

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Examining the challenges we face in living together peacefully, respectfully, and joyfully on this small planet, *You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right* is a thoughtful, thought-provoking look at how the things that make us different also make us alike—in both religious and secular life. This reader's guide is intended as a starting point for your own conversation on these ideas.

1. What, if any, religion do you practice? What drew your group to this book? Are you the same religion as the other members of your group? If not, do you have any qualms about discussing religious issues with them? Were your feelings influenced by *You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right*?

2. On page 10, Hirschfield says "ultimately it is the fanaticism that kills, not the faith." Discuss the role of fanaticism in world events—both abroad and here at home.

3. Reinhold Niebuhr said "Fanatic orthodoxy is never rooted in faith but in doubt; it is when we are not sure that we are doubly sure." Do you think this is true? Why might a person who was unsure be more strident in defending his beliefs?

4. Share your favorite passage from *You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right*. What is its message? Why is it meaningful to you?

5. Hirschfield describes faith as "a loving acceptance of the profound complexity of existence and creation. It is about abiding in mystery. In being unsure." How do you define faith?

6. What is the link between sparing ribs and honoring your mother and father? Discuss how this kind of unlikely connection, in which a seeming contradiction is actually a sacred teaching, could help people of all religions to better understand their own faith and that of their neighbors.

7. What is the difference between a pilgrim, a tourist, and a seeker? Which would you consider yourself? Are you content with that label?

8. Discuss the concepts of victim and victimizer. What danger lies in being a victim? A victimizer? Do you believe that people can be both at the same time?

9. In *You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right*, Hirschfield quotes this passage from *The End of Faith* by Sam Harris: "We must find a way to a time when faith," writes Harris, "without evidence, disgraces anyone who would claim it. Given the present state of the world, there appears to be no other future worth wanting. It is imperative that we begin speaking plainly about the absurdity of most of our religious beliefs." What do you think about this idea? Given that so much of the violence and war in the world is caused by conflicting religious beliefs, should mankind, as a whole, abandon faith? What do you think the result of such an action would be?

10. Discuss the concepts of forgiveness, justice, and vengeance in both personal relationships and interfaith relations. How are they linked and how are they different? Also, consider the role of mercy.

11. In chapter 4, Hirschfield discusses the death penalty. What do you think of his ideas on the subject? What do you think of the death penalty in general?

12. Is it important to you that your children marry members of the religion you practice? Why or why not?

13. What do you think about the biblical teachings often called on to support and condemn gay marriage? What is your position on this issue and why? On page 145, Hirschfield calls for both sides of this issue—and other debates facing us in public life today—to admit that they might be wrong and the other side might be right. Do you think that's possible? How would attitude affect public discourse on any subject? Would it be possible to think and act that way and still conduct the business of passing laws to govern the land?

14. Discuss Hirschfield's experience at the Islamic Society of North America. In his position, would you have joined your hosts in prayer or simply observed from the doorway? Why? Do you believe in the possibility of lasting peace between Jews and Muslims?

15. The following quote appears on page 152: "The more traditionally religious you are, the more deeply modest and radically inclusive you should be. After all, if your tradition truly is the infinite gift of an infinite God, then how could there be only one way to understand it?" Do you agree with this statement? Do you think the teachings of most religions would agree with this statement?

16. In Chapter 7, Hirschfield deals with the concept of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts by describing his experience at a ceremony to mark the reopening of a synagogue outside of the Polish town Oswiecim, called Auschwitz by the Nazis. How does his visit to a Catholic mass held in celebration of the reopening both surprise him and reconfirm his ideas about how we can best live together peacefully? What does Bishop Ricoczy represent to the Rabbi?

17. On pages 199–200, Hirschfield writes: "If all I am is that which you are not, then I have given over control of my identity to you! It is precisely when I can connect to you while maintaining my personal integrity that I find out who I most deeply am." What does this statement mean to you?

18. Do you think that saying both sides of the abortion debate "believe in the sanctity of life and the dignity of human beings" (page 202) oversimplifies the issue? Do you agree with the idea that both pro-life and pro-choice activists care about the same thing—although one group is focused on the mother and one on the unborn child?

19. Hirschfield translates the Hebrew word *ezer k'negdo*, used in Genesis to describe Eve as "a helper who is against him." Does this make sense to you? How can someone help you and be against you at the same time? Is it possible to disagree with someone on life's big issues and still connect with them?

20. In personal and political life, why is it important to engage those whose beliefs are the furthest removed from your own in conversation? Hirschfield declines an invitation to join a breakfast hosted by Iranian president Ahmadinejad. Why? In Hirschfield's shoes, would you have attended?

21. On page 219, Hirschfield offers an interesting take on the motivating forces behind fanaticism and zealotry. What do you think of his idea?

22. Discuss the seven steps Hirschfield lays out to help us talk to each other in a way that guarantees that we put "the dignity of the person in front of us before the correctness of our own ideas." The story begins on page 216.

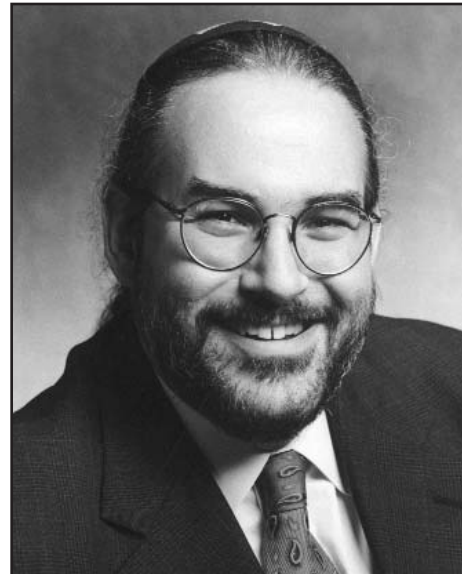
23. What's the difference between naïveté and idealism? Do you think Hirschfield is naïve? Idealistic? Correct? Would it be possible to live as he proposes?

24. Discuss the version of the coming—or return—of the Messiah found on page 239: "We could imagine a world when the Messiah comes where no people will be oppressed, where freedom to pursue what we most want will be guaranteed. We must remember, however, that the freedom to pursue what we want most doesn't guarantee a happy outcome for all people. If one nation wants to dominate another, then suffering will continue. If one person needs to take advantage of another in order to feel strong, suffering will continue. If my being right demands that I struggle to ensure that everybody thinks you are wrong, the suffering will continue. The outcomes depend on us."



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Praise for

YOU DONT HAVE TO BE WRONG FOR ME TO BE RIGHT

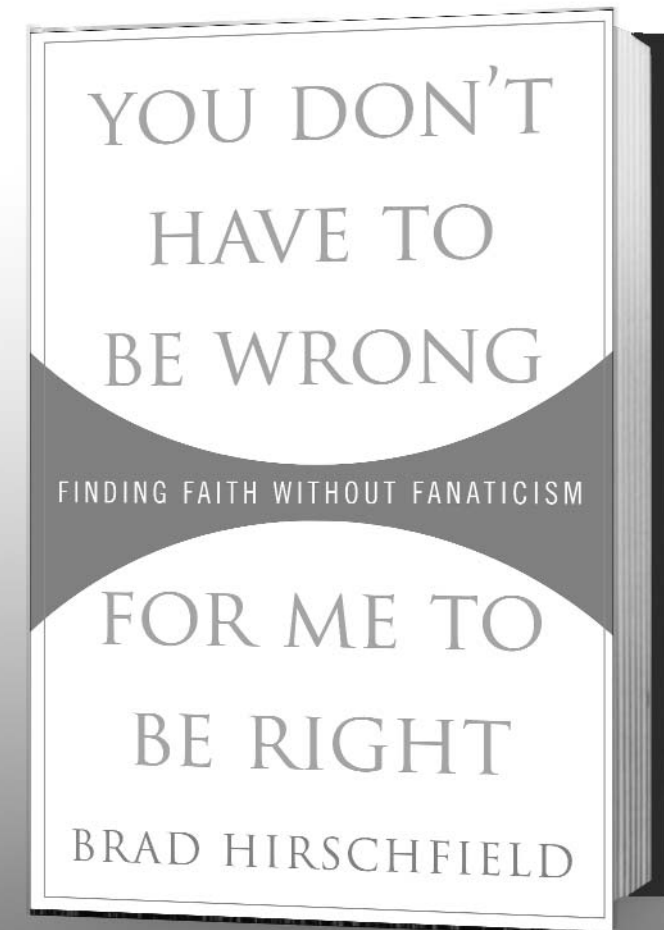
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