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Congregation B'nai Emunah, San Francisco
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Since this is a session on civil discourse about Israel on campus, I assume that my recent experience at Roger Water's recreation of "The Wall," performed live in San Jose, might be of interest to those of our contemporary generation. Knowing that I'd be participating in this workshop on civil discourse the week after I saw the concert, I couldn't help but interpret the building up of and then the crashing down of the Wall at the end of the show as a symbol for what often happens in discourse about Israel. We often build up walls by speaking past each other and by not really listening to what the other has to say. These walls isolate us and create a real divide, and too often we hide behind them. After the Wall in Water's show has been carefully constructed throughout the performance, the show concludes with a loud crash, as the Wall crumbles and tumbles in a cathartic finale.

What does one of our Jewish wisdom sources have to say about how to bring down walls? If we turn to our *Mussar*/Ethical Practice literature, we find that the *Chesbon Hanefesh*, written by R. Menachem Mendel Levin in 1812, can offer us guidance.

As both a continual student and teacher of *Mussar*, I find myself this week in the midst of the *middah*/value of *anavah*/humility. Humility, according to the above source, begins with the following task: "Always seek to learn wisdom from every person." We know as well that *Pirkei Avot* asks, "Who is wise?" and responds, "one who learns from every person." When we really enter true, civil discourse, our primary obligation is to represent ourselves, but at the same time to truly listen and to learn from the person with whom we are speaking. When we can do this, we not only practice civil discourse and dialogue, but we practice humility and earn wisdom as well.

Through the process of civil discourse, may we all grow in humility and wisdom. May these virtues empower us to bring down the walls of division that isolate us from each other. May our goals not be about right or wrong, but about building and cultivating relationships that challenge, nurture and support us. And, may these relationships help us to bring down the walls that isolate us.