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Mishna 1

מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי וּמִסָּדֵרָה
לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ, וַיְהִי שֵׁשׁ לְזִקְנִים,
וְזִקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים, וְנָבִיאִים
מִסָּדֵרָה לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה.

Moses received the Torah at Sinai and he transmitted it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly.

הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים:
הָיוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדִין, וְהִעֲמִידוּ
תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה, וַעֲשׂוּ סָג
לְתוֹרָה.

The Men of the Great Assembly said three maxims: Be measured in the legal process; raise up many students; make a fence for the Torah.

Moses received the Torah at Sinai

Pirkei Avot opens with a sketch of the chain of transmission from Moses to the sages of the Mishna. This chain constitutes the sages' statement that their teaching of Torah is the authentic and unbroken continuation – and the authoritative present incarnation – of the Torah given to Moses at Mount Sinai. This is also their reply to the claims of the other groups competing for the loyalty of the Jewish people which portrayed themselves as the carriers of the true Torah.

As underscored in the Introduction, the sages had to account for the remarkable transformation in actual religious life which characterized the way of Torah as lived in rabbinically led communities. Although the sages upheld and brought with them the entirety of biblical Judaism, the rabbinic iteration of Judaism looked very different. Two hundred

Mishna 2

שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מְשִׁירֵי
כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה. הוּא הָיָה
אוֹמֵר: עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים
הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה, וְעַל
הָעֲבוּדָה, וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים.

Shimon the Righteous was one of the last of the Men of the Great Assembly. He used to say: The world stands on three pillars: on the Torah, and on the divine service, and on acts of loving-kindness.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Shimon the Righteous is the only member of the Great Assembly whose name we know, except for the biblical prophets and teachers included in that group. He served as High Priest and is a transitional figure from the days of prophecy and the Temple to the ever more hidden Divine Presence that took over when prophecy ceased, and later when the Temple was destroyed. For this reason, his name and memory are suffused with nostalgia and uplifting associations. Among them: As long as Shimon the Righteous was alive, the permanent fire in the Temple always burned; after his death, it became erratic. During his lifetime, the initial wood supply sufficed to burn all the sacrifices; once he died, the wood burned quickly and had to be continuously replenished.

Various traditions report Shimon the Righteous meeting and winning over Alexander the Great in the third century BCE and the Roman Emperor Caligula in the first century CE. Chronologically, of course, he could not have encountered both rulers. However, both incidents dealt with cases where the Jews were in danger of these rulers turning against them, and thus both cases of deliverance were associated with

Mishna 3

אַנְטִיגֹנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכוֹ קִבֵּל
מִשְׁמֵעוֹן הַצְּדִיק. הוּא הָיָה
אוֹמֵר: אַל תְּהִי בְּעֲבָדִים
הַמְּשֻׁמְשִׁים אֶת הָרֵב עַל
מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּדָס, אֲלֵא הוּוּ
בְּעֲבָדִים הַמְּשֻׁמְשִׁים אֶת
הָרֵב שְׁלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל
פְּדָס, וַיְהִי מוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם
עֲלֵיכֶם.

Antigonus of Sokho received [the transmission of the Oral Tradition¹³] from Shimon the Righteous. He would say: Do not be like servants who serve the master for the sake of receiving a payment. Rather, be like servants who serve the master [selflessly and] not for the sake of payment; and may the fear of Heaven be upon you.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Antigonus (first half of the third century BCE) is the first noted sage with a Greek name. This was a reflection of the rising influence of Hellenism inside the Jewish community. The use of the Greek name is striking. It shows that the sages did not simply reject Greek culture; they also learned from it. They filtered its messages so that only those teachings compatible with Torah culture would get through.

Like servants who serve... for the sake of receiving a payment

God and religion should not be viewed as a vending machine in which you insert worship and obedience in order to get the good

13. Words in brackets are my additions for the purpose of making the mishna more understandable to the reader.

Mishna 12

הֵלֵל וְשַׁמַּי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם.
הֵלֵל אָמַר: הָיִי מִתְּלָמִידָיו
שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם
וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם, אוֹהֵב אֶת
הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמְקַרְבֵּן לַתּוֹרָה.

Hillel and Shammai received the tradition from them. Hillel says: Be of the disciples of Aaron [the High Priest], one who loves peace and pursues peace, loves all God's creatures, and brings them close to the Torah.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Hillel (first century BCE to early first century CE) was born in Babylonia but came to Jerusalem to study with Shemaya and Avtalyon. He lived in absolute poverty, supporting himself as a woodcutter. One Friday, unable to pay the tuition, he was not admitted to the house of study. He climbed up to the roof and onto the skylight to listen to the Torah lessons. It snowed and Hillel was trapped and almost froze to death. Shabbat morning, the students detected Hillel's body blocking the skylight. They dug him out, warmed him up, and saved his life. Later he rose to become *nasi* due to the brilliance of his mind.

One year, the fourteenth of the Hebrew month of Nisan occurred on Shabbat. The question arose: "Does bringing the Paschal sacrifice override the Shabbat laws?" No one knew the answer. Hillel ruled that the sacrifice overrode the restrictions of Shabbat. According to the Babylonian Talmud, he used some of the thirteen methods of rabbinic analysis whereby laws are derived from the Torah in order to arrive at a ruling. This would imply that Hillel exercised creative leadership in

Mishna 14

הוא היה אומר: אם אין אני לי
מי לי, וכשאני לעצמי מה אני,
ואם לא עכשו אימתני. He used to say: If I am not for myself, who
will be for me? But when I am only for
myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

If I am not for myself

It is legitimate and necessary to look out for one's own interest. Likewise, it is legitimate to give help first to one's own family and friends. The covenantal way respects the natural, human emotion of feeling the needs of one's family more intensely. It builds on this instinctive, moral sympathy and then channels those emotions outward so that all people will be brought within the universe of moral obligation. By contrast, ideologically driven, idealistic movements often disrespect these human tendencies and seek to override them in the name of a higher ideal. This masks a covert disrespect for human beings on the grounds that they do not measure up to the highest ideals.

World revolutionary movements such as Communism and Maoism attacked the family as "bourgeois" and as *a source of selfishness*. They succeeded only in weakening the natural bonds of love and affection for one's closest relatives. This degraded people's humanity and made them less humane to others as well. Starting with one's own interest and then reaching outward often leads to greater good than "idealistic" approaches that dismiss loyalty to oneself as selfish. Proof for this is that people working for themselves under capitalism out-produced and liberated more people from poverty than people working under communism,

Mishna 8

רַבֵּן יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּי קִבֵּל
מֵהִלֵּל וּמִשַּׁמַּי. הוּא הָיָה
אוֹמֵר: אִם לָמַדְתָּ תּוֹרָה
הַרְבֵּה, אַל תַּחְזִיק טוֹבָה
לְעַצְמְךָ, כִּי לְכֵן נִוְצַרְתָּ.

Rabban Yoḥanan b. Zakkai received the tradition from Hillel and Shammai. He used to say: If you have learned a lot of Torah, do not give yourself so much credit for good, for this is the purpose for which you were created.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Rabban Yoḥanan b. Zakkai (first century CE) was the seminal figure who assured the continuity of Judaism through and beyond the Destruction of the Second Temple. He took the decisive step of acknowledging that Jerusalem and the Temple could not be saved. He saw that the military leader of the rebellion knew that the cause was lost but was afraid to defy his activists and sue for peace. At the risk of his life, Rabban Yoḥanan had himself evacuated with his students from the Holy City to the settlement of Yavneh. There he established a rabbinic academy. He grasped that Judaism could survive the loss of the Temple with its direct access to God by shifting to “rabbinic mode,” i.e., by relating to God through learning Torah instead of receiving “heavenly instructions,” through communing with God through prayer in place of sacrifices, and through focusing on good deeds as a way to serve God and fellow human beings. Rabban Yoḥanan went on to lead the forging of a post-Destruction life of ongoing performance of mitzvot and commemoration of the lost rituals. He also raised up a group of disciples who became the rebuilders of Jewish faith and life.

חַמְשָׁה תַלְמִידִים הָיוּ לְרַבֵּן יוֹחָנָן
בֶּן זַכַּי. וְאֵלּוּ הֵם: רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בֶּן
הוֹרְקָנוֹס, רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן חֲנַנְיָה,
רַבִּי יוֹסֵי הַכֹּהֵן, רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן
נֶתַנְאֵל, רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲרָךְ.

Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai had five [pri-
mary] disciples. These are their names:
R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, R. Yehoshua
b. Hanania, R. Yosei the Priest, R. Shimon
b. Netanel, R. Elazar b. Arakh.

Five [primary] disciples

They led in the academy at Yavneh, they spread Rabban Yohanan's Torah, they established Jewish religious life, and expanded the study of Torah, thus leading in the rebuilding after the great catastrophe.

הוא היה מונה שבחם:
אליעזר בן הורקנוס, בור
סוד שאינו מאבד טפה.
יהושע בן חנניה, אשרי
יולדתו. יוסי הכהן, חסיד.
שמעון בן נתנאל, ירא
חטא. אלעזר בן ערך,
במעין המתגבר.

He would recount their praises: R. Eliezer
b. Hyrcanus is like a plastered cistern that does
not leak a single drop of water. R. Yehoshua
b. Hanania – blessed is the mother who gave
birth to him. R. Yosei the Priest is a *hasid*
[pious man]. R. Shimon b. Netanel is a
sin-fearing man. R. Elazar b. Arakh is like an
overflowing spring of water.

That does not leak

R. Eliezer combined industrious study with total recall, so he never lost a drop of the wisdom that he received from his teachers. R. Eliezer said of himself that he never spoke a word of Torah that he had not heard from his teachers. This suggests that his greatness was in preserving the traditions of the past and preventing their loss during a period of extraordinary turmoil and destruction.

Blessed is the mother

R. Yehoshua's behavior was so pleasant that people blessed his mother for raising such a person. The Talmud tells that his mother visited scholars in the study halls when she was pregnant with him, seeking blessings from the sages there. After he was born, she kept his crib in the study halls so he would absorb the sounds and wisdom of Torah study from the time he was an infant. Rabban Yohanan gives his mother the credit for nurturing R. Yehoshua to become a great scholar.

Chapter 2

Hasid

A title which has been repeatedly reborn over the course of Jewish history. *Hasid* implies intense piety, a combination of fervor and devotion to God, even unto death.

An overflowing spring

While R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus was honored for preserving everything he was taught, R. Elazar b. Arakh had a creative mind. He is celebrated for creating new insights and expanding the content and reach of Torah. In a generation of such upheaval and change, standing pat (not to mention intellectual rigidity) could not be sustained.

הוא היה אומר: אם יהיו כל
חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים,
ואליעזר בן הורקנוס בכף
שניה, מכריע את כלם.
אבא שאול אומר משמו:
אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל
בכף מאזנים, ואליעזר
בן הורקנוס אף עמהם,
ואליעזר בן ערך בכף שניה,
מכריע את כלם.

He used to say: If all the sages of Israel were put on one side of the scale and Eliezer b. Hyrcanus was placed on the second [opposite] side, he would outweigh them all. Abba Shaul says in his [Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai's] name: If all the sages of Israel were put on one scale of balance – including R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus – and R. Elazar b. Arakh was placed on the second scale, he [R. Eliezar] would outweigh them all.

He would outweigh them all

In a time of great transformation and loss of content, which is the most important approach to assure the future? One report has it that in Rabban Yohanan's view, the greatest contribution was made by R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus in preserving all the traditions of the past so they were not lost. The second report has it that in Rabban Yohanan's view, all the scholarship and all the preservation is outweighed by the capacity to innovate, create, and apply the Torah in new ways for unprecedented situations. Therefore, R. Elazar b. Arakh is the greatest. The Mishna does not resolve the conflicting views. An overriding argument can be made for preservation and an equally compelling case can be made for the need to innovate and meet new challenges.

Mishna 16

הוא היה אומר: לא עליך
המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן
חרין לבטל ממנה. אם למדת
תורה הרבה, נותנין לך שכר
הרבה. ונאמן הוא בעל
מלאכתך, שישלם לך שכר
פעלתך. ודע, שמתן שכרן של
צדיקים לעתיד לבוא.

He used to say: You are not required to complete the work, but you are not at liberty to stand idly by. If you have learned much Torah, they give you great wages. Your employer [God] is trustworthy to pay the wages of your labor, but know that the giving of the reward of the righteous happens in the World to Come.

You are not required to complete

God does not give us a mission that we cannot fulfill. Since the final Redemption is beyond the accomplishment of any sole individual, a person should not feel obligated to complete the task. Nor should one consider himself a failure if the job is not fully done; but neither should he feel at liberty to do nothing. You are commanded and expected to undertake the task of repairing the world, or, if you will, doing good with your life.

R. Tarfon's is a classic covenantal statement. Every generation knows it cannot finish the task, but begins nevertheless, for it accepts its mission. Before each generation passes, it transmits the work to another generation, which it has raised and recruited for the mission. One learns to be neither so arrogant as to believe that "if I don't do it, no one will," nor so self-effacing as to say, "What difference will my limited efforts make?" or "There is no point for me to start, since I cannot finish."

Mishna 13

רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אָמַר: שְׁחֹזֵק
וְקִלּוֹת רֵאשׁ מְרַגְלִין אֶת הָאָדָם
לְעֵרוּהָ. מִסֵּגָת סֵיג לְתוֹרָה,
מִעֲשָׂרוֹת סֵיג לְעֵשֶׂר, נְדָרִים
סֵיג לְפְרִישׁוֹת, סֵיג לְחֶבְמָה
שְׁתִּיקָה.

R. Akiva says: Jestng and levity accustom a person to sexual immorality; the tradition is a fence [siyag] for the Torah; tithings are a fence for [protecting] wealth; vows are a fence for self-restraint; silence is a fence for wisdom.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

R. Akiva b. Yosef is one of the greatest sages of the Talmud. He was particularly influential with his development of a methodology to derive more meanings and messages by close readings of every word, every letter, and even every jot and tittle (curlicue) on the Hebrew letters in a Torah scroll.

R. Akiva was the child of converts. He grew up in a poor, landless family (they were like migrant workers), and was illiterate until adulthood. Raḥel, the daughter of Kalba Savua, the wealthiest man in Jerusalem, met Akiva as a poor shepherd, loved him, married him, and inspired him to go to the academy and become a scholar. Disowned by her father for marrying Akiva, Raḥel put him through school for years, living in complete poverty and supporting him. He rose to become the greatest teacher of his generation.

R. Akiva supported the Bar Kokhba rebellion in 132–135 CE and hailed its leader, Shimon bar Kosiba, as the long-awaited Messiah and deliverer of Israel. He gave him the name Bar Kokhba (son of the star), associating him with the pronouncement of the non-Jewish prophet

Mishna 14

הוא היה אומר, חביב
אדם שנברא בצלם,
חבה יתרה נודעת לו
שנברא בצלם, שנאמר:
כי בצלם אלהים עשה
את האדם: חביבין
ישראל שנקראו בנים
למקום, חבה יתרה
נודעת להם שנקראו
בנים למקום, שנאמר:
בנים אתם ליהוה
אלהיכם: חביבין ישראל
שנתן להם כלי חמדה,
חבה יתרה נודעת להם
שנתן להם כלי חמדה
שבו נברא העולם,
שנאמר: כי לקח טוב
נתתי לכם, תורת אל-
תעזבו:

He used to say: The human being is beloved, for he was created in the image [of God]; even greater love [was shown by God] in that the human being is informed that he was created in the image [of God], as it says: “For in the image of God, God created the human being.”³⁸ The People of Israel are beloved, for they were designated as children of God; even greater love was shown to them in that they were informed that they were designated as the children of God, as it says: “You are the children of the Lord your God.”³⁹ The People of Israel are beloved, for they were given a precious instrument [the Torah]; even greater love was shown to them in that they were informed that they were given a precious instrument with which the world was created, as it says: “For I have given you good instruction; do not forsake my Torah [i.e., My teaching].”⁴⁰

38. Genesis 9:6.

39. Deuteronomy 14:1.

40. Proverbs 4:2.

Mishna 1

בֵּן זוּמָא אוֹמֵר: אֵיזְהוּ חָכָם,
הַלּוֹמֵד מִכָּל אָדָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:
מִכָּל-מְלַמְדֵי הַשְּׂפִלְתִּי, כִּי
עֲדוּתֶיךָ שִׁתָּה לִּי: אֵיזְהוּ גִבּוֹר,
הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יָצְרוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:
טוֹב אַרְךְ אַפִּים מִגִּבּוֹר וּמִשַּׁל
בְּרוּחַ מְלִכָּד עִיר: אֵיזְהוּ עָשִׂיר,
הַשֹּׂמֵחַ בְּחֻלְקוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: יִגִּיעַ
כַּפֶּיךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב
לְךָ: אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְטוֹב
לְךָ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. אֵיזְהוּ מְכַבֵּד,
הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:
כִּי-מְכַבְּדֵי אֶכְבֵּד, וּבְזֵי יִקְלוּ:

Ben Zoma says: Who is [truly] wise? One who learns from everyone, as it says: "I drew understanding from all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my [constant] meditation."¹ Who is [truly] strong? One who controls his impulses, as it says: "Better [i.e., stronger] one who is slow to anger than one who is mighty, and one who controls his spirit [is better] than one who conquers a city."² Who is rich? One who is happy with his portion [in life], as it says: "When you eat the fruits of the labor of your own hand, you are fortunate and well-off."³ You are [fortunate] in this world, and [well-off] in the World to Come. Who is honored? One who honors all human beings, as it says: "Those who honor Me, I shall honor; those who scorn Me, shall be made light of."⁴

1. Psalms 119:99.
2. Proverbs 16:32.
3. Psalms 128:2.
4. 1 Samuel 2:30.

Mishna 3

עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִתְּנָה
אֲבֹרָהִם אָבִי וְעָמַד בְּכֻלָּם,
לְהוֹדִיעַ בְּמָה חֶבְתּוֹ שֶׁל
אֲבֹרָהִם אָבִינוּ. Our father Abraham was tested with ten trials,
yet he stood up to all of them. This tells you
how great was the love of our father Abraham
[for God].

Ten trials

Abraham was tested to the limit of testing (ten). The Torah does not enumerate the ten trials. The Midrash does not offer a definitive list either, although it is commonly assumed that the ultimate (tenth) trial was *Akedat Yitzhak*, the command to bind Isaac upon an altar and sacrifice him.⁴

There has been much speculation concerning what the actual ten trials were. Not counting the trials articulated in the later rabbinic Midrash (such as Abraham's being thrown into a furnace for daring to destroy idols), there are fourteen potential cases in the Torah narrative:

- to leave his homeland and go to an unknown land;
- having found and been promised the land of Canaan, to have to go out of the land and down to Egypt due to a famine;
- to face Pharaoh and his absolute monarchy and not lose his own moral way and religious orientation to God;

4. Ibid., ch. 22.

Chapter 5

- to allow his nephew Lot (his successor?) to split from him and take up residence near Sodom, and to still believe God's promise that he would inherit the land;
- to fight the five conquering kings in order to rescue their captive, his nephew Lot (who had left him!);
- to believe God's promise that he would not be inherited by his servant Eliezer but by his own biological son, although he and Sarah were childless and too old to have children;
- to go on willingly with the covenant with God (the Covenant between the Pieces), even though he was told that his children would suffer servitude and oppression;
- to circumcise himself at the age of ninety-nine in order to enter into the covenant with God;
- to believe the promise that Sarah, in her old age, would bear his child;
- to argue with God to save Sodom rather than abandon the Sodomites to His wrathful punishment;
- to face the mockery of those who whispered that Sarah conceived shortly after being taken into the harem of King Avimelekh of Gerar;
- to listen to Sarah and send away Hagar even though Ishmael was his beloved, biological son;
- to endure the heart-wrenching, mettle-testing trial of the Binding of Isaac for three whole days;
- having no piece of land in which to bury Sarah when she died, and so being forced to buy a grave site for an astronomical sum, despite God's repeated promises that the whole land of Canaan (Israel) would belong to him.⁵

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik suggested yet one more trial, which ironically tests Abraham beyond the Binding of Isaac: to accept with equanimity that his brother Nahor had eight sons from his wife Milca and

5. The sources for these fourteen trials are, respectively, Genesis 12:1; 12:10; 12:11–20; 13:5–17; 14:1–24; 15:1–6; 15:2–18; 17:1–14, 23–27; 17:15–21, 18:10–15; 18:17–33; ch. 20, 21:1–8; 21:9–14; 22:1–18; and 23:1–19.

Mishna 3

four additional sons from his concubine Reuma.⁶ Rabbi Soloveitchik says: Knowing that his idol-worshipping brother had twelve sons with no effort and no excruciating test of his willingness to sacrifice one of them might have been harder to endure than some of the other, more “extreme” experiences with which he was tested.

How great was the love

An alternative, but less likely, translation is: How great was [God’s] love of our father Abraham.

6. Ibid., 22:20–24.

Mishna 16

כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא
תְּלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, בְּטֵל
דָּבָר, בְּטֵלָה אֲהָבָה.
וְשֵׁאִינָהּ תְּלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר,
אֵינָהּ בְּטֵלָה לְעוֹלָם.
אִיזוֹ הִיא אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא
תְּלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זוֹ אֲהָבַת
אֲמֹנֹן וְתָמָר. וְשֵׁאִינָהּ
תְּלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זוֹ אֲהָבַת
דָּוִד וַיהוֹנָתָן.

All love which is dependent on a specific quality [in the beloved], if that specific quality ceases to be, then the love ceases to be. Love which is not dependent on one [specific] quality [in the beloved] will never cease to be. What is [an example of] a love that is dependent on one quality? The love between Amnon and Tamar. What is [an example of] a love that is not dependent on one quality? The love between David and Jonathan.

Love which is dependent on a specific quality

Love may start with a particular attractive quality in the other: beauty, goodness, fame. As love matures, it relates to the total person beyond any one quality – even the quality that attracted the lover in the first place. If the love remains fixed on a particular quality in the beloved, it is immature. And if that particular quality is lost or loses its appeal, the love is vulnerable and liable to disappear also. In Amnon and Tamar's case, Amnon lusted for Tamar's beautiful body. Once he raped her, his lust was satisfied. Her desirability then evaporated and his love turned to hatred and rejection. In the case of David and Jonathan, however, they may well have started by being enamored of each other's youthful vitality, military prowess, leadership ability, universal admiration, or ability to be useful to the other. But the love matured to embrace the whole person.

Mishna 17

כָּל מַחְלָקָה שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם
שָׁמַיִם, סוֹפָהּ לְהִתְקַיֵּם.
וְשֶׁאֵינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם,
אֵין סוֹפָהּ לְהִתְקַיֵּם. אֵיזוֹ
הִיא מַחְלָקָה שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם
שָׁמַיִם, זוֹ מַחְלָקַת הַלֵּל
וְשַׁמַּי. וְשֶׁאֵינָהּ לְשֵׁם
שָׁמַיִם, זוֹ מַחְלָקַת קֹרַח וְכָל
עֲדָתוֹ.

Every controversy that is for the sake of Heaven, its final [outcome] will endure. And [every controversy] that is not for the sake of heaven, its final [outcome] will not endure. Which is a controversy for the sake of Heaven? This is a controversy [between] Hillel and Shammai. And which is not for the sake of Heaven? This is the controversy of Korah and his entire congregation.

Controversy... for the sake of Heaven

In most people's minds, controversy is associated with conflict (i.e., truths of questionable status), with division and disunity, and with disagreeable disagreements; hence, it must be a bad thing. Not so, says the mishna. Controversy can be good or bad, depending on how and why it is pursued. Controversy and argument can clarify issues and enrich the understanding of a truth. Done improperly, however, arguments can disturb or skew judgments and sow confusion.

For the sake of Heaven

- If the motivation for both sides is to understand what God wants.