

7-12-25 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – *Balak* (destroyer)
Torah Portion: Numbers 22:2 – 25:9
Haftarah: Micah 5:7 – 6:8
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Matt 7:1-5

Biblical Dispute Resolution 13 – Productive Conversations 3 – Choosing Better Words

Central question: How can we have conversations, and not arguments?

We are in parasha *Balak*. Its name comes from the second word in English, and the second word in the original Hebrew.

Num 22:2-4

2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel. 4 And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time.

וַיֵּרָא ² בָּלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה
And saw Balak the son of Zippor all that had done
7200 1111 1121 6834 853 3605 834 6213

יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֻמּוֹתָיו:
Israel to the Amorites.
3478 567

וַיִּגֹּר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד כִּי רַב־
And was afraid Moab of the people, sore because many:
1481 4124 6440 5971 3966 3588 9999 7227

הָיָה וַיִּקֶּץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
they and was distressed Moab because of the children of Israel.
1931 6973 4124 6440 1121 3478

וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל־זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן עַתָּה יִלְחֲכוּ
And said Moab unto the elders of Midian, Now shall lick up
559 4124 413 2205 4080 6258 3897

הַקָּהָל אֶת־כָּל־שׂוֹר כְּלִתָּךְ סָבִיבָתֵינוּ
this company all that are round about us, as licketh up the ox
6951 853 3605 9999 5439 3897 7794

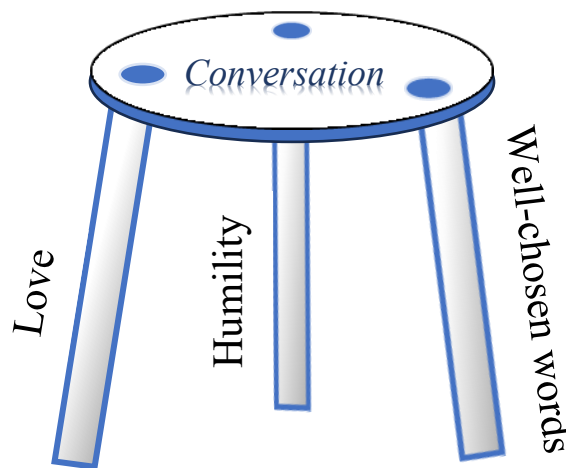
אֶת־יֵרֶק הַשָּׂדֶה וּבָלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר מֶלֶךְ
the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king
853 3418 7704 1111 1121 6834 9999 4428

לְמוֹאָב בְּעֵת הַהִוא:
of the Moabites at time. that
4124 6256 1931

Today we are continuing in our series on Biblical Dispute Resolution, and learning how to have productive conversations with others, even those who have dramatically hostile viewpoints to ours on important matters.

We have discussed how personal humility is an important cornerstone of productive relationships with others, and that is especially true when engaging in conversations.

And we have seen that love is another important pillar of productive conversations with others. We saw how love supports humility, and humility supports love. With proper humility and love in place, then the final pillar can be best crafted – and that is well-chosen words.



Each of these supports the others, and provides the best basis for a productive conversation. I do not say that a conversation cannot happen without each of these being present, or if one or more of them are diminished, but I do say that when they all are present, then we have the best chance of communicating in a way which will do the two things that

we want done in this conversation: honoring G-d with our words, and healing (and strengthening) relationships.

When dealing with hostile nonbelievers, we may not be able to strengthen or heal relationships, but we can certainly not leave a bad witness behind that reinforces the negative paradigm that many of them have concerning believers.

In either case, the goal is to leave the other person in the conversation with a good witness, and maybe sow some seeds of righteousness which might grow later. Much of this depends on the words we choose, and how we deliver them.

There are a number of impediments to choosing our words wisely. Let's first examine the idea of silence.

Silence can be more powerful than speech. When another person is trying to argue with you, your silence speaks more loudly of control, power, self-discipline. I wish to examine an incident where silence proved the most powerful argument of all.

Many students from Covington Catholic High School in Park Hills, Kentucky traveled to Washington DC. They participated in the March

for Life which occurred on January 18, 2019, on the National Mall. Coincidentally, at that same time, a group of native Americans were also conducting a traditional ceremony, with traditional dance, just in front of the Lincoln Memorial. As these natives were peacefully celebrating, a group of people who call themselves “Black Israelites”¹ began yelling very ugly slurs at the natives. The natives did not respond, and disengaged from the hostile “Black Israelites.”

As the natives were walking away, the students from Covington arrived at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, since that was to be their meet-up location after the pro-life rally. Then the “Black Israelites” began yelling slurs at the high-school students as well. Some of the students began responding, and there was some yelling from both sides, but the students and the “Black Israelites” were still some distance from one another.

Nathan Phillips, who was part of the native American ceremony, decided to try to defuse the growing tension, and he began beating his traditional drum and chanting his native chants. He walked into the crowd of the students, apparently hoping that his action would calm

¹ The origins of the Black Hebrew Israelite movement are found in Frank Cherry and William Saunders Crowdy, who both claimed that they had revelations in which they believed that God told them that African Americans are descendants of the Hebrews in the Christian Bible; Cherry established the "Church of the Living God, the Pillar Ground of Truth for All Nations" in 1886, and Crowdy founded the "Church of God and Saints of Christ" in 1896. Cherry taught that the Talmud was authoritative, that Jesus would return in the year A.D. 2000, and in a "square earth surrounded by three layers of heaven. Their “outreach” events seem to be characterized by them yelling condemnation at anyone else who does not share their beliefs.

them down a bit. The students diverted their attention from the “Black Israelites” and toward Nathan. The students actually also began chanting along with him. All was going well, so far.



Nathan ended up being in front of Nicholas Sandmann, who was wearing a red MAGA hat. Nicholas stood still and Nathan crowded him. Nicholas stood fast, and simply smiled at

Nathan, as he chanted and beat his drum. Nicholas said he just remained silent, and smiled at Nathan, to show him that he was not going to become angry, intimidated, or be provoked into a confrontation.

The photos and videos of this event seemed to fit the narrative of the left-leaning media, since it appeared to be a confrontation between MAGA students and a native American. The news media reported that the Covington students were the aggressors against native Americans. Other outlets ran with the story and soon, Nicholas became the “poster boy” portraying MAGA hate and violence.

But the truth finally did come out, and it was proved that the left-leaning news outlets had selectively omitted important facts which showed a

very different story. They had created a story which did not exist at all, but their imaginary story did support their left-leaning narrative. They were deceptive. Later, as justice prevailed, CNN, The Washington Post, and NBCUniversal all settled lawsuits for defamation.

If Nicholas had engaged shouting with shouting, or had responded at all to what was going on around him with those who were yelling at him, the outcome would have been far different.

Today, Nicholas Sandmann is the poster-boy for confident silence in circumstances which might otherwise become unfruitful, and leave a bad witness.

Yeshua used the power of silence to show His power, as well. It was prophesied.

Isa 53:7

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.

And so it was. Yeshua made no response to the false accusations against Him.

Matt 26:59-68

Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death; 60 and they did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, 61 and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" 62 And the high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his robes, saying, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; 66 what do you

think? "They answered and said," He is deserving of death!"
67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists;
and others slapped Him, 68 and said, "Prophecy to us, You
Christ; who is the one who hit You?"

Knowing when to speak, and when to be silent has many other advantages. When you are silent, the other person feels free, or maybe even compelled, to fill that silence.

If you are trying to engage in active listening, then your silence urges the other person to continue speaking. But remember that you still need to give other clues to the other person that you are actually listening and processing his words. Nobody spends much time talking to a statue. There is a balance that you need to strike.

As the comedian Ron White said during one of his routines, where he described being arrested for driving intoxicated, "I knew I had the right to remain silent... I just didn't have the ability to do so."

The other side of that coin is speaking too much, and listening too little. The Scriptures speak to that condition, as well.

Prov 10:10

19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,
But he who restrains his lips is wise.

We are familiar with the phrase, “be still and know...” It seems to apply well to this topic. If you are constantly speaking, the other person will know. If you are silent as the other persons speak, you will be the one who knows.

Let’s also now examine the concept of prejudice. This is another impediment to productive conversation.

When engaging in a conversation with another, we should be sensitive to what is going on inside of us as well. We, as human beings, have a tendency to reach conclusions regarding other people by visual and audio clues. We have a natural tendency to reach conclusions based upon incomplete information by “connecting the dots” and, sadly, we have a tendency to connect some “dots” that are not actually there.² When we reach a judgment like that regarding who a person is, we have engaged in pre-judgment. In English, the term “pre justice” has been shortened to merely, “prejudice.” We have all seen that when some

² Taking advantage of this tendency to fill-in the blanks with suppositions rather than facts is the cornerstone of what we in the military called, “deception operations.” I found I could make other people believe something that was not true – was true. And what was true – was not true. All I had to do was play upon this tendency in their minds.

make an unflattering declaration regarding another, the one to whom the declaration is directed will declare, “you can’t judge me!”

The Scriptures *command* judges to judge. Deuteronomy 16-17 sets up the judicial system for Israel. And Rv. Shaul (Paul) makes it clear that in the kingdom to come, just as was with the people Israel even before entering the Land, some will be elevated to the office of judge. And believers should be constituting a Beit Din³ in their congregations to resolve issues between other believers.

1 Cor 6:1-7

6 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? 4 If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? 5 I say this to your shame. Is

³ A Beit Din is a “house of judgment” which is a court comprised of those in the Jewish community who have proven themselves to be worthy of that honor, due to their great knowledge, and their great wisdom. Normally, a judge must first be a Rabbi, in Judaism.

it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? 7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another.

Even if you are not sitting as a judge in a Beit Din, then there is still a requirement to judge as an individual. We are all to judge right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice. When we judge something, we are to use righteous judgment, and to realize that whatever standard we are applying to the other person, that standard will be applied to us as well.

There is a passage which is occasionally misused to insist that believers should not judge one another at all. But a careful examination of the entire passage – putting the opening statement into proper context – shows us that the real issue is hypocrisy, not exercising judgment.

Matt 7:1-5

7 "Do not judge lest you be judged. 2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 "And why do you look at the

speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

This passage is a primary reason I often choose grace and mercy toward others. I wish to have grace and mercy applied to me by the True Judge. The presumption of innocence is a big part of this discipline in my life. Looking at others through the eyes of G-d – and not my own eyes – is another big part.

Still, we are commanded to judge between what is right and wrong. And Yeshua rebuked those who couldn't apply their powers of simple observation to achieve that level of judgment.

Luke 12:54-58

54 And He was also saying to the multitudes, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming,' and so it turns out. 55 "And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out

that way. 56 "You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? 57 "And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?

Certainly, we should not judge by what we see only, but to go deeper, seek out the truth that lies behind what we see, and judge with righteous judgment.

John 7:21

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Knowledge is foundational. Wisdom is the outpouring of knowledge mixed with understanding. And discernment comes with constant practice of wisdom.

Discernment is the intellectual scalpel that allows us to divide between what is righteous from what is evil, right and wrong. That dividing line is not always as easy as it would seem, and it does seem to move somewhat, based on surrounding facts.

Developing a strong discernment discipline is essential to a holy life, and it helps dramatically in conducting productive conversations.

Prov 2:1-14

2 My son, if you will receive my sayings, And treasure my commandments within you, 2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; 3 For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; 4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will discern the fear of the Lord, And discover the knowledge of God. 6 For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, 8 Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones. 9 Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course. 10 For wisdom will enter your heart, And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 11 Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, 12 To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things; 13 From those who leave the paths of uprightness, To walk in

the ways of darkness; 14 Who delight in doing evil, And
rejoice in the perversity of evil;

Developing a higher level of discipline in your speech will require constant practice with these skills. If you use the interactions with others as a “practice session” to use the skills of excellent speech, then you will find that it is not nearly as difficult as it once was. Then you will discover one day that it has become your natural default way of behaving.