



Jewish Institute
for Liberal
Values

Sources to work from for sermons on viewpoint diversity

Sanhedrin 38a:12 (commentary on the above)

It was taught: Rabbi Meir said, "One person is different from another in three ways: In voice, in appearance, and in thought."

Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5

Adam, the first human, was created alone, in order to teach that anyone who destroys one soul in Israel is considered to have destroyed an entire world; conversely, anyone who saves one soul in Israel is considered to have saved an entire world. And there is another reason Adam was created alone -- for the purpose of maintaining peace among people, so that one person will not say to another: My father is greater than yours. ... And this also serves to testify to the greatness of

סנהדרין ל"ח א:י"ב

תניא היה רבי מאיר אומר בשלשה
דברים אדם משתנה מחבירו בקול
במראה ובדעת

משנה סנהדרין ד':ה'

לְפִיכָּהּ נִבְרָא אָדָם יְחִידִי, לְלַמְדָּהּ,
שְׁכָל הַמְּאֵבֵד נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל,
מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכֶּתוּב כָּאֵלוֹ אֵבֵד עוֹלָם
מְלֵא. וְכָל הַמְּקַיֵּם נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת
מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכֶּתוּב כָּאֵלוֹ
קַיֵּם עוֹלָם מְלֵא. וּמִפְּנֵי שְׁלוֹם
הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמֶר אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ
אָבִא גְדוֹל מֵאָבִיךָ. ... וְלִהְגִּיד גְּדֻלָּתוֹ
שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁאָדָם טוֹבֵעַ
כְּמָה מִטְּבָעוֹת בְּחוֹתָם אֶחָד וְכֻלָּן

the Holy One, for when a person stamps several coins with one die, they are all similar to each other. But the supreme Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One of Blessing, stamped all people with the seal of the first human, as all of them are his offspring, and none of them is similar to another. Therefore, since all of humanity descends from one person, every single person may say: The world was created for me.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Olat Ha-Ra'ayah*

Just as the Holy Temple is built from different components, the truth of God, who is the Light of the World, is composed from different perspectives, through which all divergent opinions become clear. For all of them are the words of the living God, despite our different approaches to prayer and study ... and in this sense, all of the perspectives are aligned and do not contradict each other. For the diversity of our opinions comes from the diversity of our souls. Indeed, it enriches wisdom and causes its expansion, which affirms that it is only

דומין זה לזה, ומלך מלכי המלכים
הקדוש ברוך הוא טבע כל אדם
בחותמו של אדם הראשון ואין אחד
מהן דומה לחברו. לפיכך כל אחד
ואחד חייב לומר, בשבילי נברא
העולם.

הראי'ה קוק, מתוך סידור עולת
ראי'ה א, עמוד ש'ל

כי הבניין יבנה מחלקים שונים,
והאמת של אור העולם תבנה
מצדדים שונים, וכל השיטות
יתבררו, ואלו ואלו דברי אלוקים
חיים, מדרכי העבודה והחינוך
השונים ... שבזה יתישרו הדברים
ולא יהיו סותרים זה את זה. וריבוי
הדעות שבא על ידי השתנות
הנפשות. דווקא הוא מעשיר את
החוכמה וגורם להרחבתה ויוכר

possible for the Building of Peace to be constructed by combining a number of diverse elements that, at first glance, appear to oppose one another.

שאי אפשר היה לבנין השלום
שיבנה אלא על ידי כל אותן
ההשפעות הנראות כמנצחות זו את
זו.

Genesis 1:13

God gathered the dust [to create Adam] from the four corners of the earth - red, black, white and green.

התחיל לקבץ עפרו מד' פנות
העולם אדום שחור לבן ירקרק.

Pirke DeRabbi Eliezer 11:5

... Why from the four corners of the earth? So that if one travels from east to west and comes to the end of his life, no one can say to him as he prepares to depart from the world, "Your body is not made from the dust of this land, as mine is. Go back to where you were created!" Rather, every place that a person goes contains the dust from which they were created and to which they will return.

... ולמה מד' פנות העולם שאם
יבא מן המזרח למערב ויגיע קצו
להפטר מן העולם שלא תאמר
הארץ אין עפר גופך משלי חזור
למקום שנבראת אלא כל מקום
שאדם הולך משם הוא גופו ולשם
הוא חוזר.

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.

משנה עדיות א'י"ב

אלו דברים שחזרו בית הלל להורות כדברי בית שמאי. האשה שבאה ממדינת הים ואמרה מת בעלי, תנשא. מת בעלי, תתיבם. ובית הלל אומרים, לא שמענו אלא בבאה מן הקציר בלבד. אמרו להם בית שמאי, אחת הבאה מן הקציר ואחת הבאה מן הזיתים ואחת הבאה ממדינת הים, לא דברו בקציר אלא בהווה. חזרו בית הלל להורות כבית שמאי

Mishnah Eduyot 1:12

These are the matters concerning which Beit Hillel went back and taught according to the opinion of Beit Shammai: A woman who came from overseas and said: "My husband died," she may marry again; "My husband died [without children]," she must undergo levirate marriage. But Beit Hillel says: We have heard so only in [the case of a woman] who came from the harvesting. Beit Shammai said to them: It is the same thing in the case of [a woman] who came from the harvesting or [a woman] who came from the olive-picking or [a woman] who came from overseas; they mentioned harvesting only because that is how it happened. [Then] Beit Hillel went back and taught according to Beit Shammai.

Magen Avot, 5:17

As it is said that if it is for the sake of Heaven it is destined to exist...this signifies that they will concede to each other, for they have no intention to defeat the other, only to clearly establish the matter, and when the proofs of one are upheld, those of the other will be annulled, as we learned that the school of Hillel reverted to teaching in accordance with the school of Shammai, and Rabbi Akiva reverted to instructing in accordance with Ben Azzai....

Bereishit Rabbah 8:5

Rabbi Simon said: "When the time came for the Holy One Blessed Be God to create the first human being, the angels of (Divine) service broke up into opposing groups. Some among them say: 'S/he should be created.' Some among them say: 'S/he should not be created.' This is what is written: 'Kindness and truth met; righteousness and peace kissed.' (Psalms 85:11)

Kindness says: 'Let s/he be created because s/he will bestow kindnesses.'

Truth says: 'Let s/he not be created because s/he because s/he is entirely (made of) lies.'

Righteousness says: 'Let s/he be created for s/he will do righteous acts.'

And peace says; 'Let s/he not be created for s/he is entirely dissension.'

What did the Holy One Blessed be God do? God took truth and flung him to the ground. Thus it is written: 'You will cast truth to the ground.' (Daniel 8:12)

The angels of (Divine) service said before the Holy One Blessed be God: 'Master of worlds! Why do You despise Your seal of truth? Let truth rise from the ground as it is written: 'Truth will grow from the earth.' (Psalms 85:12)

Rabbi Hunah the rabbi of Tzipori said: "While the angels of (Divine) service were arguing with one another and occupied with one another, the Holy One Blessed be God created the first human."

God said to them: "Why are you debating? The human is already created."

Commentary Source for Pirkei Avot 5:17:

Commentary on Pirkei Avot by Rabbi Marc D. Angel (*The Koren Pirke Avot*)

The Korah model of controversy is contrasted with the debates between Hillel and Shammai. Those disputes were for the sake of Heaven. Neither Hillel nor Shammai was seeking personal power or glory. Each was presenting his interpretation of the Torah and his application of Halakha. Each had cogent arguments to support his view. Although they disagreed strongly on various issues, they were not opponents out to destroy each other but were colleagues in search of truth. The Talmud reflects this idea when it states that both of their views "were the words of the living God." In such debates, a ruling must be reached so that people will know what the law requires. Yet, the "losing" side has not really lost. His opinion is still quoted and taken seriously*. While it did not prevail then, it might prevail at another time or in another context. Hillel and Shammai ultimately were on the same side - on the side of truth, on the side of Heaven. Their controversies reflected honest and well-reasoned differences of opinion. What they shared in common far outweighed their relatively few differences of opinion.

Some present-day disputes are clearly in the category of Korah controversies. People fight for power, seek to destroy their opponents, give vent to their egotistical ambitions in cruel and ruthless ways. These controversies are resolved through power struggles. The stronger side will win; the weaker side will be wiped out or forced to surrender. Other contemporary controversies are more akin to those of Hillel and Shammai. As long as the disputants realize they are ultimately on the same side, these controversies can be healthy aspects of our intellectual and cultural lives. We can weigh both sides calmly and reasonably. We can disagree on various points of theology or philosophy and still remain respectful and friendly to each other. [...]

In his essay "The Pursuit of the Ideal," Sir Isaiah Berlin addressed the question of how to deal with theological and philosophical disagreements.

Berlin favored what he called "pluralism," an acceptance that different people might come to legitimate differences of opinion without seeing each other as mortal enemies or opponents. In his view, pluralism is "the conception that there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathizing and deriving light from each other" (*The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, Farrar Straus and Giroux, New York, 1997, p.9). In other words, I may be convinced that I have the real truth, but I may still see that others — who do not share my understanding of truth — are good, sincere, and thoughtful people trying to do their best. I can learn from them, respect them, and be friendly with them. We are disputants — not enemies.

In distinguishing between the Korah-type controversies and the Hillel-Shammai-type controversies, this Mishna provides insight on the nature of human conflict. By juxtaposing them, it may be alluding to the thin line between these two types of controversies. Power struggles can dress themselves up as religious debates; theological and philosophical disputes can be mere camouflage for egotistical and unsavory oppression of opponents.

*Note: In contemporary discourse, this is referred to as "steel-manning" your opponent's argument (the opposite of straw-manning, which is either misrepresenting or presenting a weak version of one's opponent's argument that's easy to take down).