

**FOUR BIG JEWISH QUESTIONS FOR THIS MOMENT
IS PLURALISM REALLY A JEWISH VALUE?**

RABBI JOSHUA DAVIDSON

JUNE 3, 2024

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SHULCHAN ARUKH, YOREH DE'AH 289 (SEFARIA)

The mezuzah should be erect lengthwise on the length of the doorpost of the doorway....Rema: And that is how they practice, but there are those who say that [the mezuzah] is invalid erect, rather its length needs to be inclined towards the width of the doorpost of the doorway [that is to say, horizontally]. And those who are scrupulous fulfill both [opinions] and place the mezuzah at an incline, at a diagonal. And this is how it is proper to practice, and this is how we practice in these places, and one should intend that the top of the mezuzah, where the [word] shema is, should be towards the inside and the last line should be facing outside.

TOSEFTA SOTAH 7:7 (SEFARIA)

And he (i.e., Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah) also expounded.... Perhaps it will arise in one's mind that since Beit Shammai [declares] impure and Beit Hillel [declares] pure, so-and-so prohibits and so-and-so permits, [Why] should I henceforth study Torah? Scripture teaches "words" "the words" "these are the words" [see Exodus 19:6-7] all of these words were given by "one Shepherd" [Ecclesiastes 12:11 – The sayings of the wise are like goads....They were given by one Shepherd]. One God created them, one Benefactor gave them, the Master of all deeds, blessed be God, said them. Now make

for your heart chambers within chambers and bring into it the words of Beit Shammai and the words of Beit Hillel, the words of those who declare impure and the words of those who declare pure. [After hearing what had been expounded in the house of study, Rabbi Yehoshua] said, "There is no generation that [can be considered] orphaned, if Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah dwells in its midst."

"RABBI," DR. YEHUDA KURTZER (SOURCES: A JOURNAL OF JEWISH IDEAS)

A person who is confused by the debates between the House of Hillel and Shammai but recognizes that their different traditions are given by the same God, should make for themselves a "heart of many rooms" to internalize even these conflicting ideas as part of the complexity of revelation. This was an idea ahead of its time. In texts like these, revelation exposes a huge chasm between God's infinite character and our human limitations, suggesting that each of us can access only small pieces of the divine word. This is a theological argument for epistemological humility, which in turn engenders a kind of pluralism, the kind that makes us recognize that no individual or group of individuals has unique access to the vastness or accuracy of Torah; that we are each obligated to value our individual contributions to the continuation of Torah; and that we are dependent on one another to try to capture the complex tapestry of wisdom that God has bequeathed to the world.

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MIDRASH BEREISHIT RABBAH 38:13

“Haran died in the presence of Terah his father in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans” (Genesis 11:28). “Haran died during the lifetime of Terah his father” – Rabbi Hiyya grandson of Rav Ada of Yafo: Terah was an idol worshipper [and a seller of idols]. One time, he went away to some place, and he installed Abraham as salesman in his stead. A person would come seeking to buy. He [Abraham] would say to him: ‘How old are you?’ He would say to him: ‘Fifty or sixty years old.’ He would say to him: ‘Woe to this man who is sixty years old and seeks to prostrate himself before something that is one day old.’ He would be ashamed and leave. One time, a certain woman came, carrying a dish of fine flour in her hand. She said to him: ‘Here, offer it before them.’ He arose, took a club in his hand, shattered all the idols, and placed the club in the hand of the largest among them. When his father came, he said to him: ‘Who did this to them?’ He said to him: ‘I will not lie to you, a certain woman came, carrying a dish of fine flour in her hand. She said to me: Here, offer it before them. I offered it before them. This one [idol] said: I shall eat first, and another one said: I shall eat first. This big idol, who was standing among them, got up and took the club and shattered them.’ He [Terah] said to him: ‘What, are you mocking me? Are they sentient at all?’ He said to him: ‘Do your ears not hear what your mouth is saying?’

TALMUD BAVLI - SHABBAT 127A

Rav Yehuda said that Rav said on a related note: Hospitality toward guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, as when Abraham invited his guests it is written: “And he said: Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please pass not from Your servant” (Genesis 18:3). Abraham requested that God, the Divine Presence, wait for him while he tended to his guests appropriately.