

What if discord were actually baked into our system? How might we act differently if we knew from the start that we would never agree? Instead of trying to convince each other to adopt our perspective, could we let go and accept it as part of the fabric of creation?

This is the question at the heart of the Tower of Babel story in this week's Parshat Noach. Just after the flood, humanity tries to build a grand structure reaching to the heavens. For a minute, at least, everyone seems to share the same vision. The passage begins by emphasizing that there is no discord, noting that they have, literally, "singular words":

וַיְהִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ שָׁפָה אֶחָת וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים:

Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words.

Why does this famous passage start with a comment on language? Some scholars think it's the essence of the whole story. The 19th-century scholar Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv) suggests that it is the people's total uniformity—their sameness—that gets them into trouble.

"The text does not explain what those words were... it only tells us that they were the same words, to teach us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, was not distressed by the content of their speech... but that all thought the exact same thing."

The issue was not the people's rebellion—the problem was "that all thought the same thing." Expanding on this, [Dr. Miriam Feldmann-Kaye](#), senior lecturer at Bar-Ilan University, suggests that the "punishment" of Babel was actually the divine intention all along. She asks, "was the multi-national multi-linguistic existence of today the desired state of human relationships around the globe? Had the ideal for humanity been absolute unity, why the multiplicity of languages and narratives?" She argues that in fact, the scattering of the people was "an opening to a brave new world, a world in which we are not designed to see things in the same way."

For Feldmann-Kaye, this is the core of all deconstructionist thought-- the idea that interpretation must spread. Thought must not remain monolithic; it must be expansive. This is an important value for philosophy, but it is even more essential for our dinner tables. What if the difference in opinions is actually the most fascinating design of the universe? Instead of arguing to prove ourselves right, we might sit back and say: "Oh, we all disagree? Perfect! That's exactly what God wanted."