

8-16-25 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – *Ekev* (as a result)
Torah Portion: Deuteronomy 7:12 – 11:25
Haftarah: Isaiah 49:14 – 51:3
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Rom 12:9-11

Biblical Dispute Resolution 15 – Productive Conversations 5 – Avoiding Arguments

Central question: How Can I Defuse an Argument?

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

Deut 7:12-13

12 "Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers. 13 And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock, in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you.

וְהָיָה | עֲקֹב | תִּשְׁמָעוּן | אַתָּה | הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים | הָאֵלֶּה | 12
 Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments,
1961 6118 8085 853 4941 428

וְשָׁמְרֵתֶם | וַעֲשִׂיתֶם | אֲתֶם | וְשָׁמַר | יְהוָה | אֱלֹהֶיךָ | לְךָ | אֶת־
 and keep, and do them, that shall keep the Lord thy God unto thee
8104 6213 853 8104 3068 430 3807a 853

הַבְּרִית | וְאֶת־ | הַחֶסֶד | אֲשֶׁר | נִשְׁבַּע | לְאֲבֹתֶיךָ:
 the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers:
1285 853 2617 834 7650 1

וְאֵהָבָךְ | וּבֵרַכְךָ | וְהִרְבָּךְ | וּבֵרַכְךָ | וַיְבָרֶךְ | פְּרִי־
 And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: and bless thee, the fruit of
157 1288 7235 1288 1288 6529 13

בִּטְנְךָ | וּפְרִי־ | אֲדָמָתְךָ | דִּגְלֶנְךָ | וְתִירְשֶׁךָ | וַיִּצְהָרְךָ | שִׁגְר־
 thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of
990 6529 127 1715 8492 3323 7698

אֶלְפֵיֶיךָ | וַעֲשִׂתֶּנָּה | צֹאנֶךָ | עַל־ | הָאֲדָמָה | אֲשֶׁר־ | נִשְׁבַּע | לְאֲבֹתֶיךָ
 thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers
504 6251 6629 5921 127 834 7650 1

לָתֶת | לְךָ:
 to give thee.
5414 3807a

We are continuing our series on Biblical Dispute Resolution, and continuing to examine how best to have a conversation with another person.

If we have suffered an offense, we should begin our analysis with the idea that we *probably should* have a conversation with the other person, whether he is a believer or not.

The L-rd has told us that it is good for believers to be in unity with one another.

Ps 133

133 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is

For brothers to dwell together in unity!

2 It is like the precious oil upon the head,

Coming down upon the beard,

Even Aaron's beard,

Coming down upon the edge of his robes.

3 It is like the dew of Hermon,

Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;

For there the Lord commanded the blessing — life forever.

We have already seen that in some instances we may not be able to have a productive conversation with another person. If that is the case, it is best to simply disconnect, and do so in a way that preserves your witness of G-d's ways. But you should still strive to maintain unity.

A major point of the holy days from Rosh Hashana (Yom Teruah) to Yom Kippur, found in Leviticus 23, is for us to be reconciled to our brothers and sisters and then to G-d Himself. We are to use these days to identify

our failings to one another, and get right with one another. Once that is done, we are to spend the day in humble repentance before G-d so that we can wash our lives free from sin against Him.

Lev 23:23-32

23 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month on the first of the month, you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. 25 'You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord.'"

26 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 27 "On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the Lord. 28 Neither shall you do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God. 29 If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. 30 As for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. 31 You shall

do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. 32 It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath."

We are instructed to put a priority upon reconciliation with our fellow believer. That priority is higher than even the obligation of making an offering at the Temple.

Matt 5:23-25

23 "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

G-d is telling us that our offerings to him are not pleasing, and I believe also that are our prayers are not effectual before Him while there is ongoing strife between us and another believer. The stench of our strife with one another does not mix well before the throne with the sweet aroma of our heartfelt sacrifices and prayers.

Our unity in faith and love for one another is the hallmark of our faith, and is proof to the world that Yeshua is indeed the Messiah.

John 17:13-21

13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

Knowing that our witness in this world of our Messiah depends on our unity in faith and love, We were instructed to diligently preserve that unity.

Col 3:12-17

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Eph 4:1-6

4 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

So, we now have a list of characteristics that should permeate our speech when having a conversation with believers, even when there is a dispute between us regarding an important matter.

As far as a conversation with an unbeliever is concerned, we are still to strive to show our faith in G-d by our speech.

Col 4:4-6

5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with

grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

1 Peter 3:8-18

8 To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.
10 For,

"Let him who means to love life and see good days
Refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile.

11 "And let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.

12 "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,
And His ears attend to their prayer,
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

13 And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, 15 but sanctify Christ as

Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

And now we see how we should be speaking to those who are not believers, so as to leave with them a good witness of our faith in the One true G-d.

Sadly, our disputes with both believers and unbelievers can lead to arguments, rather than conversations. How do we steer the flow of words into a conversation, and avoiding an argument. This involves a technique which you can learn to perfect, but you will need to work at it in order to do so. That is because this technique runs a bit counter to the desires of the flesh.

You should begin by learning how to avoid making as many declaratory statements and maybe asking a few questions. How do questions disarm an argument? They change the dynamic of the exchange. Here's how.

When you are having a discussion with someone else who has made a statement with which you deeply disagree, the first inclination you have is to think, “I know better than what he said, and I can challenge that statement and prove it wrong.” This may be true, but if you do it, how will the other person react? First of all, he wouldn’t have made the statement he did without a firm belief that he himself knows better than you on this topic, and he intends to challenge your position and prove you wrong. So, both participants in the conversation, who hold this attitude in their hearts, will constantly keep trying to “win” the argument. And that is the problem.

Winning is not the point. An exchange of ideas is the point. If the focus is on winning, then an argument (or debate) will come. If the focus is on truth, then a conversation is possible.

So, there are ways to recast declarative statements into questions. Let’s examine a few examples.

One person can say “Your belief that Torah is done away with is contrary to Scripture.” That statement might be true, but it has a tendency to drive the other person into a defensive posture, where he feels the need to defend himself and attack your statement.

What if you were to rather say, “I see your point. But I’m a bit confused. How can I reconcile that position with this particular Scripture?”

Do you see what that approach does? It puts you into the position of being a student, and the other person into the position of being the teacher. That is not threatening at all to the other person, and in fact elevates him. That way, he will be more open to a discussion and not an argument.

If he were to give you an answer (which he feels resolves the matter) but you know does not do so, then you can continue, “Ok, I see that interpretation. But then what about this verse, as well?” Then you turn to another one. You can ask, “What does this say to you?” When a person reads a passage of Scripture out loud, and it seems to directly contradict his position, he is much more willing to move a bit off his position than if he read it silently. If you have only one Bible between you, you can spin it around for him to read and ask him to read it out loud so you can follow along. That is useful.

If you have had him read a couple of verses which contradict his theological conclusion, you can say, “I am now more confused than before. It does seem that there must be a contradiction in these verses, and maybe something is wrong with the Bible?”

One of my favorite question phrases begins with, “Please help me understand....” That is very effective in keeping the atmosphere productive, and maintaining conversation.

So, asking questions rather than making statements is an important tool in having a productive conversation.

One other technique that is useful is to align yourself alongside the other person in opposition to the problem or the issue. One way to do that is to say words to the effect of, “I do not oppose you, but you and I both are in opposition to this disagreement. Can we work together to find the truth with which we can both agree, and together we can crush this disagreement, and become aligned with one another?”

The answer to this question will tell you much. If the other person is not willing to identify the controversy as something that you and he can work on together, and he simply wishes to continue an argument, then it is likely that no conversation can be held after all. Then it might be time to disengage with gentleness, leaving behind the best witness you can.

This is true, even if the other person is a believer. Remember that it is not always possible for you to conduct a conversation with others, or be at peace with them, regardless of their faith. The truth is that very few

believers in today's body of faith are mature enough to conduct a loving and respectful conversation with another person, even if that person is a believer in their own congregation.

But if there is an agreement that the dispute is what both participants should be aligned against, then you just might be able to have a productive conversation.

If so, then you can frame the issue in a neutral fashion. Let's pick an easy issue: Person A believes that abortion is simply the disposal of some cells that do not constitute a person, and Person B believes that a human life begins at conception and a surgical or chemical abortion – at any stage – is murder.

How can you frame this in a neutral way? Begin by taking apart the issue into its elemental parts, and getting to the real crux of the issue. The issue is not about how an abortion occurs, or who does it, or where it is done. The issue can be broken down into components:

1. Is this “clump of cells” a human being, or not. Define “life.”
 - a. If not, then abortion is legitimate up to a very late stage.
 - i. How late is “too late” for an abortion of just a clump?
 - b. When does the “clump of cells” constitute a baby?

- i. Is it at birth? Following birth?
 - ii. Is it when the baby can be born and then live?
 - iii. Does it matter if special medical techniques are needed?
 - iv. Does it matter that the baby can't live on its own for years?
 - v. Does it matter when there is a heartbeat?
 - vi. Does it matter when the baby can feel pain?
2. Does it matter whether the mother was raped?
 3. Does it matter whether there is a father who wishes to keep the baby?
 4. Does it matter that the mother can't, or won't, take care of the baby?
 5. Does it matter if there is an adoptive set of parents for this child?
 6. Does the baby have any rights to life before being born?
 - a. Where does anyone derive the right to life, and to have choices?
 7. Does G-d have any connection with a clump of cells or a baby at any time from conception forward?

If we have framed the issue with these elemental parts, and with all sorts of subordinate questions, we can sit down with someone else with opposing views and do some research together to come to a conclusion. But that is only possible if both sides are willing to do that research, and to admit that what we find can change our minds about what we believe.

And if we are not so invested in “winning” we can have a productive conversation which never results in a final agreement, but which opens doors to later conversations, or plants seeds that others may water later on.

That leads me to the next point. As participants in productive conversations, we must agree that we can each be wrong, but that there is a truth out there somewhere, if we can only find it. Then we must agree that when we find that truth, we are willing to conform our views to that truth.

If the issue is one of theology, or religion, then we should be able to resolve the dispute by reference to Scripture. But that also requires some deeper-level agreement between those in the conversation.

1. G-d is the source of all truth.
2. We can all be wrong, but G-d is never wrong.
3. We should be quick to question, and even abandon personal beliefs which differ from G-d’s truth.
4. We should align ourselves with G-d’s truth, even if it differs from our personal theology, and even our denominational doctrines.
5. G-d gave us the right answers in Scripture to every major issue.

6. Scripture does not contradict itself, and we must resolve any apparent contradictions in favor of the greater weight of Scripture on any topic.
7. Scripture is better at setting forth truth than commentaries, which are the analysis of men, and which can adhere more to denominational doctrines than to truth.
8. There are many various versions and translations of Scripture, but some are more helpful than others. We should use the best ones if we can to find G-d's truth.
9. The original language of Scripture is more useful than translations or paraphrases. We should resort to the original languages to the degree possible.
10. It is wrong for either of us to hold steadfast to a position that is contrary to Scripture's consistent message.

If you can get agreement on at least some of these points with another believer, then you can have a much better chance for resolving a theological dispute by mutual study of Scripture. But you can proceed with some agreement on some of these issues. But you may reach an impasse more quickly without this level of broad agreement.

If the issue is one of personal preference (as opposed to sin), the discussion can be somewhat different. It can be governed by both parties working to honor the other more than himself.

Rom 12:9-11

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

Ideally, a matter of personal preference should rarely, if ever, become a topic of discussion among believers. When a believer insists upon imposing his personal preference upon others, that is normally borne from pride, and a desire to rule over others – not to serve others. We each have differing personal preferences. G-d has made us all quite different. We are each wired in a unique way, with dramatic differences. Even identical twins express significant differences in preferences.

If we are to isolate ourselves from others, and *not* be part of a congregation, then our personal preferences will always be a priority to us. But we are commanded not to isolate ourselves.

Heb 10:23-25

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

As we assemble together, we will be required to put aside our petty differences and learn to get along with one another, in love. The trick is deciding what is petty, and what is not. Hopefully, as we mature in faith, the line between petty and vexing will be pushed further and further back, so that we will find little that vexes us so grievously that we need to have a conversation with another believer about it.

Prov 10:11

12 Hatred stirs up strife,
But love covers all transgressions.

And even if something reaches the vexing level, there is a mechanism to deal with that. And that is a conversation in love. Hopefully, if each person works to honor the other person, an accommodation can be

reached, even in such matters of strong disagreement regarding personal preference.

But we can recognize that even in matters of personal preference, there can be an impasse between believers. In that case, it might be best to go to the spiritual leader of the ministry or congregation and seek some help. In most all cases like this, one person's expectations might be more on the unreasonable end of the spectrum. The spiritual leader can help one or both of the parties see that a more holy application of love could be the key to harmony.

We need to remember that Satan very much wishes for believers to be at odds with one another. Satan will whisper in our ears accusations and offenses that may not even be real, but which have the power to distance us from other believers. We must be sensitive to that attack, and be ready to identify that Satan has done it.

2 Cor 10:3-6

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up

against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

And if we identify the sneak attack by Satan, don't let him win. Take that thought captive.

We need also to remember that Yeshua had the opportunity to be offended by the sins, as well as the personal preferences, of almost everyone He encountered. We can read the accounts of His life recorded in the gospels and discover that He almost never rebuked people for personal preferences. And in matters of sin, He regularly chose to offer a loving encouragement to do better. We would be well-advised to follow His lead.