

מחלוקת לשם שמים

Machlochet l'shem shamayim / Argument for the sake of heaven

How are we shaped by constructive argumentation?

A More Perfect Argument

Chanan Weissman

Last January, President Barack Obama ended his final State of the Union address with an impassioned plea for civility. "The future we want... will only happen if we work together," he said. And yet, mindful of our complex democracy and demography, he stressed that "a better politics doesn't mean we have to agree on everything."

Disagreements. Arguments. Quarrels. Disputes. Jews are not new to discord. We have a long and, perhaps, cherished history of expressing our differences. Our biblical forefathers debated God. Our ancestral prophets and kings butted heads. Our rabbinic predecessors labored over ancient texts and traditions, involved in the sacred task of navigating divergent viewpoints to reveal divine treasures of wisdom and guidance. Yes, we were once strangers in a strange land, but we have never been strangers to a good argument.

The Mishnah in *Pirkei Avot* 5:20 upholds "*machlochet l'shem shamayim*" — "a dispute for the sake of heaven" — as the quintessential model for what qualifies as a healthy form of disagreement. It's this style of debate — illustrated by the idyllic quarrels between the schools of Hillel and Shammai — that will ultimately lead to a "*sofah l'hitkayem*" an "end that endures." Hillel and Shammai are the paradigmatic examples of this holy quarreling because they prevented their differences from creating divisions within their community. Amid scholarly disagreement, they learned to coexist.

The archetypal dispute *not* for the sake of heaven is chronicled by the story in *Bamidbar* (chapter 16) of Korach, the cousin of Moshe and Aaron whose familial resentment and lust for leadership impelled him to protest and revolt against the Israelite leadership. Korach and his followers proved unsuccessful in their pursuit of power, and eventually they were swallowed up by the earth.

The distinctions between the two cases are stark. But what, for heaven's sake, constitutes a dispute for the sake of heaven? And what does it mean that it will lead to an end that endures?

A precise definition and interpretation are themselves subject to centuries of debate. Several medieval commentators and, more recently, the former British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, suggest that whereas Hillel and Shammai were motivated by a quest for truth, Korach was inspired by a passion for power.

At its core, an argument for the sake of heaven is one whose objective is not the defeat of the other but rather the humble embrace of an ultimate truth. It's less about "winning" an argument and more about solving a problem. What results, then, is not a destructive end-state that extends a divide, but rather a constructive one that bridges a difference.

And for those who embrace this values-based form of argument — *sofah l'hitkayem*, the end endures. The truth emerges. The disputants' dignity is preserved. The community is strengthened. It remains whole, and progresses from argument to argument, from generation to generation.

A few weeks after President Obama's final State of the Union address, he returned to the Illinois General Assembly, where he acknowledged the toxicity of American politics and the partisan rancor that breeds a gnawing cynicism. But he also noted that our polity has always been a work in progress and has always required work to progress. He concluded, "For all the imperfections of our democracy, the capacity to reach across our

continued on page 6

Chanan Weissman served as the White House liaison to the American Jewish community during the final year of the Obama Administration. He formerly served in several capacities at the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Defense Department.

Art by Shai Azouly
"Between Two Chairs," 2008
Oil on canvas, 158 x 162 cm

"In this work, I'm creating a narrative with figures radiating human warmth, compassion, and slight irony. This piece holds both fluency and inarticulateness — a sense of promise and hope."

NiSh'ma

On this page, we offer three takes on the talmudic verse exploring what constitutes a constructive argument. Our commentators consider the nature of how we disagree while remaining in community with one another. Please visit jd.fo/shma2 and join the discussion about stepping up and being counted. Our online version is new and interactive, and we welcome your comments. —S.B.



David Bilchitz: While marriage equality for same-sex couples has been a defining struggle of the past 20 years, disputes around marriage date back thousands of years. Why does the Talmud highlight the

fact that, despite their fundamental disagreements, the two most famous rival schools of Jewish legal thinking — Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai — allowed their children to marry one another?

Marriage adds a public dimension to an intensely personal bond between

two people. The houses of Shamai and Hillel treated one another with love and friendship — evidenced by their willingness to marry one another. What bound these schools — which disagreed on philosophy and legal principle — together was their commitment to building deep relationships founded on respect for one another. They bridged their disagreements by looking out for one another. In fact, to avert the rival school from contracting a marriage it believed to be impermissible, they notified one another when any such circumstances arose.

Marriage poses many challenges for two different people in living together. Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai modeled how differences need not cause divided hearts. Privately, in our marriages, and publicly, in our communities, disagreement abounds; for instance, profound questions of religion or our views on Israel often divide and destroy. The central challenge that our text poses is to find a way, despite our disagreements, to treat one another with love and respect, both in our private and our public lives.

David Bilchitz is a professor of fundamental rights and constitutional law at the University of Johannesburg. He is the chairperson of Limmud International, a network of 43 Limmud communities dispersed around the world that attracts some 30,000 participants.



Andrea London: An acquaintance of mine recently quipped: “I wouldn’t care if my child married a non-Jew, but a Republican — no way!” In our polarized country, I suspect the sentiment is not uncommon: Some Americans feel more in common with those of another faith community than with co-religionists who have a strikingly different worldview or political orientation. By contrast, Beit Hillel and Beit

Shammai were willing to have their children “intermarry,” despite intense disagreement on matters of ethics and halakhah. Disagreements aside, it seems that they also were able to stay focused on a higher purpose: helping the Jewish people to live according to God’s will.

Not every opinion is worthy of our respect — certainly, not the torrent of bigoted and hateful speech that was unleashed in the past election cycle. Such speech must be condemned and marginalized. But, like Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, we must find our higher purpose and engage in vigorous debate across the many divides in our nation to build a society in which all people live with dignity. There are reasons we have not done so, among them, that our neighborhoods and social circles tend to be homogeneous. We seldom truly engage with people from backgrounds sharply divergent from our own. And yet we assume that our own narrow experience provides sufficient knowledge from which to ascertain the right solutions and the right leaders for our society. The outcome of the election should both humble and embolden us to reach across the divides and seek a broader, more inclusive conversation. That may be the only path to creating a just society.

Rabbi **Andrea London** has served at Beth Emet, The Free Synagogue in Evanston, Ill. for the past sixteen years, including as senior rabbi since 2010. As co-chair of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs’ Jewish-Muslim Community-Building Initiative, she works to build bridges among Chicago-area Jews, Christians, and Muslims. She also co-chairs the J Street Rabbinic and Cantorial Cabinet. She and her husband, Danny London, have two children, Yonah and Liora.



Amitai Adler: The respectful relations between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, spoken of numerous times throughout the Talmud, represents the beautiful ideal of *machlochet l’shem shamayim*, dispute for the sake of heaven — what the rabbis define in *Pirkei Avot* as respectfully disputing Torah

for selfless reasons rather than conducting disrespectful disputations about personal or political power. As David Bilchitz notes, “Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai modeled how challenges and differences need not cause divided hearts.”

Machlochet l’shem shamayim is, perhaps, the quality most needed and most lacking in the Jewish world today. Between the various Orthodox communities, between the committed halakhic and committed non-halakhic, non-Orthodox communities, there is little in the way of compromise or mutual respect. One would be hard pressed to imagine a Reform Jew feeling comfortable with a daughter marrying a Chabadnik or a Ner Yisroel Litvak family feeling comfortable eating anything at the table of a Conservative Jew; or the *rabbinit* in Israel accepting a non-Orthodox (or, these days, even non-Haredi) conversion.

We are grievously failing both Hillel and Shammai with our failure to appreciate and embrace *machlochet l’shem shamayim*. Our first steps toward that re-embrace should be to remember that we all have sparks of *kedusha* (holiness) within us, which draw us together. And then, we might consider how we understand that holiness and connection within.

Rabbi **Amitai Adler** writes and teaches in the Chicagoland area. Find him at [facebook.com/Rabbi.Adler](https://www.facebook.com/Rabbi.Adler).

“Beit Hillel did not refrain from marrying the children of Beit Shammai and Beit Shammai did not refrain from marrying the children of Beit Hillel.”

BT *Yevamot* 14a

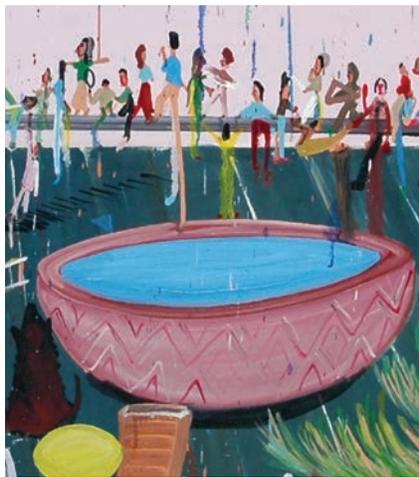
Jewish sensibilities are approaches to living and learning that permeate Jewish culture. The ideas, values, emotions, and behaviors they express — emanating from Jewish history, stories, and sources — provide inspiration and guidance that help us to respond creatively and thoughtfully to life's challenges and opportunities. Sensibilities are culturally informed senses or memes. In part, as a response to the divisiveness of the last election, *Sh'ma Now* decided to focus this issue on the sensibility *machlochet l'shem shamayim*, argument for the sake of heaven — the art of constructive argumentation. Next month, we will explore "*chiddush*," how the old becomes new, and the new sanctified.

Remember the 49 vs. 49

Daniel Roth

As I hid quietly behind a few rows of students in my first Talmud class at Yeshivat Har-Etzion in 1993, our rabbi asked: "Who do you think is right, Abayeh or Rava?" Intimidated as any class of 18-year-olds would be, no one answered. He slammed his fist on the table and asked again in a louder voice. Still, no one answered. "You are all spineless chickens!" Then, he instructed us to argue back and forth until we could prove how both rabbis — though holding contradictory opinions — were right. I recall literally pulling a muscle in my brain as I attempted to comprehend contradictory truth and experience — what I was to learn was the 49 vs. 49.

When asked by Moses for a "clear-cut Torah," God responded by saying that every law must be understood with 49 reasons to rule a matter one way and 49 reasons to rule the opposite. A vote would follow, and if the majority voted that a matter was pure, it was considered pure, and if they voted it impure, it was impure. (JT Sanhedrin 4:2, 22a) Rabbi Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli (a thirteenth-century commentator in Seville, Spain, known as the Ritva) explained that this is how we can understand the legend of the heavenly voice declaring that both the opinions of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai are "the words of the living God" (Babylonian Talmud Eruvin 13b) though they hold contradictory positions. The Babylonian Talmud states that there are 50 gates of wisdom, and only 49 were revealed to Moses; therefore, no human, not even Moses, can ever claim to attain



Art by Shai Azoulay

the absolute truth. (Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 38a)

Being able to grasp the contradictory 49 vs. 49 on any particular subject can be extremely challenging, especially if we are affected personally. It requires several particular traits. First is self-awareness (*mudaut atzmit*) of our own 49 reasons that brought us to our particular understanding of truth. What various experiences and people contributed to our interpretations of the truth as such? Second, we need a deep sense of humility (*anavah*) that our truth is at best a partial truth based upon only 49 reasons and never reaches the absolute truth of 50. Once we have acquired awareness of the bias of our own 49, we need to acknowledge the 49 experiences, stories, concerns, and values that make up our opponents' understanding of the truth. In order to fully enter into this opposing position, we need to cultivate a genuine sense of respect (*kavod*) for our opponents. We also need curiosity (*sakranut*) about the 49 reasons

and experiences that bring them to their understanding of the truth; this requires deep listening and a degree of empathy.

Grasping the contradictory 49 vs. 49 of a difficult issue enables us to engage in a process of productive and respectful disagreement. It is how our tradition instructs us to disagree constructively, known as *machlochet l'shem shamayim*, or disagreement for the sake of heaven. (Mishnah Avot 5:17) This method, practiced by the sages of the Mishnah and Talmud, is still practiced today every time study partners, or *chevruta*, respectfully argue over different interpretations of a text.

On the ninth of Adar, around the year 66 CE, shortly before the destruction of the Second Temple, the sages temporarily neglected the principle of the 49 vs. 49 and became locked in a destructive conflict, each trying to advocate for their truth without any understanding or consideration for their opponents' truth. This took place, according to the Talmud, when the schools of Hillel and Shammai ceased disagreeing constructively "for the sake of heaven" and instead engaged in a violent clash over how open to be toward non-Jews. (JT Shabbat 1:4, 3c)

Today, our cultural competency in how to engage in constructive conflict appears to be once again eroding. We might turn to our tradition to learn how to strengthen the cognitive and emotional skills essential to becoming more aware of the bias of our 49 and more respectful and curious about the opposing 49. We might, then, foster healthier and more sacred disagreements *l'shem shamayim*.

Rabbi **Daniel Roth** is the founder and director of the Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution and the 9Adar Project: Jewish Week of Constructive Conflict, which takes place this year February 19-25, 2017. To find out more, go to 9Adar.org. Roth is also a lecturer on religion and conflict resolution at Bar-Ilan University.

Safety First? Trigger Warnings and Constructive Dialogue

Joseph Levin-Manning

Are trigger warnings helpful? Trigger warnings prevent those of us who are victims of trauma from being subjected to an associative emotional pain. Trigger warnings are not meant to be an excuse to disengage, but rather an opportunity for self-care. As I work with students, I have been debating when, how, and why to use trigger warnings — wanting to stay current with students and the changing environment on many campuses.

Editors Note: A **trigger** is something that reminds a person of a past traumatic experience. A **trigger warning** alerts an individual that something disturbing — an unsettling piece of information or experience — is about to follow.

If you do not understand the purpose of trigger warnings, these few questions might help to provide perspective: Have you ever found yourself remembering an event so traumatic that you are frozen in fear? Have you ever been awakened in the middle of the night because of a scary movie you watched? Have you ever shuddered in discomfort or fear thinking about some object reminiscent of or connected tangentially to a phobia? These feelings are akin to (but different from) what someone who is triggered might feel.

My personal struggle focuses on whether or not safe spaces that ensure trigger warnings are — in the long run — helpful. For example, a teacher preparing a class discussion on domestic abuse and violence could issue a warning so that students who have experienced any personal violence are informed and allowed to disengage from the lesson rather than possibly experience a retraumatization. In this case, the student opts out of the conversation. But, sometimes, staying engaged in a conversation about a traumatic issue helps the individual to stretch, to grow, and to learn. And we also have to ask whether a trigger warning lessens the

effectiveness of a presentation. Will trigger warnings deprive the student of opportunities to engage in conversations that are painful but productive?

A few weeks ago, I spoke on a panel about the experiences that LGBTQ+ youth face when they are homeless. To begin the discussion, we showed a video that depicted a young man being thrown out of his home and forced to live on the streets. The video also contained references to rape, domestic abuse, and other violence, as it was intended to show the audience the very brutal reality of the lives of some homeless youths. Before screening the video, we gave a trigger warning. We wanted to alert the audience in case there were people present who had themselves been victims of this type of trauma. Everyone stayed to watch the video in its entirety.

The warning did not diminish the impact of the film. Rather, it may have provided an even greater opportunity to engage more deeply and meaningfully in a tense dialogue because the warning served as a guide to how difficult the conversation would be. Participants in the room could ready themselves for a gripping video and the painful conversation that followed, which challenged the perspectives of most in the room by graphically describing the physical and emotional vicissitudes of homelessness. The audience was compelled to acknowledge and face their own biases, ignorance, and complacency.

Machlochet l'shem shamayim (conflict for the sake of heaven) is the notion that it is a positive thing to engage in constructive argumentation and conflict. In a meeting, classroom lesson, or community program focusing on a difficult topic — such as the future of democracy in Israel or hate crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals and communities — I wonder whether a trigger warning would help people to engage more deeply in a conversation that might otherwise be too emotionally toxic. Constructive conflict sometimes pushes people to the edge of their comfort — especially if it drives them to consider the veracity of what they think they know to be true. In order for this struggle with knowledge to be fruitful, a person must be properly

prepared to engage. And trigger warnings can be used as a part of the prelude to that process. Such conflict helps us to vet ideas, and when this is done for the betterment of others or ourselves, it is considered *machlochet l'shem shamayim*.

Joseph Levin-Manning is a MBA student with a focus on management and leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park. He has been on staff at several Hillel programs and he now works as the graduate coordinator for LGBTQ+ programs at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Listening for the Sake of Heaven, Post-Election

Melissa Weintraub

In the immediate aftermath of the election, we witnessed a tug-of-war around empathy among Jewish and general commentators in blue America. Many expressed bewilderment and shock: “How could we have not known half our country?” “What blinders have we worn?” “What failure of empathy — basic miscomprehension — brought us here?”

The call for empathy in turn inspired a backlash: “Why should we kowtow to racism?” “Lives and the planet are on the line. You want me to hug the people who’ve brought on such threat and harm?” “Reaching out to them isn’t just morally dubious, it’s a waste of resources. We can win elections without them.”

Resisting engagement with red and purple counterparts is understandable. Yet many of the arguments against pursuing understanding rely on false binaries and strawmen. As if we must choose: Fight or dialogue, agitate or heal, condemn or introspect, rally the base or reach out to the other. As if noticing neglect for the grievances of the rural heartland obliges us to obscure the suffering of immigrants, African-Americans, the LGBTQ+ community, Muslims, and the urban poor.

I hail from Trump country — a bright-red small town like many that blanket the Midwest, ever reliant on a few core

companies. Growing up, the culture surrounding me was built on good neighborliness and church. Overwhelmingly white, Christian, and insulated from outsiders, we alternated between feeling sorry for and intimidated by city dwellers — superior and inferior, flown over, defensive, and unseen, but still proud. We grew accustomed to Hollywood and the national media ignoring us, except to make us the butt of a joke.

I was a foreigner four times over in my hometown: a stranger by virtue of Jewishness, ambition, affluence in relative terms, and parents with Chicago-roots. As a child, my friends anticipated that I would leave them. “I imagine you going off and returning, looking down on us in a fur coat,” said my best friend at age eight. But for the fur coat, she was not entirely wrong.

As an adult, I have resided in the other America — Brooklyn, Berkeley, Cambridge — and shared culture of cappuccinos, high rent, and advanced degrees. When I’ve cared about an issue, I’ve found a way to dial up power: that college friend, that son of a donor, that colleague of a colleague. I internalized the sensibility that for “us,” influence was always within reach.

I watched this election cycle as childhood friends voiced the politics of resentment: the sense of being lorded over by disdainful distant elites, the fed-up-ness with liberal “tolerance” for everyone but white Christian them. Much of my adult world, meanwhile, expressed incredulity at best, contempt at worst for the dumb, duped people of red America.

The costs of the expanding cultural and socio-political distances of our fragmented country are practical and profound. We cannot speak effectively to those we do not remotely understand. When we remain tucked in echo chambers, we are unable to make realistic and correct assessments of what is happening. We do not know how to influence and persuade. We repel would-be allies and turn them into adversaries.

It is time to dispense with zero sum games and either/or competitions over marginalization and suffering. It is time to turn toward the experiences of rural, white men and women who feel forgotten and left behind without turning away from the experiences of the urban poor, people of color, and other vulnerable populations. It is time to recognize that many Middle Americans experience not only economic anxiety, but also legitimate cultural and political disenfranchisement. Doing so does not in any way mean giving bigotry a pass. We have a far greater chance of challenging people when we hold and reflect their legitimate frustrations and hardships.

It is in liberals’ interest not only to fight, protest, and condemn, but also to extend ourselves, to touch down in the “middle of nowhere” to grapple with the sensibilities of “flyover country.” To pursue empathy is not to sing “Kumbaya.” It is, rather, to overcome the objectification of people whose lived experience we need to understand to uncover our own blind spots and increase the likelihood that our arguments and challenges will land and be taken in. Whether we are drawn to the table for the sake of relationship, insight, or political expediency, heavenly argument means listening as a precondition for being heard.

Come home with me to the corn fields. We may not change our positions, but we will not be the same at the end of that gaze.

Rabbi **Melissa Weintraub** is the founding co-director of Resetting the Table, an organization dedicated to building meaningful dialogue and deliberation across political divides on Israel in the American Jewish community. She was the co-founder and co-executive director of Encounter, which works to strengthen the capacity of the Jewish people to be agents of change in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Weintraub received the Grinnell Young Innovator for Social Justice Prize, which honors extraordinary accomplishment in effecting positive social change.

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“Every argument that is for [the sake of] heaven’s name, it is destined to endure. But if it is not for heaven’s name, it is not destined to endure.”

– *Pirkei Avot* 5:17



"All the rest is commentary..." ©Beth Grossman 2010
 From a series that presents versions of the Golden Rule. Twelve diverse world religions share their core visions of human relations.
<http://www.bethgrossman.com/gallery/commentary/>

continued from cover

differences ... remains entirely up to us."

Blessed with the right motivations, even our differences can mend our divisions and bridge the gap between the reality we see and the future we want — for "a more perfect union." For a *sofah l'hitkayem*. For an end that endures. And, if you disagree, no hard feelings.

Consider & Converse

A Guide to 'Machlochet
L'Shem Shamayim'

Argument for the Sake of Heaven

How are we shaped by constructive
argumentation?

Introduction

Sh'ma Now curates conversations on a single theme rooted in Jewish tradition and the contemporary moment. At the heart of this issue of *Sh'ma Now* is the theme of *Machlochet L'Shem Shamayim: Argument for the Sake of Heaven*. The perspectives shared in these pages are meant to be expansive — to inspire reflections on Judaism and possibility in ways you may not have considered before. They aim to hold discord. We hope that the richness and diversity of these essays will show you new perspectives that are personally meaningful and edifying.

Sh'ma Now has never viewed learning or “meaning-making” as solely an individual activity. That’s why we have included this guide, which is specifically designed to help you to consider the idea of going forth independently or with others, formally and informally.

How to Begin

This guide offers a variety of suggestions, including activities and conversation prompts for individual contemplation and informal or more structured conversations. We suggest that you use this guide to share reflections and thoughts over a Shabbat meal, or, for those who are more adventurous, to lead a planned, structured conversation with a small group of friends and family members you have invited to your home or to a coffee shop. If you would like more information about ways in which this journal might be used, please contact Susan Berrin, *Sh'ma Now* editor-in-chief, at SBerrin@shma.com. You can also print out a PDF file of the entire issue at <http://forward.com/shma-now/>.

Guidelines for Discussion

If you wish to hold a structured conversation, the following guidelines may help you to create a space that allows for honest personal exploration through sharing:

- Create a sense of shared purpose that can foster the kind of internal reflection that happens through group conversation.
- Remind participants of simple ground rules for conversations. For example: Avoid commenting on and critiquing each other’s comments. Make room for everyone to speak. Step into or away from the conversation appropriately. No one participant should dominate the conversation. Let silence sit, allowing participants to gather their thoughts.
- For each of the questions below, we recommend that you print out the article in question, or provide the link to it, and we ask that you take a moment to read it in print or on screen, before the conversation begins.
- Allow people a few minutes to absorb the article, perhaps even to read it a second time, before moving into the discussion.

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Interpretive Questions

can focus the reader on the ideas in the articles.

- Chanan Weissman [page 1] introduces readers to the idea of *machlochet l'shem shamayim* (argument for the sake of heaven) and examines Jewish historical precedents for valuing constructive argumentation. The relationship between the houses of Hillel and Shammai is the best-known example. Was that a historic anomaly? How do we recreate the fabric of that type of disputation today — what should be replicated and what should be discarded? What does “for the sake of heaven” mean in this context? Is every opinion worthy of respect — and, if not, what are the boundaries of conversation? Digging deeply into this concept, what does Jewish wisdom teach us about elevating the mechanism and orchestration for disputation?
- Rabbi Daniel Roth [page 3] reflects on the emotional skill set necessary for healthy argumentation, including empathy, patience, humility, trust, tentativeness, and *chesed* (loving kindness), among others. What additional emotional skills would be important to develop in order to practice *machlochet l'shem shamayim*? What environment needs to be created? How might the 49 vs. 49 rule (“...every law must be understood with 49 reasons to rule one way and 49 reasons to rule the opposite”) apply to Jewish communities today that are so diverse — where conversations on some topics such as Israel or American politics break down almost immediately?
- Joseph Levin-Manning [page 4] writes about **triggers** (something that reminds a person of a past traumatic experience) and **trigger warnings** (alerts to an individual that something disturbing — an unsettling piece of information or experience — is about to follow). Recently, discussions about creating safe spaces in classroom settings and at conferences have led to larger questions about freedom of speech. Levin-Manning guides our readers through the complex arguments for and against “safe spaces” and “trigger warnings” in an effort to examine these issues. Have you experienced classes or discussions that employed “trigger warnings”? How did it affect the experience? Who defines the boundaries of an argument? How are decisions about the substance and the tactics of argument made?

Reflective Questions

can help integrate the ideas in these articles with one's own sense of self.

- Rabbi Melissa Weintraub [page 4] urges us to consider political opponents more expansively, without assigning to them our binary reactions. She writes, “As if we must choose: Fight or dialogue, agitate or heal, condemn or introspect, rally the base or reach out to the other. As if seeking to understand one's political opponents necessitates suspending moral judgment. As if noticing the neglect for the grievances of the rural heartland obliges us to obscure the suffering of immigrants, African-Americans, the LGBTQ community, Muslims, and the urban poor.” After the election and the inauguration, as we imagine the next four years of a Trump administration, are you trying to understand the swath of voters that live in our country's heartland? How so? Do you sometimes feel that living in a “bubble” is just fine, but also feel — because you know you should — that you want to engage the world? What does living as an internal exile or

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foreigner in your own country feel like? How are you imagining reaching out to know the segments of our society that feel foreign to you? How are you balancing that with protecting the rights of the most vulnerable, who may be even more marginalized in the coming years?

- In *NiSh'ma*, [page 2] three writers explore the verse from the Talmud, "Beit Hillel did not refrain from marrying the children of Beit Shammai and Beit Shammai did not refrain from marrying the children of Beit Hillel." (Yevamot 14a) Rabbi [Andrea London](#) writes, "Not every opinion is worthy of our respect — certainly, not the torrent of bigoted and hateful speech that was unleashed in the past election cycle. Such speech must be condemned and marginalized. But, like Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, we must find our higher purpose and engage in vigorous debate across the many divides in our nation to build a society in which all people live with dignity." What are the limits of free speech and how do you handle situations when you come across vile language and hate-filled speech? Have there been times when you've ignored hatred, and, if so, for what reasons? When has hatred played a significant part in the drama of your own life?

Additional Resources on '*Machlochet l'shem shamayim*'

- February 19-25 is the date of this year's 9Adar Project: Jewish Week of Constructive Conflict. 9Adar seeks to cultivate a culture of constructive conflict across personal, political, religious, and other divides. Historically, the 9th of the Hebrew month of Adar marks the day when, approximately 2,000 years ago, *mahloket l'shem shamayim* (disagreements for the sake of Heaven) turned destructive between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. The date serves as a powerful reminder of what can happen when these values and skills are neglected. This project is an initiative of the Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution, part of the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies. Learn how to join the movement by going to www.9adar.org.
- Two thousand years ago, Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai knew how to engage in "Disagreements for the Sake of Heaven" or constructive conflicts. BimBam (formerly G-dcast), a Jewish digital media studio, partnered with the Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution and 9Adar Project to create a video that explains how it worked then, and maybe how it can work now <http://www.bimbam.com/conflict-resolution/> as well as a Hebrew language version: <http://www.bimbam.com/machlochet/>.