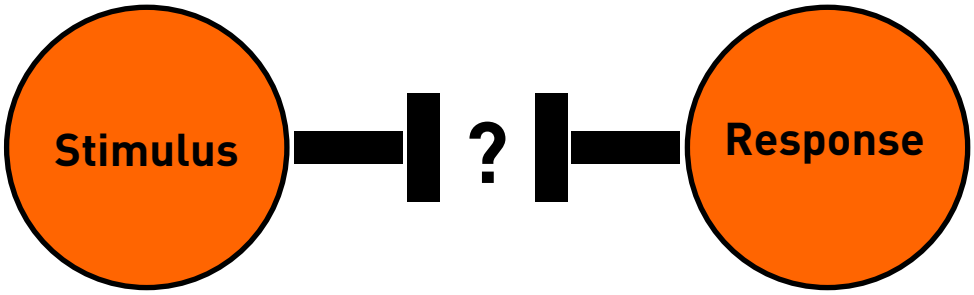
Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think it means to pay attention WITH judgment?
2. What do you think it means to pay attention WITHOUT judgment?

As we discussed in the previous unit, human beings naturally see and evaluate the world through their own particular set of core values and experiences. However, if we want to engage in an authentic 49/49 conversation, we need to practice intellectual humility and intellectual curiosity in order to try and understand someone else's perspective.

It is impossible to truly listen to someone else if we relate to them and everything they say through our own biases. We will miss the full picture, because we will be too busy forming our own opinion to pay attention to their perspective. Therefore, focusing our attention and suspending judgment enables us to put a pause on our habitual reactions, and creates space for us to observe whatever is happening. We are now in a much better position to learn more about the bigger picture.

Though it can be very difficult to suspend judgment it can also be extremely empowering. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist, psychologist and Holocaust survivor said, **"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."** (see slide #20; student materials p.10)



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

-Victor Frankl-

Let's consider an example to illustrate this idea:

You are patiently waiting at a red light in your new car. Suddenly, the car behind you rams into you. You are not physically injured, but the left taillight of your car has shattered into hundreds of pieces. How will you respond (see slide #21)?

In this situation, a car ramming into yours is the "stimulus." It is an event that happened to you which, in this case, was completely beyond your control. But you DO have the power to choose how you will respond to the stimulus.

Will you choose to ask the other driver if they are injured? Will you choose to call the police? Will you choose to exchange car insurance information with the other driver?

In this scenario, yelling and threatening the other driver may be the most natural response. After all, in your judgment, the other driver is entirely at fault since you were minding your own business at a red light when the other car hit you for no reason. Though yelling and threatening may be the most natural response, is it the most productive response? Is it the response that you ideally want to have or the response that just bursts out of you since you are "flipping your lid" in an emotionally charged situation?

Mindfulness helps us to become aware, without judgment, of what is happening in the moment. So when we are having an emotional reaction and that elephant starts to take the reins, we are aware that our emotions are overwhelming our capacity for rational thought. And that awareness enables us to choose how we respond. We can choose to **pause**. And we can take deep, **mindful breaths**.

The Power of Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing is the act of focusing on our breath with some sustained awareness, which means that your brain is preoccupied with thinking about the breath rather than the emotional trigger. Mindful breathing helps regulate our autonomic nervous system, which is connected to our brain. **Self-regulating** our nervous system reintegrates the limbic brain and the prefrontal cortex so that the elephant and rider can work together and we can get back in the driver's seat.

Check out this illuminating 3-minute video called "Just Breathe" by Julie Bayer Salzman & Josh Salzman (see slide #22).

Discussion Question:

1. One of the girls in the video compared her brain when she is feeling mad to a jar that has glitter swirling in all directions (see slide #23; student materials p.11). What analogy can you come up with for YOUR brain when you feel upset?

Activity: "Guided Meditation – Intro to Mindfulness Practice"

Now that you have learned about the impact of mindful breathing, it's your turn to give it a try!

Materials:

- Audio recording of guided meditation practice (see slide #24)
- Headphones (optional)

Instructions:

1. Tell the students that they are going to participate in a 7-minute guided mindfulness meditation practice.
2. Students should stay quiet and follow the instructions in the recording. Click here to access the audio recording of the guided meditation.

Student Reflections on Guided Meditation:

1. Raise a hand if the meditation was challenging for you.
2. Raise a hand if the meditation was easy for you.
3. Was anything surprising to you about the guided meditation experience?
4. What did you notice in your mind? What did you notice in your body?

Note to Educator:

If you would like to facilitate a guided meditation yourself for your students, we have provided a script, some tips, and recommended apps in the "supplemental resources" section on p.18 of this document.

Another thing that mindfulness can do is help us to become **emotionally intelligent**. When we are emotionally intelligent, we are aware of our emotional state in the moment, and we know how to respond effectively to different emotions as they are present with us. **The simplest way to become aware of our emotions is to notice what they feel like in the body!**

The guided mindfulness meditation was a first step toward gaining an awareness of feeling emotions in the body. Now let's build that awareness through a different exercise.

Activity: "Inside - Outside"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slide #25; student materials p.11
- Pen per student (optional)

Instructions:

1. This activity can be done individually, in small groups, or with the whole class.
2. Students should review the following list of emotions:
    - Angry
    - Sad
    - Nervous
    - Happy
    - Peaceful
3. For each emotion, ask students to do the following:

    a) Act out what it feels like in the body when they feel that particular emotion.

    b) List some words to describe how each emotion manifests in physical sensations (e.g., "Anger" = hot, rigid, clenched fists, heart beating fast. "Excitement = bubbly, butterflies in my stomach, light, smiley).

Takeaway:

We want to become familiar with what it feels like in our bodies when we feel different emotions. That way, we will be much more likely to notice when we are becoming reactive during an interaction. For example, someone who knows that their jaw tends to clench when they get angry will notice when that is happening and recognize it as an alarm signal that they are getting closer to flipping their lid. Armed with that self-awareness, the person can choose to pause, reintegrate their brain with mindful breathing, and respond in a healthy and skillful way.

Getting Back in the Driver's Seat: A Three-Step Process

In order to show up to a *mahloket* skillfully, we need access to our prefrontal cortex so that our 'elephant' and 'rider' are in sync. We want to avoid flipping our lid and escalating the conflict. And in order to continue to engage in conversation if we do start to get emotionally activated, we need to know how to pause and self-regulate in order to keep the rider in the driver's seat. How do we do that?

We can do this in a simple three-step process:

1. Notice the clues your body sends you when things are heating up (e.g., I can't think straight, my heart is beating fast, my skin feels hot, etc.)
2. Choose to pause
3. Take a deep breath (or 5! Or 10! Or more!)

Note to Educator:

You may want to ask students if they have suggestions for other response options. If so, you can follow up by asking whether they have an example in which they tried that response option or wish that they had tried that response option.

When discerning whether or not you are ready to keep engaging in a difficult conversation, notice your physiological state. You do not have to feel perfectly relaxed, as if you are on vacation in the Bahamas, in order to be ready to engage in a difficult conversation. It's normal to feel a bit nervous or a bit emotional in the context of a *mahloket*. But being a bit nervous or a bit emotional is very different than having your elephant at the reins!

There are a lot of ways to **ask for a pause** in the moment when you notice that you are reacting.

Here are some examples:

- "I'm sorry, I need to take a break right now. I am feeling overwhelmed and not ready to have a conversation in this moment."
- "I need to think about this. I'll get back to you."
- "Can we talk about this later?"

Note to Educator:

You may want to ask students if they have other suggestions for ways to ask for a pause. You may also want to ask your students if they can think of scenarios in which it is NOT possible to ask for a pause during a difficult conversation. Some students may raise situations in which there is a power imbalance between the parties participating in the conversation. For example, a student might find it challenging, or even impossible, to suggest a pause during a hard conversation with the principal of the school.

It is important to acknowledge that sometimes there is indeed a power imbalance between parties in a *mahloket*, which definitely complicates the situation. And it might even be unfair. Let students know that if it is not possible to request a break, taking mindful breaths can still help them de-escalate the conflict by self-regulating their nervous systems. Sometimes, in the presence of injustice or outrage, regulating our own nervous systems is the best that we can do... and it might help more than we think!

Am I Ready to Engage? The Choice is Mine

Once you have paused and breathed, you get to choose the next step! Your reactive (elephant) brain does not have to control you. As Viktor Frankl taught us, you have the power to choose how to respond.

- You can choose to continue the conversation.
- You can choose to take a 5 or 10 minute break.
- You can choose to put off the conversation indefinitely until you have been able to process your emotions in another way (e.g., going for a run, talking with a friend, dancing, shooting some hoops, journaling, etc.).

Ask students what strategies they use to process their emotions or to calm down when they are feeling stressed.

Make Mindfulness a Habit!

Setting some time aside regularly for formal mindfulness practice can help us develop self-awareness and emotional intelligence. With a consistent practice, it will become a lot more likely that we will be able to notice what is happening, and pause in the moment before 'flipping our lid.' We will become a lot more adept at discerning whether we are truly in danger, or if the emotional trigger is making us feel *as if* we are in danger though we are actually safe.

Mindfulness practice can be as simple as setting a regular time to relax our bodies and focus on our breath. When we practice mindfulness, we take a moment to pause, check in with ourselves, and bring non-judgmental awareness to our mental, physical, and emotional state in the present moment.

Here is a simple way to practice: Set a timer for 5–10 minutes. Allow your attention to rest on the breath, somewhere you can feel it in the body (belly, chest, nose). When the mind wanders, come back to the breath - again, and again, without judgment.

Activity: "I Used to Think/ Now I Think"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slide #26; student materials p.12
- Pen per student

Instructions:

1. Ask students to reflect on what they have learned in lesson 2 by completing one or more of the following sentences:
    - I used to think **X** about my emotions. Now I think **Y** about my emotions.
    - I used to feel **X** about engaging in a difficult conversation. Now I feel **Y** about engaging in a difficult conversation.

Invite students to share one or both of their completed sentences with the class.

Note to Educator:

Mindfulness is an invaluable tool within the core SEL competency of self-awareness. It is also a critical foundation for social-emotional intelligence. We recommend engaging your classes in a mindful moment or some mindfulness practice as a daily routine. It can be done at the beginning of each Mahloket Matters lesson, at the end, or in times of transition. You can use the recording, or guide your students with the script provided below in the supplemental resources section.

Supplemental Resources for Mindfulness Meditation:

Script:

Remind students of the definition of mindfulness: paying attention to the present moment, without judgment.

1. Begin by finding a meditative posture that is both alert and relaxed.
2. Feel your feet on the floor, and your spine in a line. Close your eyes, if you're comfortable doing so, or just soften your gaze on the ground in front of you.
3. Allow yourself to relax, and come into the present moment. Just for now, letting go of whatever happened before this moment, and whatever might happen later.
4. Begin by taking some deep breaths, and focusing your attention on your breath - on the physical sensations of breathing.
5. Notice the feeling of your breath moving through your nose as you inhale and exhale. Notice the rising and falling of the belly or the chest.
6. Choose one of those places in your body to focus your mind. Allow your attention to rest there, like an anchor to the present moment.
7. When the mind wanders, just notice that you're thinking, without judgment! And gently return to the breath, to the present moment, right here, right now. Again, and again. (Sit for 5 or 10 minutes.)
8. In a moment, I'll ring the bell to end our mindful sit. When the bell rings, pay attention to the sound until you can't hear it anymore. Then you can open your eyes.

Tips for Guiding a Meditation:

- While guiding others in a mindful sit, it is good to take it slow! Leave some space between sentences. Speak in a calm tone of voice.
- It can be helpful to meditate a bit yourself, before guiding a sit for others. You can listen to the recording provided here, or to a guided meditation on one of the apps recommended below. If you do not have time to do a full sit, even taking a couple of deep breaths beforehand can help you guide the sit from a place of presence and calm.
- The bell should have a relaxing sound, not an alarming one! It can be a gong, chime, singing bowl, or vibratone. If you do not have a physical bell, the "Insight Timer" app (downloadable for free on any smart phone) has a wide variety of bell sounds that you can choose.
- If you would rather not be the person guiding your students in meditation, there are plenty of resources on apps and websites (see resource list below) with recordings of simple guided meditations that you can peruse and use in your classroom. You can also re-use the recording that we provided in this lesson.

Mindfulness Resources and Apps:

Headspace: Guided meditations, articles, animations, and videos available as an app and online.

MyLife: Meditation and mindfulness app with guided meditations and animations for kids, teens, families, and schools.

Insight Timer: Meditation and mindfulness app with an excellent virtual meditation timer and a wide variety of recordings.

Lesson 3

Interpersonal Conditions: Between You and Me

Key vocabulary and concepts in lesson 3: (see slide #27)

- Emotional Awareness
- Feelings & Needs
- Empathy
- Motivation
- Intention
- Invitation

This lesson teaches skills associated with the SEL competencies of social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision making.

Click here for details about each competency.

In the previous lesson, we learned that *ohev shalom* is a necessary step before we are able to execute *rodef shalom*. With that in mind, we learned how to identify whether or not our brain is available to engage in a difficult conversation. We also learned how to re-regulate our nervous systems when we are emotionally activated so that we can regain access to reason, empathy, and critical thinking.

This process involves identifying the physiological signs of different emotions. Becoming **aware of our emotions** as they are happening is part of what it means to be 'emotionally intelligent.'

In this lesson, we will explore how awareness of our emotions and feelings can clue us into *needs* that are either being met or not being met. Identifying our needs will help us to uncover our *motivation* for engaging in a difficult conversation, clarify our *intention* within the difficult conversation, and extend an honest and welcoming *invitation* to another person to join the difficult conversation.

Introduction to Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication, or NVC, is a practice developed by Marshall Rosenberg, an American psychologist and mediator. It has been used widely and successfully in business settings, parenting, education, mediation, psychotherapy, healthcare, justice, and peace programs throughout the world for over 50 years.

Through the practice of NVC, we can learn to clarify what we are observing, what emotions we are feeling, what values we want to live by, and what we want to ask of ourselves and others.

Feelings are Connected to Needs

In this lesson, we are going to focus on one foundational concept in NVC: **our feelings are always connected to our met or unmet needs**. Here is one way that NVC founder, Marshall Rosenberg, described the relationship between feelings and needs (see slide #28; student materials p.12):

"Every criticism, judgment, diagnosis, and expression of anger is the tragic expression of an unmet need."

According to the NVC model, our **feelings** reflect our **needs** and whether or not they are being met (see slide #29; student materials p.12). For example, we may experience 'positive' feelings when our needs for belonging, understanding, and attention *are* being met. We may experience 'negative' feelings when those same needs are *not* being met. Often, we are not aware or do not acknowledge that our feelings are connected to these underlying needs. Instead, we focus on the specific person or situation that made us feel a certain way.

Needs and values reflect things that we all want in our lives. When those needs are met, we tend to feel certain ways, and we tend to feel very differently when those needs are not met. For a clear list of needs and feelings, please look at the "Needs Inventory" and "Feelings Inventory" published by the New York Center for Nonviolent Communication (see slides #30–31; student materials pp.13–14).

The following scenario (see slide #32; student materials p.15) illustrates how negative feelings reflect needs that have not been met:

> Sivan came home from school and discovered that the handmade vase that normally sits on her desk had shattered all over her bedroom floor, its contents strewn everywhere. It turns out that her brother had come into her room to borrow some books and had accidentally knocked over her vase in the process.
>
> Sivan felt anger and frustration that her brother had come into her room without permission, which did not honor her needs for space, trust, and security. She also felt remorse and disappointment that the special, handmade vase had broken, because it was helping to fulfill her need for beauty and self-expression in her bedroom.

Now let's see if you can connect the dots between feelings and needs.

Activity: "Matching Feelings With Needs"

Materials:

- The Needs Inventory (see Pardes-provided slide #30; student materials p.13)
- The Feelings Inventory (see Pardes-provided slide #31; student materials p.14)
- Pardes-provided slide #33; student materials p.15
- Pen (optional)

Instructions:

1. This activity can be facilitated as a class discussion or as an individual writing exercise.
2. Students should have access to the Needs Inventory and the Feelings Inventory for reference during this activity.
3. Tell students that they will be presented with several different scenarios related to feelings and needs. For each scenario, students should consider the following question:

What feelings and needs do you imagine might be underneath the surface in the following scenarios?

Scenario A: Your mom comes home late from work, and the house is a mess. She is feeling stressed out and frustrated. What might be a need(s) she has that is *not* being met?

Scenario B: Your little sister wakes up on the morning of her birthday to breakfast-in-bed and a new bike. She's thrilled. What might be a need(s) she has that *is* being met?

Scenario C: The class is going crazy at the end of the school day. How might your teacher be feeling? What might be a need(s) of his that is *not* being met?

4. Ask students to think of a scenario in their own lives when they experienced a challenging feeling. Ask them what need(s) they had that was *not* being met and causing them to feel that way.
5. Ask students to think of a scenario in their own lives when they experienced a positive, pleasant feeling. Ask them what need(s) they had that *was* being met and causing them to feel that way.

Discussion Question:

1. Why do you think it would be helpful and important to acknowledge the connection between our feelings and our needs?

   Recognizing the needs that are reflected by our feelings helps us identify what is the deep down, root cause for how we are feeling. If we find ourselves in conflict with someone else, understanding the emotions and needs involved will give us a much better sense of what is REALLY bothering us below the surface. It also helps us find common ground with the other person involved in the conflict.

Finding Common Ground

Emotions and needs are universal among humans!

We have so many differences as a human family, but we ALL share common feelings and common needs (see slide #34; student materials p.16).

Examples of Common FEELINGS	Examples of Common NEEDS
• anger	• respect
• sadness	• belonging
• fear	• nourishment
• excitement	• health
• contentment	• fun

If we all share common needs and feelings, why is there so much conflict between people in the world? **While our feelings and needs are similar, we may try to meet our needs in different ways. The strategies that people choose to meet their needs might conflict with each other**.

Consider the following scenario (see slide #35; student materials p.16):

Two friends in 12th grade, Joanne and Adam, had a very busy day in school. Both had a math exam in the morning, gave an oral presentation in the afternoon, attended a yearbook meeting during lunch, and ran 3 miles in track club after school. After such a stressful day, Joanne and Adam both have a need for relaxation.

Joanne and Adam sit next to each other on the bus ride home from school. Adam immediately begins filling in Joanne on the details of his crazy day. After 2 minutes, Joanne rolls her eyes, plugs in her headphones, and listens to music the whole way

home. Adam is insulted that Joanne tuned him out and decides that he won't sit next to her on the bus in the future.

Why did Joanne and Adam get annoyed with each other? Both of them boarded the school bus at the end of a hectic day with a need for relaxation. Adam achieves relaxation by talking things through with others, whereas Joanne achieves relaxation by zoning out with music. Though they shared the same need, they have *conflicting strategies* for achieving that need. Their opposing strategies for attaining relaxation caused tension between the two friends.

Becoming aware of the feelings and needs beneath those strategies can help us get curious and creative about alternative ways to meet our needs that might not conflict as much. In this scenario, if Joanne and Adam had been aware of their mutual need for relaxation and their opposing strategies for achieving it, maybe they would not have gotten so irritated with each other. Perhaps they could have even come up with a compromise plan to meet both of their needs. For example, Adam is allotted 5 minutes of talk-time while Joanne listens and then Joanne gets to pop in her headphones for the remainder of the ride home.

Note to Educator:

You may want to ask students if they can think of examples from their personal lives or the world at large that demonstrate a common need but opposing strategies for achieving that need, which results in conflict.

Why is it so crucial to remember that feelings and needs are universal? Shared feelings and needs give us a strong **common ground** with other people, including those with whom we have conflict. Finding common ground is a critical starting point for connecting with others and for engaging in constructive conflict. It helps us to cultivate **empathy.**

em·pa·thy
/ ˈempəTHē/
Noun

The ability to understand and share the feelings of another in a respectful and compassionate way.

Ask your students to define empathy. One definition is "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another in a respectful and compassionate way" (see slide #36; student materials p.17).

We are going to explore why empathy is such an essential ingredient for *mahloket le-shem shamayim*. We will consider three examples of empathy in three different contexts: international negotiations, national politics, and home life.

The Impact of Empathy in International Negotiations

Please watch this 3-minute video (see slide #37; student materials p.17) of Israeli certified NVC instructor Yoram Mosenzon who describes the role that empathy played in his negotiation with a Chinese government official.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the major strategic difference in the way Greenpeace approached the Chinese minister versus the way Yoram Mosenzon approached the Chinese minister?

   The Greenpeace team lectured at the Chinese minister for two hours. In contrast, Mosenzon concisely explained his concern for the ecological system and then inquired about the minister's reasons for continuing to fish the tuna fish. Mosenzon demonstrated empathy through a desire to understand the minister's point of view. He also gave the government official the space to express himself.

2. Mosenzon claims that people typically begin a conversation by "telling you how you should change rather than starting with empathy." Why do you think that's the case?

The Impact of Empathy in U.S. National Politics

The current political environment in the United States, and in many other places around the world, is characterized by extreme polarization and negativity. That is what made the actions of the two gubernatorial candidates in Utah all the more unique.

Republican candidate Spencer Cox and Democratic candidate Chris Peterson issued this 1-minute joint campaign ad (see slide #38; student materials pp. 17–18) on October 20, 2020, less than two weeks before the gubernatorial election. The ad went viral immediately and has been featured by newscasters across the United States.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the common "American values" that Cox and Peterson say transcend their political differences?
2. How is this ad an appeal to the empathy of the American public?
3. These two gubernatorial candidates on opposite sides of the aisle joined together to use their campaign platform to demonstrate and encourage civility. How do you think that citizens who are *not* in the public spotlight can demonstrate and encourage civility in our own circles, either in person or on social media?

The Impact of Empathy in Home Life

Rebecca Schisler, mindfulness educator and co-author of the Mahloket Matters School materials, shares a memory of how empathy transformed an ongoing conflict at home (see slide #39; student materials pp.18–19):

My stepdad and I hold different political views, and when I was a teenager, we were constantly getting into arguments about it that never really led anywhere and made us both upset. When I began to practice mindfulness and learned about Non-Violent Communication, I focused less on which one of us was 'right' and which one of us was 'wrong.' I realized that his opinion, and his passionate expression of it, was connected to his underlying needs and past experiences. I didn't know what those experiences were, or what his needs were, but I knew that I could relate to them - whether they were to be heard, to feel safe, to feel integrity, or even to feel secure in his identity. When I could tune into his feelings and needs and reflect on how they are true in my own life also, I could feel compassion and empathy for him. Then, I was so much more motivated to respond with patience, kindness, and more skillfulness, as I practiced and learned more over time.

Over the years, those political conversations have shifted significantly! We still disagree on some important issues, but we have both opened our minds a bit more to the other's perspective. The change did not happen overnight, but our mutual understanding and respect for one another has deepened, and our communication has steadily improved.

Discussion Questions:

1. How is it possible to have empathy for someone when you do not know their underlying needs or past experiences?
2. How can cultivating empathy towards the other person impact your motivation and intention for engaging in a conversation?

Activity: "Partner Empathy Exercise"

Materials:

- The Needs Inventory (see Pardes-provided slide #30; student materials p.13)
- The Feelings Inventory (see Pardes-provided slide #31; student materials p.14)

Instructions:

1. This activity is meant to be done in pairs, and there are two parts to the activity.
2. Tell your students that they will be working with a partner for this activity. Both partners should have handy the Needs Inventory and the Feelings Inventory for easy reference.
    - Partner A: Share about something that happened recently in your life and how it made you **feel** (look at the Feelings Inventory for reference)**.**
    - Partner B: As you listen, tune into your own experience of that feeling, remembering a time when you have felt that way in your own life. See if you can feel some empathy for your partner. Try to express that feeling of empathy to your partner either verbally or non-verbally.
    - Partners A and B should switch roles.
3. Working with the same partner, follow the next steps:
    - Partner A: Share about a **need** that you have in your life (look at the Needs Inventory for reference), and a time when that need was either met, or not met.
    - Partner B, listen and reflect on if and how that need shows up in your own life. See if you can feel some empathy for your partner. Try to express that feeling of empathy to your partner either verbally or non-verbally.
    - Partners A and B should switch roles.

Reflection Questions:

1. How was that experience for you?
2. What was it like to share a feeling or a need with your partner, and to feel their empathy?
3. What does empathy feel like? How would you describe it? (e.g., warmth in the body, heart open, engagement, feeling of care.)
4. What are some small or large ways that we can express empathy while a person is talking to us? (e.g., nodding head, saying "that's true for me too," or "I hear you," etc.)

Deep Dive: What's Beneath the Surface?

Becoming aware of our feelings and needs helps us to uncover what is really going on for us beneath the surface when we find ourselves in a *mahloket* situation. This deep dive into ourselves is necessary in order to uncover our true **motivation** within the *mahloket*. We can ask ourselves, what are my feelings and needs right now? Taking my feelings and needs into account, what is my true motivation for this interaction?

We are always motivated by something when we engage in any interaction, and that motivation is connected to our underlying feelings and needs. Hillel and Shammai taught us (unit 1) that one key principle for engaging in a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* is to "check your motivation - are you trying to win or to solve problems?"

If my motivation has to do with learning, understanding, connection, or problem-solving, then the interaction is much more likely to lead to a *mahloket le-shem shamayim*. If that is not my motivation then I need to take that into account when deciding whether or not I want to move forward with the interaction. Hillel and Shammai would likely suggest that the wise choice is probably to go back to our own feelings and needs, and see how we can work with them to find another way to get our needs met.

After investigating what's going on beneath the surface for ourselves, we can consider what might be going on beneath the surface for the *other* person by 'putting ourselves in their shoes' or in their situation.

What do you think is the value of trying to imagine ourselves in someone else's shoes? What is the potential danger of it?

Imagining ourselves in someone else's shoes, or in their situation, helps us to cultivate empathy and move forward with more compassion and curiosity.

Putting ourselves in the shoes of someone else DOES NOT mean that we should make assumptions about what is true in their experience. On the contrary, it can remind us that we DO NOT know what it's like to be in their situation and give us a glimpse of the myriad possibilities of what it MIGHT be like. Hopefully it will help us to cultivate empathy, compassion, curiosity, encourage us to ask questions, and find that 49/49 mindset that we need for a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* interaction.

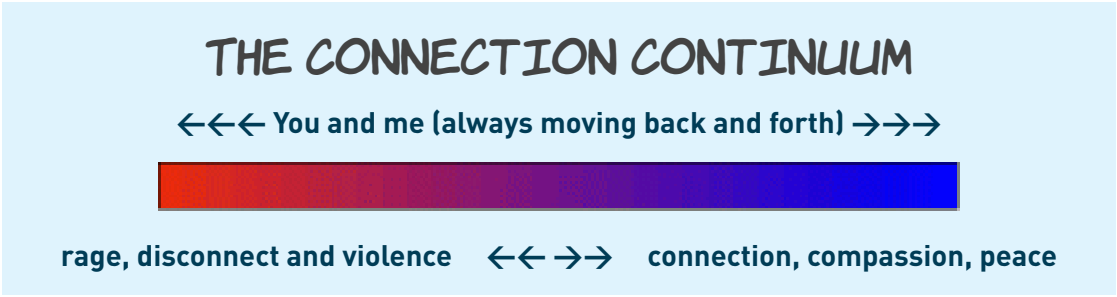
Discussion Question:

1. Put yourself in the shoes of Datan/Abiram and Moshe. What may have been going on underneath the surface for each of them in their *mahloket*? What might their feelings, needs, or motivation have been?

What is a practical way to "deep dive" into my feelings and needs in order to better understand my motivation? If I discover that I do not have a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* motivation, how can I cultivate empathy so that I have a better chance of engaging in an authentic 49/49 conversation with someone with whom I am in conflict?

Thom Bond of the New York Center for Nonviolent Communication (NYCNVC) created an exercise called "Shifting Toward Compassion." In his own words, here is the goal of the exercise (see slide #41; student materials p.20):

> *I created this exercise so people can have what I call a "Shift." By that I mean experience a "shift" in what you are thinking about and a shift in how you feel. To understand "shift," I have found it helpful to imagine a line like the one below labeled "Connection Continuum." On one end is rage, disconnect and violence... on the other is compassion, connection and peace. In any given moment we are all somewhere on this line (many or most of us in the middle somewhere).*



> *When we interact with other people, we are constantly moving back and forth on this line, often from moment to moment, at times even second to second. This exercise is a tool to move yourself toward a more compassionate state, even in difficult moments.*

Please note that Thom Bond, the creator of this exercise, suggests 20–30 minutes of uninterrupted time for this activity, so you may decide to do this during class time or to assign it as homework.

Distance Learning Adjustment: The instructions for this entire exercise can be found online here. Note that students will need a pen and paper even if they are following the online instructions.

Activity: "The Exercise: Shifting Toward Compassion"

(created by Thom Bond of the **NYCNVC**)

Materials:

- The Needs Inventory (see Pardes-provided slide #30; student materials p.13)
- The Feelings Inventory (see Pardes-provided slide #31; student materials p.14)
- Pardes-provided slides #42–43; student materials pp.20–22
- Pen and 1 piece of paper per student

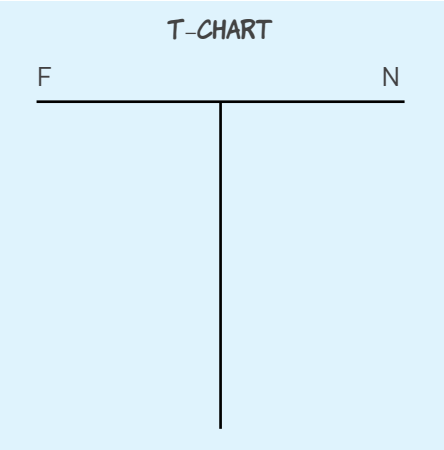
Instructions:

(copied from The Exercise: Shifting Toward Compassion)

1. Take a blank piece of paper and at the top, write down something somebody said to you that you **did not** like hearing.

   Hints:
   a) People who choose a less than traumatic, yet "stimulating" situation seem to have greater success early on. Invite students to choose a situation that was challenging, but not the most challenging or extreme situation in their lives.

   b) Think of the exact quote. No story line or background is needed for this exercise, just the quote.



2. Draw a "T" shape below the quote on the top half of your paper. Write an "F" on the left side and an "N" on the right, just like the picture here.
3. On the left side, under the "F" column, write down how you're feeling when you think about that quote. See slide #31 or p.14 in the student materials for a list of FEELINGS to be used with this exercise.
4. On the right side, under the "N" column, write down what you are (or were) needing and not getting the moment you heard the words. See slide #30 or p.13 in the student materials for a list of NEEDS to be used with this exercise.
5. Take a minute....Close your eyes and relax. After some time, look at the list again. If you feel certain that this list represents what you were experiencing then move on to the next step. If you feel like something's missing, go back to the FEELINGS and NEEDS lists and look again until you feel complete.
6. Draw a second "T" shape on the bottom half of the paper with an "F" on the left side and an "N" on the right, just like before.
7. On the left side, under the "F" column, write down what you imagine the *other person* was feeling when you heard what they said. If you really can't think of what they were feeling, you can try going back to "Step 5" and double check your own list. Most people have difficulty doing "Step 7" until their own list is really complete ("Step 5").
8. On the right side, under the "N" column, write down what you imagine the *other person* was needing and not getting in the moment you heard their words. Just like in "Step 7" if you really can't think of what they were needing, you can try going back to "Step 5" and double check your own list. Most people have difficulty doing "Step 8" until their own list is really complete ("Step 5").
9. Take a minute. Close your eyes and relax. Look at the list again. If you feel comfortable that this list represents what they were experiencing then move on to the next step. If you feel like something's missing, go back and look at the lists again until you are sure you are finished.

10. Check with yourself and see if you notice a shift in how you feel about what was said to you or how you feel toward the person that said it. Check if you think you may have a way of thinking about this that wasn't there before.... or if you just feel less upset than when you started. If you do, then you've had a shift. You've consciously moved yourself toward compassion. If you feel the same or worse you may want to try again with the same quote or one on a subject that's not as "hot" for you.

Please note: About 20% of people that do the exercise DO NOT shift on the first time through. 100% of people who keep trying eventually do... People who practice this over and over report more success in "shifting." It's like developing a muscle. Please keep in your mind that this is a "taste" of NVC and that there is a larger body of work and practice that is far more powerful when we increase our skills through learning and practice.

Setting a Clear Intention

Getting curious and asking ourselves questions about our own and the other's experience can help us formulate a clear **intention** for the conversation. Where do we want the conversation to go?

Our intention emerges from our motivation. Just as we should have a productive motivation for having the conversation, our intention should also be positive and related to learning, sharing, connecting, or collaborative problem solving for a *mahloket le-shem shamayim*. The intention may be general or specific.

Why is it important to go into a difficult conversation with a clear intention? Because when topics are emotionally charged, there's a higher likelihood that the conversation can bring up a lot of feelings, needs, and related events and issues which can take us off track. **Having a clear intention can help us stay focused and on track through the challenging interaction.** It's like having an arrow that we can point in the direction we want to go (see slide #44; student materials p.22).

The intention should be centered around MY actions rather than what I expect or want from the other person. In other words, the focus of the intention should be on what I will do and not that, for example, the other person will listen to me. The intention is not something we necessarily need to share with the other person, although that might be helpful. It is more for ourselves, to help us remember why we are engaging in the conversation.

Here are a few examples of productive intention setting:

- Through talking to this person, I hope to better understand her view on gun control.
- My intention for this conversation is to brainstorm together how we can equitably divide the cleaning responsibilities in our shared office space.

Note to Educator:

You may want to use this as an opportunity to build off of the previous "Shifting Toward Compassion" exercise. That exercise began by asking students to write down something somebody said to them that they **did not** like hearing.

Ask students to imagine that they are planning for a conversation with the person who said something that they did not like hearing. Instruct students to formulate an **'intention'** for that challenging conversation. If you plan to ask for volunteers to share what was said to them that they did not like and/or their intention for the conversation, remind students in advance that this is meant to be a safe space, which means that confidentiality must be maintained.

Crafting and Extending a Welcoming Invitation

Everything we do to prepare for a challenging conversation helps set the stage and impacts how the conversation will go. What preparatory steps have we taken so far?

- ✓ We have asked what is really going on beneath the surface for ourselves and the other.
- ✓ We have reflected on what we want to accomplish in the conversation.
- ☐ Now we are ready to reach out and initiate an interaction.

HOW we reach out to the other person is important! We need to invite the other person into a challenging conversation in a way that is honest, non-threatening, non-demanding, and welcoming. If we are careless about how we extend the invitation, the other person is less likely to agree to meet in person or will arrive disgruntled. Neither of those options supports our goal of *mahloket le-shem shamayim*.

Consider the following two "invitation scenarios" (see slides #45–46; student materials p.22):

Scenario A: Hey, we need to talk! I can't believe you were so mean that you, John, and Sarah went to that movie without me! You knew I wanted to go too and none of you even thought to invite me.

Scenario B: Hey, I heard that you, John, and Sarah went out to a movie. I wanted to see that movie too. I feel left out. Can we talk about it?

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some significant differences between these two invitations to talk?
2. What kinds of reaction do you think each invitation will elicit?

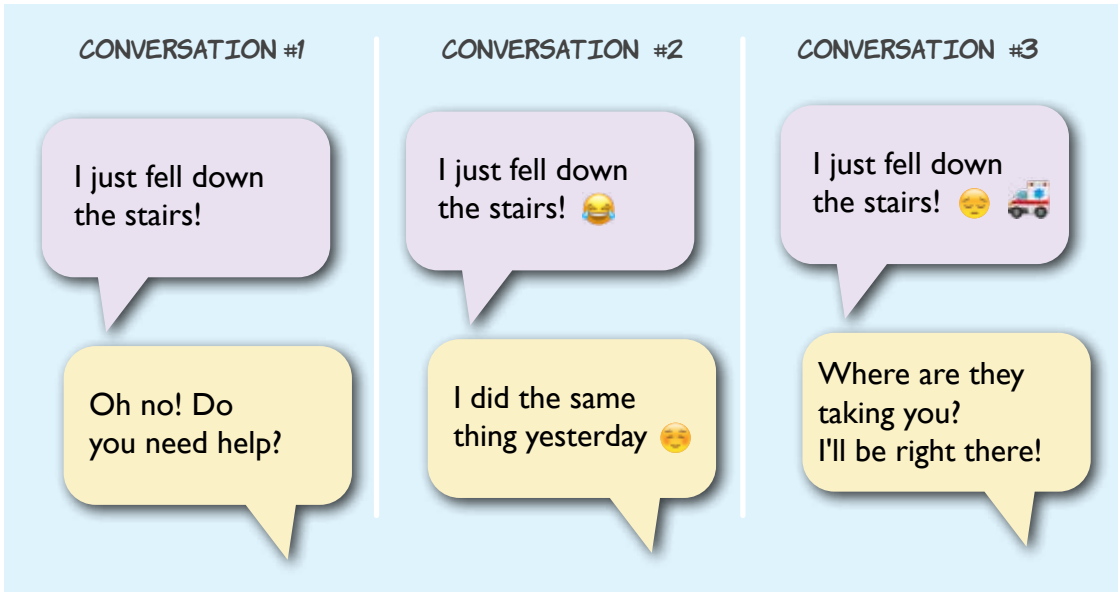
Tips for Crafting a Successful Invitation (see slide #47; student materials p.23)

Here are some helpful hints to keep in mind when crafting an invitation to a challenging conversation:

1. It is a request, not a demand! That means we have to accept it if the other person declines the invitation. Do not assume they are available or wanting/ready to engage.
2. The invitation can include your intention. For example, "I would like to talk to you about immigration so that I can share where I am coming from and understand better where you are coming from. Are you open to having a conversation with me?"
3. Your tone of voice is as important as the words you choose.

Note to Educator:

Tip #3 has important implications for social media. How do you accurately and clearly express tone of voice through text messaging or social media? If that is a discussion that you want to have with your students, the graphic below (see slide #48; student materials p.23) might generate some interesting discussion.



Writing Activity:

Pretend you are Moses and you get a chance to rewrite history. You have an opportunity to extend an invitation to Datan and Abiram to join you in a conversation. What will you say in your invitation?

Note to Educator:

This is another opportunity to further build off of the "Shifting Toward Compassion" exercise. That exercise began by asking students to write down something somebody said to them that they **did not** like hearing.

Ask students to imagine that they are planning for a conversation with the person who said something that they did not like hearing. Instruct students to formulate an **'invitation'** for that challenging conversation. If you plan to ask for volunteers to share what was said to them that they did not like and/or their intention for the conversation, remind students in advance that this is meant to be a safe space, which means that confidentiality must be maintained.

Alternatively, you can broaden the question for students by asking them to think of a *mahloket* that might be constructive for them to engage in. It could be personal, or it could be a conversation with a public figure, or anyone else in the world with whom they would be interested in having a 49/49 conversation. Ask students, "What is your intention for that conversation? How would you communicate a clear and welcoming invitation?"

Lesson 4

External Conditions: Setting the Stage

Key vocabulary and concepts in lesson 4: (see slide #49)

- Setting
- Anchoring Agreements
- *Haskamah*
- Sharing Circle

This lesson teaches skills associated with the SEL competencies of social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision making.

Click here for details about each competency.

In the previous lesson, we learned that through awareness of our feelings and needs, we can better identify what is going on below the surface within ourselves when we experience some sort of conflict. We are then in position to consider our true motivation for wanting to engage the other party in conversation. Uncovering our true motivation will help us to clarify our intention for the interaction, which enables us to craft an honest and welcoming invitation to the conversation. The invitation **sets the stage** for the conversation to follow and impacts how well it will go. All of this internal and external preparation is meant to lay the groundwork for an authentic 49/49 conversation (see slide #50; student materials p.24).

In this lesson, we will continue to set the stage for a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* interaction by considering the **setting** in which the conversation should take place. We will also discuss the role of **anchoring agreements** in supporting a challenging conversation. These external conditions are often necessary to generate a productive conversation.

Setting is Significant

External conditions - where, when, with whom, how – play a major role in establishing the tone for a conversation. When any one of these variables shift, we tend to feel the difference, either consciously or subconsciously.

The ancient Jewish High Court, known as the Sanhedrin, recognized that physical space has practical and symbolic significance. They took this into account when establishing the seating arrangement of the 71 judges in the Sanhedrin. Let's learn more about the seating arrangement in the Sanhedrin from the mishnah.

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 Study: Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:3

Text 2.5 (see slide #51; student materials p.24)

Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:3

The Sanhedrin was (organized) like half a round granary, so that each (judge) could see each (judge).

משנה סנהדרין ד:ג

סַנְהֶדְרִין הָיְתָה כַּחֲצִי גֹּרֶן עֲגֻלָּה, כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּהוּ רוֹאִין זֶה אֶת זֶה.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the seating arrangement in the Sanhedrin?
   The members of the Sanhedrin sat in a semi-circle so that all of the judges could see each other (see slide #52; student materials p.24).

2. What is the significance of the judges being able to see each other?

The judges' ability to see each other sets a tone of transparency, which is an important aspect of justice. It also reflects the notion that each one of the 71 judges has a voice in the judicial proceedings and makes it easier for the judges to communicate with each other. We would expect the Jewish High Court to function according to the principle of *mahloket le-shem shamayim*, and this seating arrangement supports that principle both practically and symbolically.

Let's consider how different modern settings set a particular tone and make us feel a certain way.

Activity: "Creating a Vibe"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slides #53–56; student materials p.25
- Pen and paper per student (optional)

Instructions:

1. Inform students that you will display three slides of three different places.
   - Slide 1: an amusement park
   - Slide 2: a library
   - Slide 3: an interrogation room
2. Students should consider the following two questions upon seeing each slide:
   a) How was this particular place designed to make you feel?
   b) What specific features of this place make you feel that way?
3. Ask students, either individually or in pairs, to come up with their own examples of places that evoke a certain vibe. Students can do this orally or they can find pictures to illustrate their point. Have students share their examples with the full group.

Note to Educator:

You may want to ask students to write down their answers to the two questions after seeing each slide and then select a few students to share their thoughts with the whole group at the end. Alternatively, you can raise these questions for group discussion after displaying each slide.

Physical space is only one element of "setting" that can impact a challenging conversation. Let's consider some other questions concerning the setting of a challenging interaction:

- Public or private?
- Online or in person?
- Email or text?
- One-on-one or with multiple people?
- With or without a mediator?
- Time of day?

There is not one correct answer to these questions, because the context impacts which option is most suitable for the particular situation. However, considering these factors should be part of the planning process for a difficult conversation. These variables can have a significant impact on the mood of a conversation and its outcome. Of course, sometimes conditions are not ideal and we have to go with what we've got. But it is worth thinking it through and getting creative when necessary in order to try and create the setting best suited for a challenging interaction.

Consider the following scenario (see slide #57; student materials p.25):

> You decide that you want to run for student council treasurer. You share your plan with your friend, Karen. The next week, you see Karen's name on the official list of student council treasurer candidates. You feel betrayed that Karen is running against you, and you feel hurt that she did not tell you in person. You have decided that you want to talk with Karen about this upsetting situation.

a) What do you think is the ideal setting for this conversation, why?

- Public or private?
- Online or in person?
- Email or text?
- One-on-one with Karen or mediator present?
- Time of day?

b) Are there other factors related to the "where, when, with whom, and how" that should be taken into consideration?

Anchoring Agreements

Another important 'external condition' for a productive conversation is the creation of **anchoring agreements**. Anchoring agreements are mutually accepted guidelines for an interaction.

The 15th-century commentator known as the Abarbanel (Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel from Portugal) teaches us that agreements between people are a crucial ingredient for peace.

Text Study: Abarbanel, Nahalat Avot 1:12

Text 2.6 (see slide #58; student materials p.26)

Abarbanel, Nahalat Avot 1:12

... In all places that shalom is mentioned in Scripture, the commentaries thought it to be [about bringing] agreement between two conflicting parties...

[But this way of looking at shalom] is as if the matter of shalom, according to them, does not occur unless there is a fight and conflict beforehand! ...

But [those commentators] did not recognize the greatness of shalom...for if they say it is about bringing agreement to those in conflict, **surely they would also say that shalom applies to situations other than fighting and conflicts, [such as working for] the common good, and the making of agreements between people, and loving one another, for these things are necessary things in the gathering of a nation, and this is the string that binds us all**...*Therefore, God is called Shalom, since God connects the whole world.*

אברבנאל, נחלת אבות א:יב

... בכל מקום שנזכר "שלום" בכתוב, חשבו המפרשים שעניינו תמיד הסכמה בין הכתות המתקוטטות...

כאלו עניין השלום, לדבריהם, לא יפול כי אם במקום שיש קטטה ומריבה קודמת...

והנה לא הכירו את מעלת השלום... לפי שאם היות שיאמר על הסכמת המריבים כמו שחשבו, **הנה גם כן יאמר שלום, מזולת מריבה וקטטה, על הטוב המשותף, ועל הסכמת האנשים, ואהבתם זה לזה, שהוא הדבר ההכרחי בקבוץ המדיני והוא החוט הקושר ומהחבר את כולם...**

ולכן נקרא ה' "שלום" לפי שהוא הקושר את העולם.

Discussion Question:

1. Why do you think that the Abarbanel includes the "making of agreements between people" in his second definition of "*shalom*?"

   "*Shalom*" occurs when people work towards a common good of society and when people show love for their fellow – it is proactive and holistic and represents an overall approach to creating a healthy society. Agreements are a **proactive** way to prevent conflict and help unite us.

Anchoring agreements can make a HUGE difference in supporting a *mahloket*, and it is important to establish the agreement in advance of a potentially difficult conversation in order to prevent unnecessary conflict or harm during the interaction. Anchoring agreements also help maximize the positive, productive impact of the conversation.

Below, Rebecca reflects about her experience in 2019 with an Israeli-Palestinian youth program that did not establish any kind of anchoring agreement in advance of the gathering (see slide #59; student materials pp.26–27):

> *Last year, I was observing a program at an organization that brings together Israeli and Palestinian teenagers in Jerusalem for peace-building work. It was right after the Trump administration unveiled a controversial Peace Plan, and tensions were high among everyone in the group. In an effort to promote constructive dialogue, the organization held a session for 9th and 10th graders to learn about the specifics of the plan, and process their thoughts and feelings together.*
>
> *But there had not been agreements laid out in an explicit or significant way as to how the conversation would take place. While the program leader was trying to present information and facilitate a dialogue, participants continually interrupted her with questions and exclamations. They also interrupted one another, and seemed to be 'talking at' one another rather than listening and responding. Some of them were totally absorbed in their cell phones while those who they disagreed with were talking. After one student expressed his opinion, some others simply got up and walked out of the room. Participants were continually whispering to the people sitting near them, and some were yelling and responding in a blameful tone of voice when others spoke. There was a thick emotional charge in the room, and the atmosphere was one of chaos.*

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think that the teens in this program acted this way?

   These teens walked into an emotionally charged environment, and the program content was emotionally activating for them. Since there were no anchoring agreements in place, there was no understanding or established standard of acceptable behavior. Instead, the teens acted based on their gut instincts and expressed themselves in ways that did not support a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* environment.

2. What are some anchoring agreements that could have made this experience more productive and aligned with a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* environment?

   - We will listen to each other without interrupting.
   - Cell phones need to be in knapsacks at all times.

3. Due to the lack of a *mahloket le-shem shamayim* atmosphere, what opportunity was lost in this gathering of Israeli and Palestinian teenagers?

   Had the setting been more supportive of this *mahloket*, and had there been some anchoring agreements to fall back on when the emotional charge became very strong, these teens might have been able to gain some understanding about their peers' perspectives. They may have become aware of each other's needs, feelings, and fears and cultivated connections with one another even in the midst of this controversial political moment.

Anchoring agreements are relevant for conversations among groups, as well as between individuals. For example, in a one-on-one conversation, both parties may agree to listen without interrupting. In a group conversation, everyone may agree to honor confidentiality.

It is important that both parties come up with agreements together, and that everyone consents to the agreement in an explicit, clear manner. That way, rather than feeling that the agreement is a burden imposed upon them, co-creators of the agreement will feel invested and committed to it.

Agreements help facilitate the intention and mission of the community and make people feel safe. They help clarify our expectations. We can reference the agreement if something happens or something is said that makes us feel uncomfortable or uncertain.

What might be some agreements that you could use in a one-on-one conversation?

Anchoring agreements in a one-on-one conversation can be super simple! You can request them at the beginning of a conversation. Here are a few examples:

- "Hey, would it be ok with you if we both agree to just listen without interrupting each other?"
- "Can we agree that this conversation will not be longer than half an hour?"

Ask your students what factors these agreements address (e.g., showing each other respect, valuing each other's time).

It is important to honor agreements. And of course, we're all human, and sometimes agreements are broken – either on purpose, or because we simply forget. What happens then? If it is not a serious offense, usually a calm reminder will suffice. If it is more complex, there are restorative steps we can take to repair what happened and establish trust again. We will explore this more in later units.

As the Abarbanel taught us, agreements are a useful way to promote peace and prevent *mahloket*. They are especially important when conversations take place within a society or collective reality that is rife with distrust and tension (like our society right now). For example, when we have a class check-in, we may not necessarily be discussing a controversial topic, but we are communicating within larger concentric circles where there is a lot of polarization so establishing agreements can still be very supportive.

Activity: "Creating a Classroom *Haskamah* (Agreement)"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slide #60; student materials pp.27–28
- Pen/paper for 1 member of each small group

Instructions:

1. Tell your students that we will spend some time creating some agreements for our classroom community that we will use going forward.
2. In small groups, come up with 3–5 classroom community agreements that are important to you. Have a scribe take notes in each group.
3. The agreement statements should be simple to remember and concise. They may also be descriptive but fit into simple categories or values. For example, the category of RESPECT may contain the statement, "Do not interrupt people."
4. Come back together as a full group.
5. Give each small group a chance to share the 3–5 anchor agreements that they came up with. Designate a classroom scribe to take notes as each small group shares their ideas with the whole class.
6. After hearing the ideas of each small group, the class decides together on their 3–5 official *haskamot*.

7. Make sure that everyone consents by showing their agreement in a visible, explicit way (e.g., give a thumbs up if you agree on all of these). If they do not agree, ask why. Everyone's consent matters!
8. Raise the question of what happens if someone breaks part or all of the agreement (e.g., gentle reminder). If someone consistently breaks the agreement then additional steps may be needed.
9. Decide where this classroom agreement will reside for easy reference (e.g., hang it on the classroom wall, document in a shared classroom folder, etc.).

Introducing the "Sharing Circle"

Note to Educator:

In addition to mindfulness practice, we also encourage implementing a "Sharing Circle" as a beneficial tool to use in your classrooms throughout the year. It can stand alone as an activity, or be incorporated at the beginning or end of lessons in this curriculum.

Here, we will put what we learned about the importance of setting and agreements into practice by creating a 'Sharing Circle' or 'Council.' This is a special space within our classroom where we are invited to share authentically and witness one another in that sharing, cultivating connection within our community. In a 'Sharing Circle' we are not aiming to fix problems or to give advice, but to see one another and to be seen.

In addition to regular classroom agreements, we recommend making some agreements that apply specifically to the 'Sharing Circle' space. These might include:

- Confidentiality: What is said here, stays here.
- Speak from the heart, and listen without judgment
- Speak in I-statements, from your experience.
- No cross-talk or giving advice.

Activity: "Sharing Circle"

Materials:

- Pardes-provided slide #61; student materials p.28

Instructions:

1. Provide students with 2 prompts and go around the circle giving each student an opportunity to answer the prompts:

   a) Share a challenge - personal, interpersonal, or societal - in your life that is in process right now.

   [It does not have to be the deepest, hardest thing you're dealing with! Just something that is challenging, where there might be potential for mahloket le-shem shamayim or learning.]

   b) Share a challenge you have had in the past that was resolved in a constructive or meaningful way and had a positive impact on you in the end. What did you learn from that experience?
2. Students should not be giving each other advice or talking over each other. They are encouraged to use hand signals to communicate empathy and presence (e.g., rub thumb and forefinger together to indicate "same here!").
3. Optional: End with Appreciation Round! Each student should choose someone in the circle and express why you appreciate them. Go around until everyone has been publicly appreciated.