

Is There a “Right” Way to Light on Chanukah? Thought Questions

Thought Questions on Talmud Shabbat 21b

1. Why do you think that Beit Shammai’s opinion is mentioned first?
2. Which of the two opinions resonates more with you? Explain why that is.
3. Why is it important that the Gemara tells us what was done in both *Eretz Yisrael* and Sidon (which is outside *Eretz Yisrael*)?
4. Why is it significant that the *Amoraim* still maintained the practices of Hillel and Shammai, who were *Tannaim* from centuries before?
5. Why is it important to record people’s names, even when we don’t know who says what?
6. Why do you think that the way we light Chanukah candles goes according to (Beit) Hillel rather than (Beit) Shammai?
7. Does this mean that (Beit) Shammai was wrong? Explain...

Thought Questions on Talmud *Eruvin* 13b

1. What do you make of the fact that there was a 3-year disagreement between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai?
2. How does this Gemara shed light on the contrast between “unity” and “uniformity”?
3. There is a competing halakhic concept of “we don’t make decisions based on a *bat kol* and/or “*lo bashamayim hi*”. How can you reconcile the Gemara in *Eruvin* with this concept?
4. What seems to be the overriding value in deciding which opinion we follow? What can you learn from this?
5. How do the “personal” and the “professional” interact when it comes to making decisions for a group or a community?

Thought Questions on *Avot 5:17*

1. How would you explain the idea of *makhloket l'sheim shamayim* to someone who is unfamiliar with the idea?
2. Have you ever witnessed or been involved in a *makhloket l'sheim shamayim*? What does that feel like?
3. Have you ever witnessed or been involved in a *makhloket lo l'sheim shamayim*? What does that feel like?
4. How would you explain the difference between “unity” and “uniformity”?
5. How does debate serve as a constructive force?
6. Do you think a coalition of people or groups whose goals are contradictory can or should work? (I.e. does “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” actually work?)
7. What creates unity between groups who disagree? How does consensus happen?

Thought Questions on *Yevamot 14b*

1. How does this Gemara describe the essence of *makhloket l'sheim shamayim*?
2. Why do you think that Beit Shammai is consistently mentioned first?
3. How does this Gemara further expand your understanding of the difference between “unity” and “uniformity”?
4. How does this Gemara connect back to the Gemara in *Shabbat 21b*?
5. In what way does this Gemara resonate with you? Or does it not?
6. How could this Gemara help guide us in how we conduct both debates and interpersonal relationships?

Overall Discussion Points

1. How do (religious) observances reveal and reinforce (religious) philosophy?
2. How can the specific practice of lighting Chanukah candles reinforce the concepts of unity and tolerance?
3. What are the parameters of "*makhloket l'sheim Shamayim*"?
4. How do we deal with different, even contradictory viewpoints in Halakha?
5. How do we deal with different, even contradictory, opinions in life?
6. How do we arrive at consensus/unity? What's the difference between unity and uniformity?
7. How can we model *makhloket l'sheim shamayim* to others?
8. How might the practice of lighting Chanukah candles be extended to bring light into the darkness?