

אלו ואלו

Elu v'Elu

lit. these and those

Wield a Both/And Perspective

The Jewish approach includes embracing multiple sides of an issue and grappling with the complexity of life, as there are no simple answers.

Once there were two great Schools of Jewish thought: the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. They often disagreed. Shammai's School liked to regulate, circumscribe, define. Hillel's kept things more open, favoring flexibility and inclusivity. One time, as told in the Talmud's tractate Eruvin, the rabbis debated for three years and could not decide which opinion to follow since both sides had valid arguments. Finally a voice came from heaven, saying 'both these and those – *elu v'elu* – are the words of the living G'd.' Then why do we favor Hillel? Because Hillel taught the views of Shammai before teaching their own.

The sensibility of *elu v'elu* pervades Jewish life, ensuring variety, diversity and creativity. Making room for multiple viewpoints improves solutions and fosters better relationships. There is a lot to be said for agreeing to disagree.

While creating the world, G'd consulted with Truth, Justice, Mercy and Peace, asking – should I create human beings? Peace spoke up first. No, You can't! There will never be Peace. Mercy chimed in, 'Yes, they will have so many opportunities to show their compassion.' Justice agreed –some people will work for justice for their entire lives. Truth interjected: No! They will never find me. G'd didn't know what to do. The score was two for, two against. So G'd picked up Truth and hurled her toward the ground, where she shattered into a million pieces, how truth remains until this day. It's up to each of us to find a piece of Truth, and connect it to another found by someone else.

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

1. Think of a time that you were not able to accept another person's position on something. What was it that kept you from being able to do so?
2. Think of a time when you were able to accept another person's position that was very different from yours. What was it that enabled you to do so?
3. What is a 'piece of Truth' you feel that you are carrying around, looking for other 'pieces of Truth' to connect it to?