

Crafting a World of Conversation

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Rabbi Shira Stutman

TEXT #1: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference, p. 64-65

Truth on earth is not, nor can be, the whole truth. It is limited, not comprehensive; particular, not universal. When two propositions conflict it is not necessarily because one is true the other false. It may be, and often is, that each represents a different perspective on reality, an alternative way of structuring order, no more and no less commensurable than a Shakespeare sonnet, a Michelangelo painting or a Schubert sonata. In heaven there is truth; on earth there are truths. Therefore, each culture has something to contribute. Each person knows something no one else does. The sages said: 'Who is wise? One who learns from all men- 'The wisest is not one who knows himself wiser than others: he is one who knows all men have some share of the truth, and is willing to learn from them, for none of us knows all the truth and each of us knows some of it.

- 1. Rabbi Sacks wrote this text before we had such phrases as "fake news" or "truthiness." Is he correct that there are indeed multiple truths on earth?**
- 2. Can you think of situations in which he could be proven wrong, or in which people might argue for "multiple truths" when you're pretty sure there's only one? Or vice versa?**

TEXT #2: Likutei Moharan, Part II 8

And even though rebuke is a great thing and it is incumbent upon each Jew to rebuke his friend when he sees him acting in a way that is not allowed...even so not everyone is able to rebuke. As Rabbi Akiva said, "I would be surprised if there is a person in our generation who is able to rebuke." And if Rabbi Akiva said this about his generation, all the more so today. Because when one rebukes who is not able to rebuke, then one will not be able to receive his rebuke and he causes a putrid smell in the souls that hear his rebuke. Because by means of his rebuke, he [actually] arouses the nasty scent of the bad actions and bad qualities in those he rebukes.

ליקוטי מוהר"ן, תנינא ח'

א אף-על-פי שתוכחה הוא דבר גדול, ומטל על כל אחד מישראל להוכיח את חברו, כשרואה בו שאינו מתנהג כשורה, כמו שכתוב (ויקרא ט): הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך, אף-על-פי-כן לאו כל אדם ראוי להוכיח. כמו שאמר רבי עקיבא (ערכין טז): תמה אני, אם יש בדור הזה מי שיכול להוכיח. ואם רבי עקיבא אמר זאת בדורו, כל-שכן בדור הזה של עכשו. כי כשהמוכיח אינו ראוי להוכיח, אזי לא די שאינו מועיל בתוכחתו, אף גם הוא מבאיש ריח של הנשמות השומעים תוכחתו. כי על-ידי תוכחתו הוא מעורר הריח רע של המעשים רעים ומדות רעות של האנשים שהוא מוכיחם.

- 1. First, explain this text in plain language. What does it mean?**
- 2. More specifically, what types of people are "not able to rebuke"?**
- 3. In general, are you "able to rebuke"? Are there certain arenas in which you're not?**
- 4. What's the connection with rebuke and smell? Why that sense, not others?**

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TEXT #3: Eruvin 13b:10-14

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Shmuel, For three years, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai argued. One said, 'The halakha is like us,' and the other said, 'The halakha is like us.' A heavenly voice spoke: "These and these are the words of the living God, and the halakha is like the House of Hillel."

A question was raised: Since the heavenly voice declared: "Both these and those are the words of the Living God," why was the halacha established to follow the opinion of Hillel? It is because the students of Hillel were kind and gracious. They taught their own ideas as well as the ideas from the students of Shammai. Not only for this reason, but they went so far as to teach Shammai's opinions first.

- 1. What does it mean for both to be “words of the living God”?**
- 2. If so, why is halakha decided like one of them?**
- 3. What is gained by deciding the halakha is like one of them? What is lost?**

TEXT #4: Pirkei Avot 5:7

(7) Seven things are [found] in an unformed person and seven in a wise person. A wise person does not speak in front of someone who is greater than him in wisdom or in number; and he does not interrupt the words of his fellow; and is not impulsive in answering; and he asks to the point and answers as is proper; and he speaks to the first [point] first and the last [point] last; and about that which he has not heard [anything], says, "I have not heard [anything]"; and he concedes to the truth. And their opposites [are the case] with an unformed person.

- 1. Do you agree with this advice?**
- 2. How do you understand "he speaks about the first first, and the last last"?**
- 3. Think about everything you've learned thus far this evening (and in your life) about civil discourse. How might you translate this list into an instruction manual for civil discourse? What words of wisdom might you add to this list? Remove/change?**

עירובין י"ג ב"י-י"ד

א"ר אבא אמר שמואל שלש שנים
נחלקו ב"ש וב"ה הללו אומרים
הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה
כמותנו יצאה בת קול ואמרה אלו
ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן והלכה
כב"ה וכי מאחר שאלו ואלו דברי
אלהים חיים מפני מה זכו ב"ה
לקבוע הלכה כמותן מפני שנוחין
ועלובין היו ושונין דבריהן ודברי ב"ש
לא עוד אלא שמקדימין דברי ב"ש
לדבריהן כאותה ששנינו מי שהיה
ראשו ורובו בסוכה ושלחנו בתוך
הבית בית שמאי פוסלין וב"ה
מכשירין

משנה אבות ה' ז'

(ז) שבעה דברים בגלם ושבעה
בחכם. חכם אינו מדבר בפני מי
שהוא גדול ממנו בחכמה ובמנין,
ואינו נכנס לתוך דברי חבירו, ואינו
נבהל להשיב, שואל כענין ומשיב
כהלכה, ואומר על ראשון ראשון
ועל אחרון אחרון, ועל מה שלא
שמע, אומר לא שמעתי, ומודה על
האמת. וחלופיהן בגלם: