



Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 59b

And this is known as the oven of *akhnai*...The Sages taught: On that day, when they discussed this matter, Rabbi Eliezer answered all possible answers in the world to support his opinion, but the Rabbis did not accept his explanations from him.

After failing to convince the Rabbis logically, Rabbi Eliezer said to them: If the halakha [law] is in accordance with my opinion, this carob tree will prove it. The carob tree was uprooted from its place one hundred cubits, and some say four hundred cubits. The Rabbis said to him: One does not cite halakhic proof from the carob tree.

Rabbi Eliezer then said to them: If the halakha is in accordance with my opinion, the stream will prove it. The water in the stream turned backward and began flowing in the opposite direction. They said to him: One does not cite halakhic proof from a stream.

Rabbi Eliezer then said to them: If the halakha is in accordance with my opinion, the walls of the study hall will prove it. The walls of the study hall leaned inward and began to fall. Rabbi Yehoshua scolded the walls and said to them: If Torah scholars are contending with each other in matters of halakha, what is the nature of your involvement in this dispute? The Gemara relates: The walls did not fall because of the deference due Rabbi Yehoshua, but they did not straighten because of the deference due Rabbi Eliezer, and they still remain leaning to this day.

Rabbi Eliezer then said to them: If the halakha is in accordance with my opinion, Heaven will prove it. A Divine Voice emerged from Heaven and said: Why are you differing with Rabbi Eliezer, as the halakha is in accordance with his opinion in every place that he expresses an opinion? Rabbi Yehoshua stood on his feet and said: It is written: "It is not in heaven" (Deuteronomy 30:12). The Gemara asks: What is the relevance of the phrase "It is not in heaven" in this context? Rabbi Yirmeya says: Since the Torah was already given at Mount Sinai, we do not regard even a Divine Voice, as You already wrote at Mount Sinai, in the Torah: "After a majority to incline" (Exodus 23:2). Since the majority of Rabbis disagreed with Rabbi Eliezer's opinion, the halakha is not ruled in accordance with his opinion. [...]

What did the Holy One, Blessed be God, do at the time when Rabbi Yehoshua issued his declaration? The Holy One, Blessed be God, smiled and said: My children have triumphed over Me; My children have triumphed over Me.

Thought Questions:

1. What does this say about the Torah's authority in today's world?
2. Ultimately who has the most authority?
3. Why is argument and interpretation a necessary part of Torah Study?
4. Why is majority opinion important even if it might not be completely or always correct?
5. Why is minority/individual opinion important even if it might not be completely or always correct?

[Midrash] Song of Song Rabbah 1:4 (*adapted selections from the original*)

Rabbi Meir said: When Israel stood before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the Holy One said to them: "I am about to give you the Torah. But you must [first] give Me good guarantors that you will keep it, and then I will give it to you."

They replied: "Ruler of the universe, our patriarchs and matriarchs will be guarantors for us, our prophets will be guarantors for us."

The Holy One: "These also require guarantors for their own persons. You yourselves must bring Me better guarantors, and I will give it to you."

Israel: "Behold, our children will be guarantors for us."

The Holy One: "Certainly, these are excellent guarantors. Because of them will I give you the Torah."

Thought Questions:

1. Why are the children the only acceptable guarantors?
2. Have you ever given or received a savings bond? Why did you give one? How did it feel to get one (especially when you were a child)?
3. What gifts can you think of are that are for future use?
4. How do you ensure something is lasting or enduring?

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