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SESSION

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# Constructive Disagreements

December • Hanukkah



**JOURNEY OF GROWTH**  
Exploring Jewish Values  
and Inspiring Action

In partnership with



Ministry for Diaspora Affairs  
and Combating Antisemitism

## VALUE

# Courage

## *Azut d’Kedushah*

Hanukkah tells the story of people who refused to let fear determine their choices. A small group stood against overwhelming odds because something mattered more to them than their fear. Jewish tradition sometimes calls this *azut d’kedushah*, holy *chutzpah*. Courage here does not mean the absence of fear. It means deciding that something more important than fear will guide our actions.

In our homes, courage often looks quieter but no less meaningful. Tension can enter through small moments. A comment, a habit, a disagreement can shift the atmosphere between people who care about each other. In those moments, it can feel easier to withdraw, to let frustration grow or irritation slip into your voice. Courage asks something different. It asks us to remain present, to speak honestly, and to listen even when the conversation feels difficult.

This session draws on Jewish wisdom both ancient and modern, including teachings from Daniel Taub, an Israeli mediator, lawyer, and diplomat. His 2025 book *Beyond Dispute: Rediscovering the Jewish Art of Constructive Disagreement* explores how people with deeply different beliefs can remain in conversation. He describes disagreement as a shared endeavor, one that invites participants to act as explorers rather than combatants, even in moments of deep conflict.

Hanukkah reminds us that courage often begins with small acts. One light is kindled, and then another. In the same way, a single courageous conversation can begin to shift the atmosphere in a home. When we choose to face tension with honesty, humility, and care, we help create relationships strong enough to hold difference without losing connection.



### FACILITATOR PREPARATION

- **Read through the session** to understand the flow.
- **Notice the transitions.** Mark where you will move the group from one section to the next.
- **Practice saying aloud** the short instructions in Parts III, IV, and VI. Clear delivery sets the tone.
- **The work of this session is relational.** Your task as a facilitator is to create a steady container where participants can explore disagreement with curiosity.
- **You set the pace.** Keep the group focused on the exercises and let the texts do the teaching.



### TIMELINE: 90 MIN

BEGIN WITH INTENTION | 5 MIN

WELCOME | 5 MIN

FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN | 20 MIN

DEVELOPING A ROBUST IDENTITY:  
GUIDED VISUALIZATION | 10 MIN

ELEPHANT & RIDER | 15 MIN

CASE STUDY | 25 MIN

BRING YOUR LEARNING HOME | 5 MIN

END WITH MEANING | 5 MIN



### MATERIALS FOR THIS WORKSHOP

Flipchart or whiteboard/markers



### WHO FACILITATES THE SESSION?

This session is designed for participants to lead. Anyone in the group can facilitate, regardless of background or experience. The facilitator’s role is to guide the flow, keep time, and read the prompts provided in the guide. All instructions and questions are included. Co-facilitators can divide roles if helpful, with one managing time and the other guiding the activities.



### VIDEO GUIDE

Want a helping hand (and heart) from Momentum Educators on how to facilitate this session? Follow this QR code to access the [training video](#) library:



## PART I

**Begin with Intention**

5 MIN

Looking for ways to start your session with purpose?

Turn to p. 4 for simple, meaningful ideas to open your gathering with presence, connection, and shared energy.



## PART II

**Welcome**

5 MIN

Hanukkah invites us to notice how light enters complicated spaces. Today we turn that lens toward the moments when we disagree. Conflict shows up in every home and every relationship. What matters is how we step into it.

This session explores courage, a courage that is not the absence of fear, rather the decision that something more important than fear will guide our actions. In relationships, that courage might mean staying present in a difficult conversation, speaking honestly while protecting dignity, or listening long enough to understand what truly matters to the other person.

As we learn together, you will slow down and notice your own patterns. What happens inside you when someone you love sees a situation in a completely different way? What habits do you fall back on? Where do you hold firm, where do you pull away, and what choices help keep the relationship steady?

Jewish tradition teaches that disagreement does not have to destroy connection. Our time together will offer tools and perspective for engaging in disagreement with clarity and courage, so that difficult conversations can help strengthen the home and community you are trying to build, one relationship at a time.

## PART III

**For the Sake of Heaven**

20 MIN

Begin by inviting participants to take a moment to jot down a few words or associations that come to mind when they hear the words “disagreement” or “argument.” After a minute or two, ask them to call out their associations and notice the range of responses in the room. Use this brief exercise to introduce the Jewish concepts of *mahloket* and *helek*, and how Jewish tradition understands disagreement as an opportunity to uncover different pieces of truth. In pairs or small groups, take turns reading out loud the elements of Part III: Understanding Our Terms texts, and Texts in Context. After you finish, talk through the Guiding Questions below.

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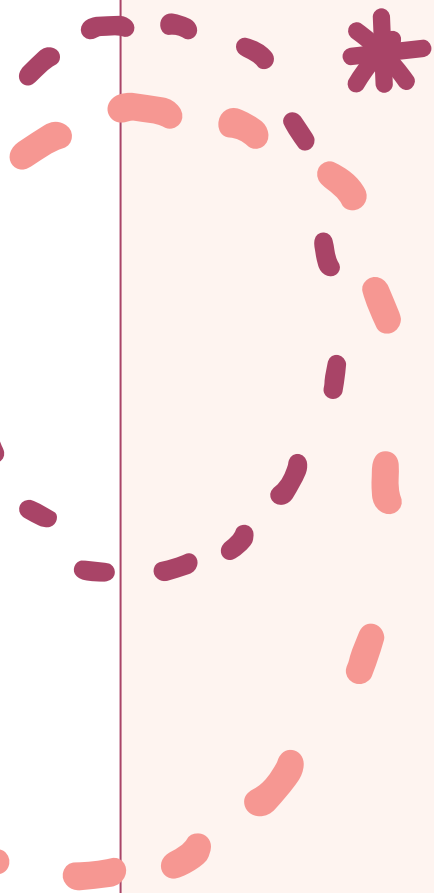
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**Understanding Our Terms**

**Mahloket** means disagreement or dispute. It comes from the Hebrew root חִלְקָה which means to divide or to portion. Built into the word is the idea that each person holds a *helek* a part or portion of the issue. No one carries the whole picture alone. A *Mahloket* assumes that there is a larger whole that could be reached if the different portions are brought together with honesty and care.

PART III

## For the Sake of Heaven



### ***Mahloket l'Shem Shamayim***

This phrase means a **disagreement for the sake of heaven**. *L'Shem* means for the sake of. *Shamayim* means heaven. A *Mahloket l'Shem Shamayim* is a disagreement rooted in principled intention and genuine seeking, not in ego or the need to win. It is the kind of disagreement that can deepen trust, clarify values, and create space for real connection.

### **Texts**

#### **PIRKEI AVOT 5:17**

Any disagreement rooted in a higher purpose will endure. Any disagreement driven by other motives will not endure. Which disagreement is rooted in a higher purpose? The disagreement between **Hillel and Shammai**. And which is not? The dispute of **Korach** and his congregation.

#### **BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE ERUVIN 13B**

For three years, the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai disagreed. One said, “The law follows us,” and the other said, “The law follows us.” A voice from heaven proclaimed: “These and those are the words of the living God, but the law follows the School of Hillel.”

And why did the law follow the School of Hillel?

Because they were gentle and humble. Because they taught their own words and the words of the School of Shammai. And they taught the words of the School of Shammai before their own.

### **Texts in Context**

**Hillel and Shammai** were two influential Jewish teachers who lived in the first century BCE. They often disagreed with each other, and their debates became the center of two major schools of thought. Hillel is remembered for his patience, gentleness, and focus on compassion. Shammai is remembered for stricter interpretations and a more exacting style. Their disagreements were preserved not to show winners and losers, but to model confident humility: how serious thinkers can argue with conviction while maintaining respect.

**Korach** is a figure from the Torah who led a rebellion against Moses in the wilderness. He claimed that Moses and Aaron were taking too much authority for themselves. Many sages interpret his story as a warning about arguments that are driven by ego rather than principle. Korach's case becomes an example of a dispute that breaks relationships instead of strengthening them.

## PART III

**For the Sake of Heaven****Guiding Questions**

- Which ideas or phrases in the texts stood out to you?
- What kind of courage do these sources suggest is needed for healthy disagreement?
- Where do you see this kind of courage showing up in real family relationships?

## PART IV

**Developing a Robust Identity: Guided Visualization**

10 MIN

**“We do not see things as they are; we see things as we are.”**

- Anaïs Nin

Invite participants to sit comfortably and, if they wish, close their eyes. Explain that you will guide them through a short reflection about how disagreements unfold beneath the surface.

Ask them to think of a recent disagreement or argument. It does not need to be a major conflict. It could be something small that still lingered in their mind afterward.

Begin with the first layer.

**1. WHAT HAPPENED?**

Invite participants to picture the moment of the disagreement. Where were they? Who else was there? What were the concrete details of what happened?

This is the first layer of most disagreements: the conversation about facts. What time someone arrived home. What rule had been agreed upon. What was said and what was not said.

Many arguments stay at this level. We focus on what happened and what should happen next.

Now guide them one layer deeper.

**2. FEELINGS**

Ask participants to notice the emotions that were present in that moment. What were they feeling before the disagreement even began? What feelings surfaced as the conversation unfolded?

Often, disagreements quickly become conversations about emotion, even if no one names those emotions directly. Someone may feel misunderstood, controlled, dismissed, worried, or hurt.

Invite participants to imagine what the other person in the disagreement might have been feeling as well. When feelings remain unspoken, conversations often circle endlessly around rules and details.

Finally, guide them to the deepest layer.



PART IV

## Developing a Robust Identity

### 3. IDENTITY

Now ask participants to reflect on what the disagreement may have touched about how they see themselves.

Did it raise questions like: Am I being respected? Am I a good parent? Am I responsible? Am I being fair?

At this deepest level, disagreements often connect to identity. They touch our sense of who we are and who we want to be.

A conversation that appears to be about a rule or a decision can quickly become something deeper: a question about what kind of person I am, what kind of family we are, and what kind of relationships we want to build.

After a moment of quiet reflection, invite participants to open their eyes and briefly share with a partner:

*Which layer do you think shows up most often in your disagreements: facts, feelings, or identity?*

PART V

## The Elephant and the Rider



15 MIN

### Read This Section Aloud Together

The social psychologist Dr. Jonathan Haidt spent years studying the same question we are asking: Why do people with good intentions and strong values still find themselves in sharp disagreement?

In his book *The Righteous Mind*, he offers a helpful image for how our minds work.

*Ask the group: When you find yourself in an argument, do you usually feel your reaction first, or do you calmly reason it through? Allow a few voices to respond.*

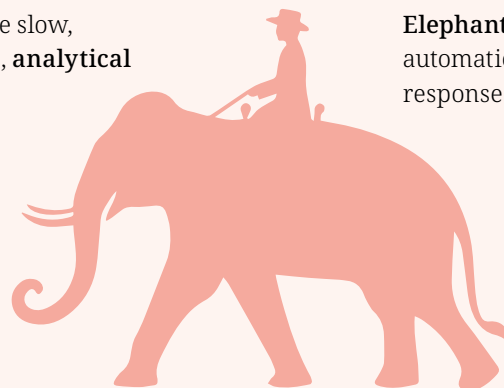
Haidt suggests that our brains operate with two systems:

- The Elephant is the fast, instinctive, intuitive system.
- The Rider is the slower, more deliberate, reasoning system.

*Ask the group: Which one do you think reacts first in most disagreements, the Elephant or the Rider? After a few responses, continue.*

**Rider:** The slow, conscious, **analytical** response

**Elephant:** The fast, automatic, **emotional** response



## PART V



## The Elephant and the Rider



The elephant is much larger and stronger than the rider. It represents the force of our feelings, instincts, and identity. It reacts quickly and sets the direction.

Then the rider comes in. The rider analyzes, explains, and justifies what is already happening.

*Ask: Have you ever found yourself explaining your position very confidently, only to realize later that your feelings had already decided it? **Pause for a few responses.***

In many disagreements, the rider believes it is steering the conversation, but in reality it is often following the direction the elephant has already taken.

Because the elephant reacts first, arguments that focus only on facts often fail to reach what is really driving the disagreement. Facts and reasoning alone rarely change someone's mind.

*Ask: What might help prevent calming someone's elephant, or calm a riled elephant so the rider can begin to listen?*

Engagement begins when the elephant feels safe, affirmed, and understood. Only then does the rider become open to thinking differently.

**Now let's connect this idea to real relationships.**

## Case Study



25 MIN



When the Elephant feels threatened, logic alone rarely changes its direction. In conversations about Israel, identity, or other deeply personal issues, people often think they are debating facts. In reality, emotions and identity are already shaping how those facts are heard and interpreted.

Recognizing those deeper layers takes courage. It asks us to pause instead of react, to stay present even when a conversation feels uncomfortable. If we ignore what is happening beneath the surface, conversations can quickly become stuck or defensive. When we name those emotions and values honestly, we create space for curiosity, understanding, and more thoughtful responses.

**This case study is an opportunity to practice noticing all three layers.**

### High School History

A group of Jewish moms text each other after their teens come home from school saying that a history class on the rise of nationalism in the 19th century unexpectedly shifted into a discussion about current events in Israel. The conversation included words like “colonialism,” “apartheid,” and “genocide.” One mom writes, “Our kids shouldn’t be left to navigate language like that alone. We should reach out to the school.” Another replies, “I’m uncomfortable too, but I don’t want to turn this into a bigger conflict.” The next day, a mom adds, “My son felt like he had to defend Israel by himself.” Another responds, “My daughter stayed quiet because she didn’t want attention or pushback.” A third adds, “I want my kid to be proud and informed, but I also want them to feel safe.” The group chat ends without a clear plan, as the moms weigh whether speaking up will help or make things harder.

Facts	Feelings	Identity

#### INSTRUCTIONS TO FILL OUT THE CHART

Read the case study, then fill in the chart, imagining that you are one of the moms in the group.

#### FACTS

Start with the first layer, the one closest to the surface. What happened? Using only the information in the case study, list the facts as you understand them. Notice that even at the level of facts, different people may interpret “what happened” differently. For this exercise, stay anchored in the scenario itself rather than adding information you wish you had.

## PART VI

**Case Study****FEELINGS**

Imagine yourself in this situation, what emotions are YOU experiencing in this moment?

**IDENTITY**

Consider the deepest layer. What in your past might be shaping your reaction, such as family history, Jewish background, or prior experiences? At the same time, what future are you imagining for your children and for the Jewish community? How might those hopes and fears influence how you want to respond now?

**The goal is not to solve the situation but to practice noticing the different layers operating at the same time.**

**Share Back in Pairs or as a Group**

We will share in three rounds. Notice how differently we experience the same scenario.

**ROUND 1: FACTS**

As you listen to others share the facts they identified, pay attention to how different details stood out to different people. Even though we all read the same Case Study, we may not agree on what is most important or even what happened. Notice how quickly interpretation can shape what we call facts.

**ROUND 2: FEELINGS**

As women share feelings, notice the range in the room. What surprises you? Why might people with shared values have different emotional reactions to the same situation?

**ROUND 3: IDENTITY**

Listen for the variety of backgrounds, stories, and values represented here. This room reflects a global Jewish family, with many different lived experiences shaping how we show up. Notice the diversity of hopes, fears, and responsibilities your Momentum sisters carry.

**TAKE HOME**

Now imagine this same mix of facts, feelings, and identities inside your own family. Navigating them with a partner or with children requires courage. It means staying present when a conversation feels uncomfortable and choosing relationship even when you disagree.

Jewish tradition reminds us that disagreement does not have to break connection. The debates between Hillel and Shammai model the possibility that strong differences can exist alongside respect and care. When we learn to hold multiple perspectives with humility, disagreement itself can become a way to deepen understanding and strengthen the relationships that matter most.



PART VII

## Bring Your Learning Home



5 MIN



Hanukkah teaches that light grows through steady, small acts. One flame becomes two, then three, then eight. In the same way, courage in the home is often expressed through small choices that shape the atmosphere of everyday life.

**Ways to bring the practices from this session into daily life.**

### WITH A PARTNER

Pick a small issue that keeps resurfacing. Before the conversation begins, set the intention: I want to understand what matters to you here. As you talk, try to notice the different layers at play. What are the facts as each of you sees them? What feelings are present? What identity questions or past experiences might be shaping the conversation? Practice the Hillel approach by naming their perspective before sharing your own: Here's what I think you're saying... and then pause. Notice how the tone shifts when both people feel heard.

### WITH KIDS

Use an everyday moment of disagreement as a gentle reflection exercise. Ask: What happened? How did you feel? What mattered most to you? Help children see that people can experience the same event differently and still both be telling the truth as they understand it. Share the idea that everyone holds a *helek*, חלק, a piece of the picture. Learning to name feelings and listen to someone else's version is part of growing up with courage.

### WITH TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

A helpful way to build this skill is to start with a scene from a movie or show you watch together. Pause and ask: What happened from each character's point of view? What feelings do you notice? What might each person care about or be afraid of? Practicing on stories creates distance and makes it easier to notice the layers without defensiveness. Encourage them to slow the story down and notice that many disagreements are not only about events but also about identity, belonging, and how we want to be seen. The goal is not agreement on everything, but learning how to stay in relationship across difference.

### BEYOND THE FAMILY

Bring this practice into your wider circles: work, volunteer roles, and community spaces. When tension rises, ask yourself: What facts am I focusing on? What feelings might be present that have not been named? What identities or histories might be shaping how people are responding? Remember that each person holds a *helek*, חלק, a partial view. When you model curiosity and layered listening, you help create courageous space for more thoughtful and respectful disagreement.



PART VIII

**End with Meaning**

5 MIN

As we close, may we hold disagreement as a sacred practice, committing to argue for the sake of heaven by protecting dignity, staying in relationship, and letting our differences sharpen rather than shatter us.

Head back to p. 4 for thoughtful ways to close your gathering with reflection, gratitude, and a sense of shared purpose.

PART IX

**Continue the Journey**

Continue growing your skills as a Jewish leader through the [Momentum Fellowship](#), an opportunity for listening, learning, mentorship, and meaningful leadership development.

## Beyond Dispute: Rediscovering the Jewish Art of Constructive Disagreement

Drawing on classical Jewish sources, modern conflict-resolution research, and author Daniel Taub's experience as a diplomat and negotiator, this book presents disagreement as a shared search for truth rather than a zero-sum fight. Its central idea is that healthy argument can deepen relationship and community when it is grounded in listening, humility, and a willingness to hold multiple perspectives at once.



NOTES



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