

Kluwer Mediation Blog

How can the Jewish way of conflict resolution contribute to improve mediation results?

Andrea Maia (Mediar360 – Dispute Resolution) · Wednesday, September 8th, 2021

As we approach the end of Rosh Hashanah celebration, I decided to write about a book I love and gives name to this post: “The Jewish Secret of Problem Solving” by Rabbi Nilton Bonder.

In the meantime, to my surprise I was lucky to learn that [Constança Madureira](#), one of my partners at Mediar360, shared exactly the same feelings about the book and I was even happier when she accepted to coauthor the present article.

First we would like to introduce Rabbi Nilton Bonder. Throughout the years, Bonder has become a national and internationally recognized writer and philosopher. Some of his 19 books and works in the areas of humanism, philosophy and spirituality have been successfully published in the United States, Europe and Asia. Worth noting as well is the fact that Rabbi Bonder was the only Brazilian to participate in the first walk in the [Abraham Path](#) and part of the group in charge of the creation of the Brazilian chapter of that project in the city of Sao Paulo.

Well, moving on to the book, we find it a short but very pleasant reading which stands out for the wise use of metaphors, examples and humor, as well as for conveying many insights connected with the spirit of mediation. The following excerpt illustrates how much the Jewish culture can contribute to problem solving and conflict resolution. It reads:

“The teacher asks the students: ‘How would you divide 11 apples among 12 children?’

One of them would reply in a non-aesthetic way: ‘It’s simple, I would make a jam’.

In such case, the author presents a keen and very insightful vision of life, popularly known as *Yiddish kop* – the head of a Jew –, a process consisting of reasoning and questioning apparently impossible situations and which eventually allows one to solve apparently irreversible situations. Bonder masters the use of re-contextualization and creativity based on the fact that the Jewish people have historically survived the most difficult situations over the centuries.

Bonder also transits among the four dimensions in which reality can be decomposed, translating them into four worlds/dimensions:

- i) the apparent of the apparent (problem itself, literally speaking),
- ii) the hidden of the apparent (metaphorical problem),

iii) the apparent of the hidden (allusive problem) and

iv) the occult of the occult (secret problem).

The apparent of the apparent is the literal problem, which, at first sight, comprises of the dimension of the obvious and the concrete.

However, when questioning the utterance of the questions presented, giving up standard answers and breaking with outdated mental and aesthetic conditioning, the so-called reasoning vices, it is possible to go beyond the obvious conclusions, discovering new ways of understanding the problem.

The main characteristic of **the hidden of the apparent**,

the metaphorical problem, is the fact that the hidden element acts by highlighting the apparent aspect. In other words, the apparent would not be so apparent if it weren't for its connection with the hidden element. In this dimension, reframing, paradoxical interventions, transparency, ironies and predictions help to find solutions for the proposed situation.

The apparent of the occult, related to the allusive problem, is the apprehensible world that we know through consciousness. This is the dimension we call unconsciousness and where there are secrets that give meaning to issues in the apparent world. It is the terrain of intuition, where the connections between questions and answers are not evident and the absurd is an important link between apparently disconnected logics, revealing more about the character of the occult than rationalisms.

Finally, **the occult of the occult**, the secret problem, can be defined as the dimension when any form of action can also promote discernment, and it is important to know the error to better understand and identify the best solution. It is the case of first doing and then listening – a paradigmatic inversion that is a revolutionary element, outside of pre-established models, since, in this dimension, teaching is more experienced than understood.

No other argument could better summarize our recommendation of Rabbi Bonder's book than his own words: *"This book is about dispute resolution"*. Thanks to his cultural background and professional experience, as mediators, we learn that there are no easy or "ready-to-wear" solutions to life problems and that reality is always complex and therefore must be seen from different and simultaneous perspectives.

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