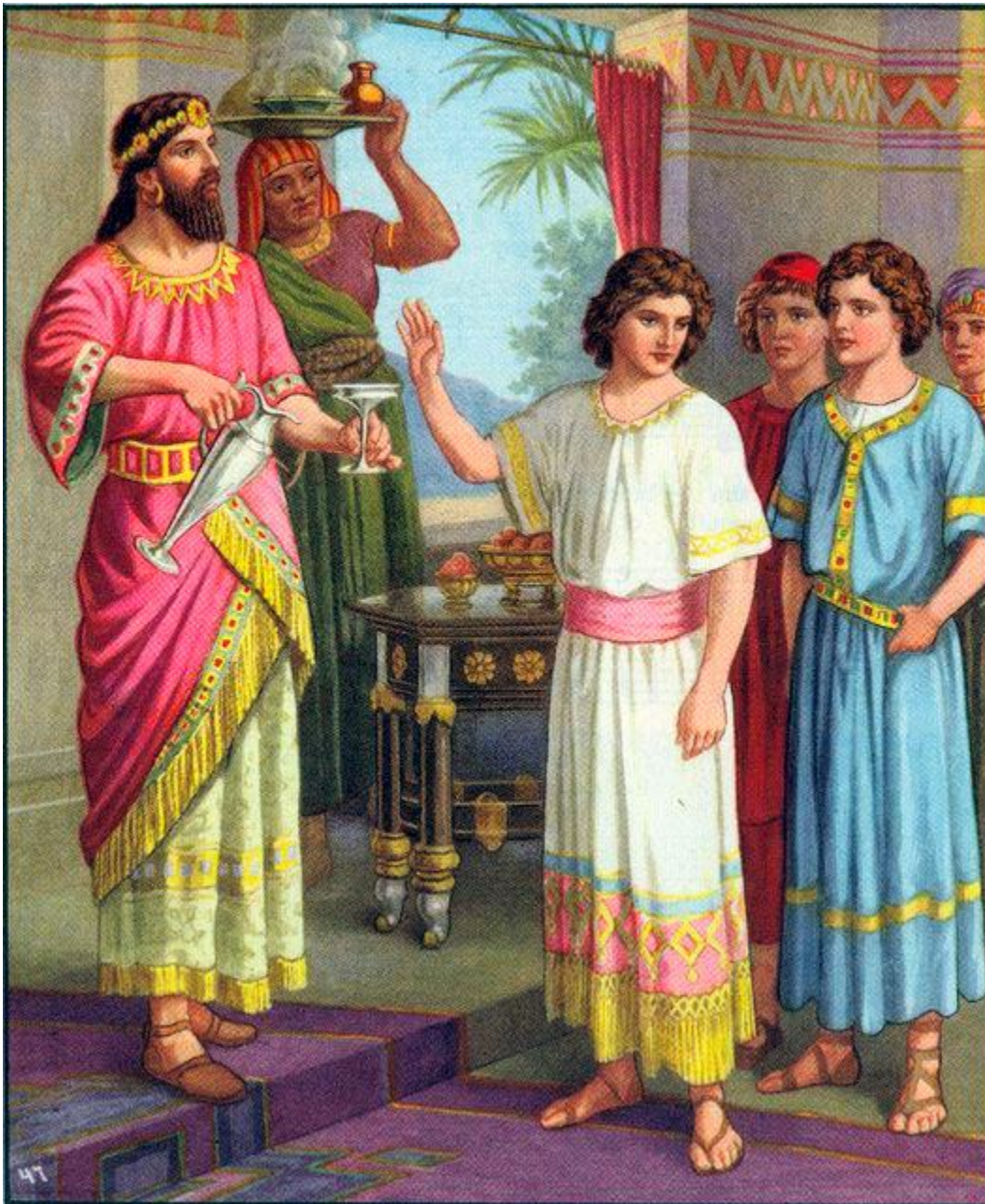


Opening Question:

Based on personal experience, how would you describe the obligations/expectations of hosts and guests? What kinds of vulnerability are involved in being a host/guest?

Consider the following scenes of hospitality...

1. *Daniel 1:1-21*



"Daniel refusing the King's Food," Otto Adolph Stemler, early 1900s

בשנת שלוש למלכות יהויקים מלך־יהודה בא
נבוכדנאצר מלך־בבל וירושלם ויצר עליה:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged
it.

ויטן אדני בידו את־יהויקים מלך־יהודה ומקצת
כלי בית־האלהים וביאם ארץ־שנער בית אל־היו
ואת־הכלים הביא בית אוצר אל־היו:

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with
all of the vessels of the house of God; and he carried them into
the land of Shinar to the house of his god, and the vessels he
brought into the treasure-house of his god.

ויאמר המלך לאשפנז רב סריסו להביא מבני
ישׂראל ומזרע המלוכה ומן־הפרתמים:

And the king spoke unto Ashpenaz his chief officer, that he
should bring in certain of the children of Israel, and of the seed
royal, and of the nobles,

ילדים אשר אין־בהם כל־מאום וטובי מראה
ומשפלים בכל־חכמה וידעי דעת ומביני מדע ואשר
כח בהם לעמד בהיכל המלך וללמדם ספר ולשון
כשדים:

youths in whom was no blemish, but fair to look on, and skilful
in all wisdom, and skilful in knowledge, and discerning in
thought, and such as had ability to stand in the king's palace;
and that he should teach them the learning and the tongue of
the Chaldeans.

וימן להם המלך דבר־יום ביומו מפת־בג המלך
ומיין משתיו ולגדלם שנים שלוש ומקצתם יעמדו
לפני המלך:

ויהי בהם מבני יהודה דנאיאל חנניה מישאל ועזריה:

And the king appointed for them a daily portion of the king's
food, and of the wine which he drank, and that they should be
nourished three years; that at the end thereof they might stand
before the king.

וישם להם שר הסריסים שמות וישם לדנאיאל
בלטשאצר ולחנניה שדרה ולמישאל מישל
ולעזריה עבד נגו:

Now among these were, of the children of Judah, Daniel,
Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

וישם דנאיאל על־לבו אשר לא־יתגאל בפת־בג
המלך ויבין משתיו ויבקש משר הסריסים אשר לא
יתגאל:

And the chief of the officers gave names unto them: unto Daniel
he gave the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of
Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-
nego.

ויטן האלהים את־דנאיאל לחסד ולרחמים לפני שר
הסריסים:

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile
himself with the king's food, nor with the wine which he drank;
therefore he requested of the chief of the officers that he might
not defile himself.

ויאמר שר הסריסים לדנאיאל ירא אני את־אדני
המלך אשר מנה את־מאכלכם ואת־משתיכם אשר
למה יראה את־פניכם זעפים מן־הילדים אשר
בגילכם וחיבתם את־ראשי למלך:

ויאמר דנאיאל אלי־המלצר אשר מנה שר הסריסים
על־דנאיאל חנניה מישאל ועזריה:

And God granted Daniel mercy and compassion in the sight of
the chief of the officers.

נס־נא את־עבדיך ימים עשרה ויתנו־לנו מן־
הזרעים ונאכלה ומים ונשתה:

And the chief of the officers said unto Daniel: 'I fear my lord the
king, who hath appointed your food and your drink; for why
should he see your faces sad in comparison with the youths that
are of your own age? so would ye endanger my head with the
king.'

ויראה לפניך מראינו ומראה הילדים האכלים את
פת־בג המלך וכאשר תראה עשה עם־עבדיך:

וישמע להם לדבר הזה וינסם ימים עשרה:

Then said Daniel to the steward, whom the chief of the officers
had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:

ומקצת ימים עשרה נראה מראהם טוב ובריאי
בשר מן־כל־הילדים האכלים את פת־בג המלך:

ויהי המלצר נשא את־פת־בגם ויין משתיהם ונתן
להם זרענים:

'Try thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us
pulse to eat, and water to drink.

והילדים האלה ארבעתם נתן להם האלהים מדע
והשכל בכל־ספר וחכמה ודנאיאל הבין בכל־חזון
וחלמות:

Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the
countenance of the youths that eat of the king's food; and as
thou seest, deal with thy servants.'

ולמקצת הימים אשר־אמר המלך להביאם וביאם
שר הסריסים לפני נבוכדנאצר:

So he hearkened unto them in this matter, and tried them ten

וַיְדַבֵּר אִתָּם הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלֹא נִמְצָא מִבְּלֶם כְּדַנְיָאֵל חֲנֻנְיָהּ
מִיִּשְׂאֵל וְעֲזַרְיָה וְנִעְמָדוֹ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:

וְכָל דָּבָר חֲכָמַת בֵּינָהּ אֲשֶׁר־בְּקוֹשׁ מֵהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ
וַיִּמְצָאֵם עֲשׂוֹר גְּדוֹת עַל כָּל־הַחֲרָטְמִים הָאֲשֵׁפִים
אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְלָכוֹתָיו:

וַיְהִי דְנִיָּאֵל עַד־שָׁנַת אַסַּת לְכוֹרֵשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ:

days.

And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer,
and they were fatter in flesh, than all the youths that did eat of
the king's food.

So the steward took away their food, and the wine that they
should drink, and gave them pulse.

Now as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and
skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding
in all visions and dreams.

And at the end of the days which the king had appointed for
bringing them in, the chief of the officers brought them in
before Nebuchadnezzar.

And the king spoke with them; and among them all was found
none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore
stood they before the king.

And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king
inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the
magicians and enchanters that were in all his realm.

And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

2. Esther 1:1-9

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים אֲחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵהַדֹּדוּ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה:	Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus — this is Ahasuerus who reigned, from India to Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces —
בַּיָּמִים הֵנֶהם בָּשָׂבַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ עַל כֶּסֶּא מַלְכוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבֵּירָה:	that in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the castle,
בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁלוּשׁ לְמַלְכוּתוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֶּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו חֵיל פָּרַס וּמְדֵי הַפָּרְתָּמִים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינֹת לְקָנָיו:	in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the army of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him;
בַּהֲרָאתוֹ אֶת־עֶשְׂרֵי כְבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת־יְקָר תַּפְאָרָתוֹ גְּדוּלְתוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים וְשָׂמוֹנִים וּמֵאָת יוֹם:	when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty, many days, even a hundred and fourscore days.
וּבַמְּלֹאָת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל־הַיָּעַם הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבֵּירָה לְמַגְדוֹל וְעַד־קֶטֶן מִשְׁתֶּה שֶׁבַעַת יָמִים בַּחֲצָר גִּנַּת בֵּיתוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ:	And when these days were fulfilled, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the castle, both great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace;
חֹר כַּרְפָּס וְתַכְלֵת אָחוּזוּ בַּחֲבָלֵי־בוּיָז וְאַרְגָּמָן עַל־גְּלִילֵי כֶסֶף וְעִמּוּדֵי זָהָב וְנֶכְסֶף עַל רִצְפַת בַּהֲטָ־נֶשֶׁשׁ וְנֹדַר וְסַחֲרָת:	there were hangings of white, fine cotton, and blue, bordered with cords of fine linen and purple, upon silver rods and pillars of marble; the couches were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of green, and white, and shell, and onyx marble.
וְהַשְּׂקוֹת בְּכָלֵי זָהָב וְכָלִים מְכֻלִּים שׁוֹנִיִּם וַיִּין מַלְכוּת רַב כְּיַד הַמֶּלֶךְ:	And they gave them drink in vessels of gold — the vessels being diverse one from another — and royal wine in abundance, according to the bounty of the king.
וְהַשְּׂתִיָּה כֶדֶת אֵין אֲנִס כִּי־כֹן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּרִצּוֹן אִישׁ־נְאִישׁ:	And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel; for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.
גַּם וְשִׁתֵּי הַמֶּלֶכָה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֶּה נְשִׁים בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ:	Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.

For Discussion:

How would you describe the hospitality of the gentile hosts in the selections above? Are they “good” or “bad” hosts? To what degree is choice/freedom relevant here?

What about the conduct of the Jews as guests in a foreign court? Do you think their behavior (to the degree its depicted in the text) is civil or socially appropriate? Are they “good” or “bad” guests? To what degree is choice/freedom relevant here?

Now consider the following fictional scenes of (in)hospitality...

1. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865)

There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it: a Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head.

“Very uncomfortable for the Dormouse,” thought Alice; “only, as it’s asleep, I suppose it doesn’t mind.”

The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it: “No room! No room!” they cried out when they saw Alice coming. “There’s plenty of room!” said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table.

“Have some wine,” the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.

Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. “I don’t see any wine,” she remarked.

“There isn’t any,” said the March Hare.

“Then it wasn’t very civil of you to offer it,” said Alice angrily.

“It wasn’t very civil of you to sit down without being invited,” said the March Hare.

“I didn’t know it was your table,” said Alice; “it’s laid for a great many more than three.”

“Your hair wants cutting,” said the Hatter. He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech.

“You should learn not to make personal remarks,” Alice said with some severity; “it’s very rude.”

The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he said was, “Why is a raven like a writing-desk?”

“Come, we shall have some fun now!” thought Alice. “I’m glad they’ve begun asking riddles. – I believe I can guess that,” she added aloud.

“Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?” said the March Hare.

“Exactly so,” said Alice.

“Then you should say what you mean,” the March Hare went on.

“I do,” Alice hastily replied; “at least – at least I mean what I say – that’s the same thing, you know.”

“Not the same thing a bit!” said the Hatter. “You might just as well say that ‘I see what I eat’ is the same thing as ‘I eat what I see!’”

“You might just as well say,” added the March Hare, “that ‘I like what I get’ is the same thing as ‘I get what I like!’”

“You might just as well say,” added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, “that ‘I breathe when I sleep’ is the same thing as ‘I sleep when I breathe!’”

“It is the same thing with you,” said the Hatter, and here the conversation dropped, and the party sat silent for a minute, while Alice thought over all she could remember about ravens and writing-desks, which wasn’t much.

2. William Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* (1600)

SHYLOCK May I speak with Antonio?

BASSANIO If it please you to dine with us.

SHYLOCK Yes, to smell pork; to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into. I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following, but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you.

For Discussion:

Both Alice and the March Hare accuse each other of not being “civil.” Why? What is civility?

Do you think Shylock is being civil in the passage above? If not, why not?

How is choice or personal freedom represented by the authors in these scenes between characters of different background/cultures? Positively or negatively? Does personal freedom of the individual help/hinder a civil encounter with the Other?

On Civility and Hospitality

1. Rav Kook, adapted from *Ein Ayah* vol. I on Berachot 34b (5:124), printed in [*Silver from the Land of Israel*](#)

Over the millennia, Jews have faced the holy city of Jerusalem when praying. The Talmud in Berachot 34b derives this practice from how Daniel would pray in Babylon:

One should only pray in a house which has windows, as it says, 'And Daniel would enter his house, where there were open windows in his upper chamber facing Jerusalem; three times a day he would kneel and pray' (Daniel 6:11).

Why are windows needed for prayer? Is not prayer a private exercise of the soul, where one concentrates inward? And why did Daniel have his windows facing Jerusalem?

Prayer is an intensely introspective activity, but it should not lead us to belittle the value of being part of the world around us. If meditation and private prayer lead us to withdraw from the outside world, then we have missed prayer's ultimate goal. The full import of prayer cannot be properly realized by those secluded in a monastery, cut off from the world. Prayer should inspire us to take action for just and worthy causes. For this reason, the Sages taught that we should pray in a room with windows, thus indicating our ties and moral obligations to the greater world.

As we affirm our connection to the world, it is important that we turn toward the city of Jerusalem. Our aspirations for perfecting the world should be channeled through the goal of universal peace. This is the significance of directing our prayers toward Jerusalem, whose name means "the city of peace." Jerusalem is the focal point from which God's prophetic message emanates to the world – "For the Torah shall come forth from Zion, and God's word from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

2. Emanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (1979, 300 - 304)

Metaphysics, or the relation with the other, is accomplished as service and as hospitality. In the measure that the face of the Other related us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves us into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality. But politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules, and thus as in abstentia. In welcoming the Other I welcome the On High to which my freedom is subordinated. But this subordination is not an absence: it is brought about in all the personal work of my moral initiative (without which the truth of judgement cannot be produced), in the attention to the Other as unicity and face (which the visiblensness of the political leaves invisible), which can be produced only in hte unicity of an I...

The presence of exteriority in language, which commences with the presence of the face, is not produced as an affirmation whose formal meaning would remain without development. The relation with the face is produced as goodness. The exteriority of being is morality itself.

Freedom, the event of separation in arbitrariness which constitutes the I, at the same time maintains the relation with the exteriority that morally resists every appropriation and every totalization in being. If freedom were posited outside of this relation, every relation within multiplicity would enact but the grasp of one being by another or their common participation in reason, where no being looks at the face of the other, but all beings negate one another. Knowledge or violence would appear in the midst of the multiplicity as events that realize being. The common knowledge proceeds toward unity, either toward the apparition in the midst of a multiplicity of beings of a rational system in which these beings would be but objects, and in which they would find their being-or toward the brutal conquest of beings outside of every system by violence...

To approach the Other is to put into question my freedom, my spontaneity as a living being, my emprise over the things, this freedom of a "moving force," this impetuosity of the current to which everything is permitted, even murder. The "You shall not commit murder" which delineates the face in which the Other is produced submits my freedom to judgment. Then the free adherence to truth, an activity of knowledge, the free will which, according to Descartes, in certitude adheres to a clear idea, seeks a reason which does not coincide with the radiance of this clear and distinct idea itself. A clear idea which imposes itself by its clarity calls for a strictly personal work of a freedom, a solitary freedom that does not put itself in question, but can at most suffer a failure. In morality alone it is put in question. Morality thus presides over the work of truth.

It will be said that the radical questioning of certitude reduces itself to the search for another certitude: the justification of freedom would refer to freedom. Indeed that is so, in the measure that justification cannot result in non-certitude. But in fact, the moral justification of freedom is neither certitude nor incertitude. It does not have the status of a result, but is accomplished as movement and life; it consists in addressing an infinite exigency to one's freedom, in having a radical non-indulgence for one's freedom. Freedom is not justified in the consciousness of certitude, but in an infinite exigency with regard to oneself, in the overcoming of all good conscience. But this infinite exigency with regard to oneself, precisely because it puts freedom in question, places me and maintains me in a situation in which I am not alone, in which I am judged. This is the primary sociality: the personal relation is in the rigor of justice which judges me and not in love that excuses me.

3. Rabbi Sacks, *Morality*, pp. 213 - 224

There were five of us, sitting facing one another, and we were to be together for the next eight hours. Across the aisle were Prime Minister John Major and Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind. Opposite me sat the leader of the opposition, Tony Blair, and next to me, Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats, Britain's third party. It was Sunday, November 5, 1995, and we were on a plane of the Queen's Flight to attend the funeral of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who had led the Oslo peace process with the Palestinians and had been assassinated the previous night by a Jewish religious-nationalist zealot while attending a peace rally in Tel Aviv.

A normal commercial flight from London to Ben Gurion Airport takes no more than four and a half hours, but this plane of the Queen's Flight, like an antiquated but very dignified limousine, traveled slowly, though in immense style, and needed to land halfway to refuel. I had been invited, as Chief Rabbi, to represent the Jewish community. The atmosphere was somber. We all knew that a great man had given his life for the sake of peace in the Middle

East, much as had Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt, in retaliation for his peace deal with Israel in 1979. War often turns ordinary people into heroes, while the pursuit of peace can make genuine heroes look like traitors to their own more nationalistic countrymen.

Half an hour into the flight, Paddy Ashdown turned to John Major and said, "John, here we are, leaders of three opposed parties, but we probably have more in common with one another than we do with the extremists in our own parties. We've never sat together before like this. Let's talk honestly and openly about what we really believe regarding the biggest issues today." John Major, with a smile, willingly agreed, and for hour after hour all four politicians talked together as candid friends. It was possibly the only time such an extended conversation took place between the party leaders. For eight hours, I sat and listened to the closest British politics came to a team of rivals, sharing their deepest convictions with total openness and friendship. I cherish the memory of those hours because it showed me politics at its best.

An American historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin, wrote a book about Abraham Lincoln called *Team of Rivals*, about how Lincoln had brought together the candidates who stood against him in the presidential election, turning them into a team, to face together the divisive issue of slavery that had brought the nation to civil war. In an earlier age, there used to be a phrase for this kind of thing: "dining with the opposition."

This was civility in its deepest sense. It was as if politicians were playing for different teams, but with the same love of the game, respect for one another's abilities, and an absolute conviction that the team is bigger than the player, and the game is bigger than the team. That private encounter left its mark on the tone of British politics in the public square. Thereafter these leaders may have argued passionately, but they were never less than respectful, they spoke about issues not personalities, and what united them was more than good manners. It was a conviction they shared about politics: that it exists to reconcile the conflicting desires and aspirations of people within a polity, and to do so without violence, through reasoned and respectful debate, listening to, while not agreeing with, opposing views, and trying as far as possible to serve the common good.

Yitzhak Rabin, whom I had come to know, believed in the same kind of civility, and his assassination was a symptom of its breakdown in Israel. In the previous months I had been urging him to spend more time with the extreme elements of the religious Zionist camp who, in quite violent language, were vehemently opposing the peace process, but he told me not to worry. In a letter he wrote to me shortly before his death he spoke of his conviction that "compromise and tolerance are essential if peace is to be achieved." He believed in speaking to all sides, and did so with great humility and respect...

Civility is more than good manners. It is a recognition that violent speech leads to violent deeds; that listening respectfully to your opponents is a necessary part of the politics of a free society; and that liberal democracy, predicated as it is on the dignity of diversity, must keep the peace between contending groups by honoring us all equally, in both our diversity and our commonalities. All politics is about the pursuit of power, but liberal democratic politics carries with it a special responsibility to use that power for the dignity of each and the good of all.

There can be little doubt that in both Britain and America, civility in the public domain is at, or close to, an all-time low. In Britain the think tank Policy Exchange recently published a paper called "An Age of Incivility." It speaks bluntly of a definitive shift in the tone and character of British politics. There has been a coarsening of language. Insult, rage, vicious attacks on opponents, intimidation, and abuse have all become commonplace... The poison

appears to be currently spreading in all directions, with plentiful examples of misogyny, homophobia, anti-Muslim prejudice, antisemitism, personal invective, the attribution of malign motives to opponents, routine comparison between one's political opponents and the Nazis, conspiracy theories, threats of violence, and accusations of treachery. There have even been instances of dehumanization: people on the left calling Conservatives and even Labour moderates, "lower than vermin."

Something similar has been happening in American politics. In 2019, the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress produced a report on the state of political civility in the United States. It spoke of "ever greater partisanship, zero-sum governing, and tribal gridlock." In addition, trust in the political process has been deeply undermined by the manipulation of social media and the result has been, to quote the Center, a political discourse of "surpassing crudeness and incivility."

The 2016 presidential election in particular was marked by deep divides and angry discourse...

To be sure, many elections in the past have been raw, rude, and raucous in their rhetoric. That is part of the competitive spirit of electoral politics. But something new is happening: the sense that the other side is less than fully human, that its supporters are not part of the same moral community as us, that somehow their sensibilities are alien and threatening, as if they were not the opposition within a political arena, but the enemy, full stop. This is the result of four independent but mutually aggravating causes.

The first is the development we have been tracking throughout this book: the deepening individualism of Western societies since the 1960s. After both world wars, there was a strong persisting sense of togetherness born during the war itself and lasting for some time thereafter. So powerful is the feeling of unity in the face of an enemy that many nondemocratic leaders will deliberately conjure up the specter of an external cheat simply to unify the population and dampen down any opposition to his or her leadership. This is a deeply encoded instinctive reaction that goes back to the hunter-gatherer stage in human evolution.

Any country that has been at peace for as long as the Western nations have been--essentially since the end of the Second World War--will find that their sense of togetherness has atrophied. In place of this togetherness our respective populations feel themselves mere assemblages of atomic particles connected by no strong sense of identity and kinship. This is, historically, a very dangerous point, and we can understand why simply by going back a century. The Edwardian age, which, like ours, had been largely spared the reality of war, led many people throughout Europe to feel that the general culture had become individualistic and decadent. Intellectuals, in Britain, France, and especially Germany, held that going to war would have a morally cleansing effect. Even Martin Buber, instinctively a pacifist, was at the very beginning of the war convinced that it represented a "world historical mission" for Germany, along with Jewish intellectuals, to civilize the Near East. Bewary of an age in which people find war a solution to the decadence of peace.

Second comes the entire phenomenon of the internet, which has changed the nature of communication and the way we acquire our information about the world. Until relatively recently, the main way in which people discovered what was going on was through newspapers or television networks. These generally represented a broad range of opinions and held to journalistic standards that offered reassurance of balance and truth in reporting. Even media with a distinct partisan bias nonetheless gave some voice to dissenting views. Besides which, they informed their readers and viewers of events that might not fall directly

within their zone of interest, but which inevitably gave them a general sense of what was happening elsewhere. The name for this kind of communication is broadcasting.

This has been replaced by narrowcasting: news filtered to reflect our given interest and political stance. The result is that we see the world the way other people like us see the world, and the commentary we read is one that is already in line with our own take on events. This hugely intensifies the confirmation bias that leads us to register and remember facts that support our view, and dismiss and forget those that do not. This tendency is a dangerous flaw in our cognitive capacities-- useful when we were facing predators or rival tribes on the savannah, but hardly relevant to the global twenty-first century. But once social media's algorithms have taken this and amplified it, it becomes very dangerous indeed. As Professor Cass Sunstein has shown in *Going to Extremes: How Like Minds Unite and Divide*; if you associate with people who share your views, you will all become progressively more extreme. Thus a tendency to extremism is built into the way we now acquire information about the world.

Third, there is the un-civilizing impact of the new media themselves, generally described as the disinhibition effect. As anyone who has read the comment thread of an online newspaper article or followed a Twitter storm will know, it is the equivalent of handing thousands of people megaphones and inviting them to shout their loudest, rudest, and crudest commentary on anyone and anything, a cacophony of noise in place of true communication. Those who have studied this phenomenon attribute it to five features of social media:

- First, it is anonymous. You don't have to give your true name or reveal your real identity.
- Second, it is invisible. You don't see the people you are insulting, and they don't see you.
- Third, it is not done in real time. It is asynchronous. There is a time gap between your saying what you have to say and others hearing it.
- Fourth, it is unregulated. There are no ground rules.
- Fifth, and most important, it is not face to face, the mode in which all our most important communications are governed by everything that we have inherited in terms of interpersonal skills and conventions.

The factors that normally inhibit our being rude to someone are thus absent. The result is that I can simply say what I feel better for having said, without consideration or restraint. This is not the normal logic of communication, which is to inform, persuade, or convince. Rather, this is communication as primal therapy, and it helps create the anger it then expresses and amplifies...

Taken together, these four tendencies combined threaten a genuine risk of political breakdown. Given these vast challenges, why should mere civility matter? Stephen Carter calls civility "the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together." Edward Shils calls it "a belief which affirms the possibility of the common good; it is a belief in the community of contending parties within a morally valid unity of society."

Civility is more than good manners. It is an affirmation that the problems of some are the problems of all, that a good society presposes collective responsibility, that there is a moral dimension to be part of this nation, this people, this place. We speak to one another because we feel bound to one another in a shared enterprise in which we each have a part to play. I would add three insights from Jewish thought that I think are relevant in understanding the importance of civility.

There is no doubt that Judaism is not strong on the *civil* element--polite, well-mannered, mild--of civility. The prophets were passionate, not polite. The rabbis were argumentative rather than agreeable.

But Judaism does have three important things to say about why we should "reason together"-- the favorite phrase of Harvard political philosopher Michael Sandel, taken from the prophet Isaiah (1:18).

The first is the truly remarkable passage in Genesis 18 in which God discloses in advance to Abraham what he is about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do....For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." (Gen. 18:19-21)

The passage offers no conceivable reason why God would wish to seek Abraham's opinion on the matter. In fact, by the very terms of the biblical narrative, there can be no conceivable reason. There is nothing Abraham might know that God does not know, nor could Abraham possibly have a better sense of justice than God himself. Yet God is clearly inviting a response from Abraham, and indeed it comes, in one of the most radical passages in all religious literature:

Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:23-5)

What is going on here? It seems that we have in this passage a biblical version of the Roman axiom of justice that I have already mentioned: *Audi alteram partem*, "Hear the other side." There cannot be justice if there has been no speech in defense of the accused. That is what Abraham provides here. Even God himself must submit to this rule. There can be no justice in which all sides have not had a hearing. Abraham must defend his neighbors as far as he can, even though their way is not his. That is the first rule of a just society.

The second is an equally radical rabbinic passage, about a debate in the mind of God before he came to create Homo sapiens:

Rabbi Shimon said: When God was about to create Adam, the ministering angels split into contending groups. Some said, "Let him be created." Others said, "Let him not be created." That is why it is written: "Mercy and truth collided, righteousness and peace clashed" (Psalms 85:11). Mercy said, "Let him be created, because he will do merciful Deeds." Truth said, "Let him not be created, for he will be full of falsehood." Righteousness said, "Let him be created, for he will do righteous Deeds." Peace said, "Let him not be created, for he will never cease Quarrelling." What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took truth and threw it to the ground. The angels said, "Sovereign of the universe, why do You do thus to Your own seal, truth? Let truth arise from the ground." Thus it is written, "Let truth spring up from the earth" (Psalms 85:12).

This is an audacious theological interpretation. God, it suggests, was in two minds before creating mankind. Yes, humanity is capable of great acts of altruism, but it is also endlessly at war. Human beings tell lies and their lives are full of strife. God takes truth and throws it to the ground: for life to be livable, truth on earth cannot be what it is in heaven. Truth in heaven may be platonic-eternal, harmonious, radiant. But man cannot reach to such truth, and if he does, he will create conflict, not peace. Men kill precisely because they believe they possess the truth, while their opponents are in error. In that case, says God, throwing truth to the ground, let human beings live by a different standard of truth, one that is conscious of its limitations. The divine word comes from heaven, but it is interpreted on earth. The divine light is infinite, but to be visible to us it must be refracted through finite understanding. Truth in heaven transcends space and time, but human perception is bounded by both space and time.

What is more, 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--nor contradictory--than a Shakespeare sonnet, a Michelangelo painting, and a Schubert sonata.

God, wrote Rabbi Abraham Kook, "dealt kindly with his world by not putting all the talents in one place, in any one man or nation, not in one generation or even one world."¹ Each culture has something to contribute to the totality of human wisdom. The sages said: "Who is wise? One who learns from all men." This is the Jewish equivalent to the story of Socrates. The Delphic Oracle proclaimed Socrates the wisest in Athens because although he knew nothing, everyone else also knew nothing, whereas Socrates alone knew that he knew nothing. The Jewish variant states that we all know something, and the wisest is the one who knows that we all know something, and is therefore willing to learn from everyone, for none of us knows all the truth, but each of us knows some of it.

Finally, there is a line in the Hebrew Bible that is almost never correctly translated. It refers to the first two human children: Cain and Abel. Each brings an offering to the Lord. God accepts that of Abel and rejects that of Cain- for what reason, we do not know. However, God senses that Cain is resentful toward his brother and warns him against doing harm to Abel. We then read: "Cain said to his brother Abel, and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."

The text cannot be translated literally because it is syntactically ill-formed. It says that "Cain said," but it doesn't say what he said. The text's fractured syntax forces us in the most dramatic way to focus on the fractured relationship between Cain and his brother-- and then spells out the consequence: when words fail, violence begins.

Hence the three principles of civility:

1. For there to be justice, all sides must be heard.
2. Truth on earth cannot aspire to be truth as it is in heaven. All truth on earth represents a perspective, and there are multiple perspectives.
3. The alternative to argument is violence. That is why the argument must continue and never cease.

Those are the conclusions I have reached since that long plane journey when I listened to three party leaders arguing together as they flew to attend the funeral of a brave politician, assassinated by a zealot who did not believe in the democratic argument, and believed instead that politics can be dictated by the barrel of a gun.

I HAVE ARGUED that the loss of shared moral community means that we find it difficult to reason together. Truth gives way to power. Uncomfortable views are excluded from

campuses. To win support, people start defining themselves as victims. Public shaming takes the place of judicial establishment of guilt. Civility-- especially respect for people who oppose you--begins to die. The public conversation slowly gives way to a shouting match in which integrity counts for little and noise for much. This is not a culture whose survival can be taken for granted. It is one that is fraying at the seams.

Now we must consider the question of morality itself. What does it have to tell us about the human person and the dignity and meaning of our lives?

For Discussion:

For Levinas, what is the relationship between freedom and moral behavior, or freedom and our responsibility to others?

For Rabbi Sacks, what is civility, what interferes with it, and how can it be achieved?

How can the individual maintain personal freedom (such as free speech and religious observance) without compromising civility and participation in the "greater world" or mainstream society?

Do you have any personal examples of a time you struggled with, or achieved, this?