

אלו ואלו

ELU V'ELU
(both) these and those

*Wield a "Both/And"
Perspective*

The Jewish approach includes recognizing that there are multiple sides of an issue, being open to hearing views that are not your own, and grappling with the complexities of life.

SENSIBILITY CARD

On One Foot: Elu v'Elu

IMPORTANT TEXTS

"The teachings of both are the words of the living God, but the law is in agreement with the school of Hillel." — *Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b*

"But [it was asked] since both are words of the living God, for what reason was the School of Hillel entitled to have the law determined according to its rulings? Because they were kindly and humble, and because they studied their own rulings and those of the School of Shammai, and even mentioned the teachings of the School of Shammai before their own." — *Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b*

"Rabbi Yochanan said: 'Are you like the son of Lakish? When I said something, the son of Lakish would ask me twenty-four questions, and I would respond with twenty-four answers. As a result, learning increased. And you tell me a *Tannaitic* support. Do I not know that I say good ideas?'" — *Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 24a[YL1]*



The Implications

We will look at *Elu v'Elu* in the context of:

- Working With Different Types of People **72**
- Argue Like A Jew: The School of Hillel **75**
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- Just for Hillel Professionals:
Working with Colleagues and Students
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Elu v'Elu: Working with Different Types of People

This Activity is Great For



Identity & Relationships

- Team Building
- Student Leaders
- Inclusion



Pastoral Counseling

- Career Development
- Self-Worth
- Relationships



Academic Calendar

- Career Development



Big Ideas

- We all have different talents and challenges; working together successfully involves understanding and respecting our differences.
- Our work can be more successful and effective when we combine our different talents and approaches.

I. Beginning the Conversation

Supplies Needed: Popsicle Sticks; Pace Palette and Score Cards.

The Pace Palette and Score Cards can be ordered from the Pace Corporation at 858-449-7223. Mention that you are a non-profit, for a 20% discount. You may alternatively choose to use a different personality test (see below for more information).

In this session, students will use the Pace Color Palette to understand their own, and others' personality types. They will then work on how to take advantage of the strengths of everyone on the team to work together most effectively and get the most successful results. If you are not able to access the Pace Color Palette, feel free to use any other appropriate personality test, such as the Myers Briggs, Strengths Finder, A Buzzfeed Quiz on which Disney character represents you, etc.

Separate students into groups of 3 and 4. Give them 20-30 popsicle sticks and ask them to build the tallest structure they can, in 5 minutes. They are not allowed to use tape or glue, but they may use anything else in the room. After 5 minutes have elapsed, students should walk around and view what everyone has created. Then take a few minutes to unpack the group dynamics that were in play.



TALK IT OUT

- How did the people in your group decide how to build the structure?
- Did you notice differences in your approach to this project from the approach of others in your group?

Elu
v'Elu



II. A Deeper Dive

Tell students:

Working together in a group can be very effective, but it can also be confusing - because we are not all alike, and other people's styles can be so different from ours. In order to work together effectively, we need to understand each other, and work on capitalizing on everyone's unique style.

We have a Jewish teaching called "*Elu v'Elu*" — or to be a little longer — "*Elu v'elu divrei Elohim Chayim*" — **these and these** are the words of the living God. Jews believe that there is not only one way to be, or one way that is better than others — all of our different styles are a reflection of the God who made us, and should be respected. In fact, we recite a blessing when seeing a multitude of people, specifically praising God for making us to be so different from one another. Read together and discuss the following source:

Babylonian *Talmud Berakhot* 58a:

ת"ר הרואה אוכלוסי ישראל אומר ברוך חכם הרזים שאין דעתם דומה זה לזה ואין פרצופיהן דומים זה לזה

Our Rabbis taught: If one sees a crowd of Israelites, he says, "Blessed is the One who discerns secrets," for the mind of each is different from that of the other, and the face of each is different from that of the other.

- What kind of diversity does this blessing focus on?
- Why do you think we have a blessing for diversity?





Today we are going to use a team-building tool developed by the Pace Corporation to understand what “color” we are and how to appreciate and relate to people who are different colors. This will help us live out in our group interactions (and beyond) the important teaching of *Elu v'Elu*. (This session is crafted for team building; however, you may also wish to use the Pace Palette when working with students on self-esteem and career counseling.)

1. Give out the Pace Palettes and Score Cards. Give students a few minutes to take the Pace Palette assessment (on the Score Card) and add up the numbers in each of the vertical columns.
2. Tell students what color they are, based on which column they scored highest: first column on the left = red, second column= yellow, third column= blue; fourth column= green.
3. Ask students to read the card with the description of their color.
4. Tell students to talk to someone else in the room who is a different color than they are. Students should explain to each other what makes them the color that they are.
5. Come back together in a group. Introduce an upcoming project and event. Ask students to brainstorm what each color would be good at doing, in order to make this a successful project/event.
6. Group together in *chavruta*, students who are very different from each other, and may have a difficult time working with each other. Tell them to give their color card to their *chavruta*, and to read how to communicate with each other. Then have them continue the discussion about the project or event, while using the color-appropriate communication tools for the person they are with.

Come back together and reflect on what they have learned.

TALK IT OUT

- How does understanding your own color help you think about how to work with this group?
- How did understanding other people’s colors help you in your work with the group?
- What are some ideas or strategies you have learned from this exercise that you will use in group activities/Hillel Board Meetings in the future?



Argue Like A Jew

Part 1: The School of Hillel

Elu
v'Elu

This Activity is Great For



Identity & Relationships

- Team Building
- Inclusion



Pastoral Counseling

- Self-Worth



Learning



Holidays

- Chanukah



Big Ideas

- Jewish tradition affirms the validity of many points of view; they may all be "the words of the living God."
- It is important to understand other positions before presenting your own point of view.

I. Beginning the Conversation

Supplies Needed: Enough soccer sized balls for every 2-3 people in the room. Sticky labels with words or phrases that lend themselves to different opinions, for example: political party; gun policy; health care; minimum wage; mechitzah; Mac or PC; animal shelter or pet store.

Attach a label to different places on the ball, so that the entire ball is covered with the labels.

Separate students into groups of two or three. Give each group a labeled ball (see above) and tell them to toss it back and forth. When they catch the ball, they should look down and see which label their thumb is touching and announce their position about that issue, and then toss it to the next person, who should do the same thing. So, for example, A tosses to B. B's thumb is on "political party" and she says "Independent" and then tosses it to C, whose thumb lands on "mechitzah" and she says "never." This activity is adapted from <http://www.training-wheels.com/>.

Continue tossing the ball around for a few minutes.

TALK IT OUT

- Did you mostly agree or disagree with your friend's opinions?
- What do you do when you disagree with someone else?



II. A Deeper Dive

Hillel and Shammai were Jewish scholars who lived in the first century BCE, in the Land of Israel, and had many disputes about Jewish law. (If you are leading this session around *Chanukah* time, tell students about one of their best-known disputes: the order of lighting *Chanukah* candles. Hillel believed that we should light one candle on the first night, two on the second night, etc. Shammai believed that we should light eight candles on the first night, seven on the second night, etc.) Hillel, of course, is the namesake of Hillel International and campus Hillels, and when asked to teach the entire *Torah* on one foot, he responded: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole *Torah*; the rest is the explanation of this--go and study it!" (Babylonian *Talmud*, *Shabbat* 31a)

Read together and discuss the following excerpt from the Babylonian *Talmud* about the way that the schools of Hillel and Shammai conducted their disputes, and Rabbi Joseph Telushkin's commentary in *The Book of Jewish Values*:

Babylonian *Talmud*, *Eruvin* 13b

שלש שנים נחלקו ב"ש ובי"ה הללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו יצאה בת קול ואמרה אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן והלכה כבי"ה וכי מאחר שאלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים מפני מה זכו בי"ה לקבוע הלכה כמותן מפני שנחמין ועלובין היו ושונין דבריהן ודברי ב"ש ולא עוד אלא שמקדימין דברי ב"ש לדבריהן

For three years, there was a dispute [actually, many disputes] between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the former asserting, "The law (*halacha*) is according to our view, and the latter asserting, "The law is according to our view." Then a voice issued from heaven announcing, "The teachings of both are the words of the living God, but the law is in agreement with the school of Hillel." But [it was asked] since both are words of the living God, for what reason was the School of Hillel entitled to have the law determined according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and humble, and because they studied their own rulings and those of the School of Shammai, and even mentioned the teachings of the School of Shammai before their own."

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *The Book of Jewish Values: A Day-By-Day Guide to Jewish Living*, New York: Random House, 2000, pp. 186-7:

Significantly, the heavenly voice ruled in favor of Hillel and his disciples, even in areas of ritual dispute, for moral reasons: he and his followers were "kindly and humble."

The wording of the passage suggests that Shammai's followers had grown somewhat arrogant. Certain that they possessed the truth, they no longer bothered to listen to, or discuss the arguments of, their opponents. Their overbearing self-confidence led them to become morally less impressive (the language of the *Talmud* suggests by implication that they were not "kindly and humble") and probably led them to become intellectually less insightful (after all, how insightful can you be if you are studying only one side of the issue?)



Because the School of Hillel studied their opponent's arguments, when they issued a ruling, they were fully cognizant of all the arguments to be offered against their own position. Thus, their humility not only led to their being more pleasant people, but also likely caused them to have greater intellectual depth.

We can all learn a lesson from the behavior of Hillel and his followers: Don't read only books and publications that agree with and reinforce your point of view. If you do so, and many people do, you will never learn what those who disagree with you believe (at best, you will hear a caricature of their position, presented by people who, like you, disagree with it). It would be a good thing in Jewish life if Jews in the different denominations, or in different political camps, started reading newspapers and magazines of the groups with which they disagree, on a regular basis.

If you seldom hear, read, or listen to views that oppose your own, and if almost everyone you talk to sees the world just as you do, your thinking will grow flabby and intolerant. That is often the case with ideologues on the right and left, both in religion and in politics.

As this text teaches us, humble people are not only more pleasant human beings, but in the final analysis, they may well be the only ones who will have something eternally important to teach.

- What resonates with you in this description of the way that the Hillel argued?
- How can you apply these practices in your own life?



OFF THE PAGE AND INTO LIFE

Students should return to their original ball-playing groups. Have them each choose an issue or issues on which they disagreed, and about which they feel fairly passionate. Tell students:



- Try to follow in the footsteps of the School of Hillel as you discuss this issue. Before you present your position, try to understand the other person's point of view and articulate it. Once you have explained the other position to the other party's satisfaction, present your own point of view.
- Regroup and discuss: What was the effect of listening to and repeating the other person's point of view? How did it affect you? How did it impact your own point of view? How did it affect the dynamic in the room?

Assign "Life homework" to everyone in the room: At some point over the next week, when you are having a discussion or argument with someone else, pause and articulate their point of view (to their satisfaction) before presenting your own. Watch and see how this shifts the dynamic of your conversation.



Argue Like A Jew

Part 2: How Not to Argue



This Activity is Great For



Identity & Relationships

- Team Building
- Student Leaders



Learning

- *Beit Midrash*

Big Ideas

- Diverse experiences and opinions can lead to better discussions and decisions.
- Despite the value of robust argument and open discussions, personal attacks are out of bounds.

Note to Facilitator: In the first session, we talked about how to argue with those who have positions or ideas different from your own. We practiced arguing like the School of Hillel: by first listening to, and then repeating the other's position before presenting our own position. In this session, which can be done either as a stand-alone or together with the first session, we will discuss the benefits of listening to the ideas of someone who is very different from us, and investigate what is fair play, and what is not, in discussions and arguments.

I. Beginning the Conversation

Supplies Needed: Body Part Deluxe bag from Training Wheels (<http://www.trainingwheelsgear.com/products/body-part-deluxe>) or use your own Mr./ Ms. Potato Head with all accessories (or simply print out images of body parts); poster board and markers.

Use the Body Part Deluxe bag (see above) or Mr./Ms. Potato Head or your printouts, and spread the body parts and accessories on a table.

Ask students to choose one body part or other accessory that describes how they behave in a heated discussion or at a meeting. (For example, a student may choose a foot because these discussions always make her want to run away, or a heart because she always acts very emotionally in these kinds of discussions.) Go around and have students explain why they picked each body part.



II. A Deeper Dive

Gather together and read the *Talmudic* story of the relationship between Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish, two great sages who lived in the Land of Israel in the 3rd Century CE:

Babylonian *Talmud*, *Bava Metzia* 84a

יומא חד הוה קא סחי ר' יוחנן בירדנא
חזייה ריש לקיש ושוור לירדנא אבתריה
אמר ליה חילך לאורייתא אמר ליה שופך
לנשי א"ל אי הדרת בכ' יהיבנא לך אחותי
דשפירא מינאי קביל עליה בעי למיהדר
לאתויי מאניה ולא מצי הדר אקרייה ואתנייה
ושוייה גברא רבא יומא חד הוו מפלגי בי
מדרשא הסייף והסכין והפגיון והרומח
ומגל יד ומגל קציר מאימתי מקבלין טומאה
משעת גמר מלאכתן ומאימתי גמר מלאכתן
רבי יוחנן אמר משיצרפם בכבשן ריש
לקיש אמר משיצחצחן במים א"ל לסטאה
בלסטיותיה ידע אמר ליה ומאי אהנת לי
התם רבי קרו לי הכא רבי קרו לי אמר ליה
אהנאי לך דאקריבין תחת כנפי השכינה
חלש דעתיה דרבי יוחנן חלש ריש לקיש
אתאי אחתיה קא בכיא אמרה ליה עשה
בשביל בני אמר לה (ירמיהו מט) עזבה
יתומיך אני אחיה עשה בשביל אלמנותי
אמר לה (ירמיהו מט) ואלמנותיך עלי תבטחו
נח נפשיה דר' שמעון בן לקיש והוה קא
מצטער ר' יוחנן בתריה טובא אמרו רבנן
מאן ליזיל ליתביה לדעתיה ניזיל רבי אלעזר
בן פדת דמחדדין שמעתתיה אזל יתיב
קמיה כל מילתא דהוה אמר רבי יוחנן אמר
ליה תניא דמסייעא לך אמר את כבר לקישא
בר לקישא כי הוה אמינא מילתא הוה
מקשי לי עשרין וארבע קושייתא ומפריקנא
ליה עשרין וארבעה פרוקי וממילא רווחא
שמעתא ואת אמרת תניא דמסייע לך אטו
לא ידענא דשפיר קאמינא הוה קא אזיל
וקרע מאניה וקא בכי ואמר היכא את בר
לקישא היכא את בר לקישא והוה קא צוח
עד דשף דעתיה [מיניה] בעו רבנן רחמי
עליה ונח נפשיה

One day Rabbi Yochanan was swimming in the Jordan. Reish Lakish saw him and jumped into the Jordan after him. He (Rabbi Yochanan) said: "You should use your strength for *Torah*." He (Reish Lakish) said: "You should use your good looks for women." He said: "If you return to *Torah*, I will give you my sister (for a wife), who is better looking than I am." [Reish Lakish] accepted this offer. He tried to do a return jump to get his clothing and was unable. He then learned *Tanakh* and studied the *Talmud* and became a great man. One day, they were arguing in the *beit medrash* (study hall). "A sword, a knife, a dagger, a spear, a sickle and a scythe, from which point are they susceptible to ritual impurity? From the time that they are completed." * When is that point of completion? Rabbi Yochanan said: "When they are forged in the fire." Reish Lakish said: "When they are rinsed with water." [Rabbi Yochanan] said to him: "The bandit knows his trade." [Reish Lakish] said to him: "And how did you benefit me? There, [when I was a bandit,] I was called the master, and here I am called the master." He said to him: "I helped you because I brought you closer under the wings of the Divine presence." Rabbi Yochanan became depressed. Reish Lakish became sick. His sister came crying to Rabbi Yochanan. She said: "Do it [i.e., forgive Reish Lakish or pray for him] for my son." He said: "Leave your orphans; I will revive them" (*Yirmiyahu* 49:11). She said: "Do it because of my widowhood." He said: "The widows should trust in Me" (*ibid.*) (In other words, she begs Rabbi Yochanan to forgive Reish Lakish for the sake of the family, but Rabbi Yochanan refuses and says that God will take care of them.) Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish passed away. Rabbi Yochanan was very pained by his passing. The Rabbis said: "Who will go and help calm Rabbi Yochanan? Let Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat go, for he is sharp in learning." He went and sat in front of Rabbi Yochanan. Every time Rabbi Yochanan said something, Rabbi Elazar cited a supporting *Tannaitic* source. Rabbi Yochanan said: "Are you like the son of Lakish? When I said something, the son of Lakish would ask me twenty-four questions, and I would respond with twenty-four answers. As a result, learning increased. And you tell me a *Tannaitic* support. Do I not know that I say good ideas?" He walked, and tore his garment, and wept. He said: "Where are you, son of Lakish? Where are you, son of Lakish?" He was crying out until he lost his mind. The Rabbis asked for mercy on him and he passed away. Translation by Rabbi Yitzchak Blau, *The Ideal Chavruta* (Study Partner), *The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash*, <http://letzion.org.il/vbm/english/archive/aggada66/05aggada.htm>.



*At the time the rabbis were arguing, ritual impurity was a big deal. Something can become ritually impure only when it has been completed — not when it is in the middle of being created. Their argument here centers on when in the process we can consider weapons to have been completed, and thus susceptible to ritual impurity — is it when they go through the fire, or when they are later rinsed in water?

Elu
v'Elu



TALK IT OUT

- Why does Rabbi Yochanan recruit Reish Lakish and become his learning partner in the beginning of the story? Doesn't he have plenty of other candidates who are Torah scholars - why does he choose a bandit?
- It seems that Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish were successful learning partners for many years. What finally breaks their relationship?
- What was so awful for Rabbi Yochanan about learning with Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat?

OFF THE PAGE AND INTO LIFE

Choose one or both of the following activities depending upon your group:



1. Separate into groups of 3 or 4. Give out poster boards and markers. Ask students to create symbols that illustrate the rules of discourse they wish to have in their committee/board meetings. What kind of discussion do they want to encourage? What kind of comments are out of bounds? What symbols could they use in their board meetings to quickly remind everyone when discussions become too much like Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat, or too personally hurtful like the exchange between Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish?
2. Lay out the Training Wheels or Potato head body parts again on the table or floor. Ask students to choose a body part or accessory that symbolizes something they will do as a result of the discussion today. Go around and have students explain in a line or two what they chose and why? (E.g. someone may choose an ear because they will listen closer before speaking, someone may choose eyes because they will truly look at the other person and consider their vulnerabilities, before tossing off a comment that may be hurtful).



Just for Hillel Professionals: Working with Colleagues and Students Who are Very Different from You

This Activity is Great For



**Just for Hillel
Professionals**

I. Beginning the Conversation

Use these questions to reflect on how you can incorporate some of the lessons of *Elu v'Elu* into your relationships with colleagues and students:

1. Which of your colleagues do you work with the most? Is there a colleague who you are hesitant to work with because he or she is so different from you? What is an upcoming project in which that person's perspective would be helpful?
2. Do you ever hold back from expressing your opinion when it is not the same as your colleagues'? What can you do to feel secure and open enough to express those opinions?
3. What do you do to encourage the free flow of ideas in your events and classes? How can you create an environment in which everyone in the groups you work with, will feel secure and open enough to express their true opinions?
4. How do you react when a student has a very different worldview than your own? Do you try to change their mind? When is it appropriate to try to win another over to your own worldview, and when should you help them continue on their own individual path?



Elu
v'Elu



Textsheets for Students

On the next pages, you'll find just the texts mentioned in each of the sections of this curriculum, without the facilitator's guide. Use these sheets if you would like to make copies of the texts for students, while keeping the facilitator's notes just for you!



Elu v'Elu: Working With Different Types of People

Elu
v'Elu

Babylonian *Talmud Berakhot* 58a:

ת"ר הרואה אוכלוסי ישראל אומר ברוך
חכם הרזים שאין דעתם דומה זה לזה ואין
פרצופיהן דומים זה לזה

Our Rabbis taught: If one sees a crowd of Israelites, he says, "Blessed is the One who discerns secrets," for the mind of each is different from that of the other, and the face of each is different from that of the other.



Argue Like A Jew: Part 1: The School of Hillel

Babylonian *Talmud*, *Eruvin* 13b

שלש שנים נחלקו ב"ש וב"ה הללו אומרים
הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה כמו-
תנו יצאה בת קול ואמרה אלו ואלו דברי
אלהים חיים הן והלכה כב"ה וכי מאחר
שאלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים מפני מה
זכו ב"ה לקבוע הלכה כמותן מפני שנחין
ועלובין היו ושונין דבריהן ודברי ב"ש ולא
עוד אלא שמקדימין דברי ב"ש לדבריהן

For three years, there was a dispute [actually, many disputes] between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the former asserting, "The law (*halacha*) is according to our view, and the latter asserting, "The law is according to our view." Then a voice issued from heaven announcing, "The teachings of both are the words of the living God, but the law is in agreement with the school of Hillel." But [it was asked] since both are words of the living God, for what reason was the School of Hillel entitled to have the law determined according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and humble, and because they studied their own rulings and those of the School of Shammai, and even mentioned the teachings of the School of Shammai before their own."

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *The Book of Jewish Values:*

***A Day-By-Day Guide to Jewish Living*, New York: Random House, 2000, pp. 186-7:**

Significantly, the heavenly voice ruled in favor of Hillel and his disciples, even in areas of ritual dispute, for moral reasons: he and his followers were "kindly and humble."

The wording of the passage suggests that Shammai's followers had grown somewhat arrogant. Certain that they possessed the truth, they no longer bothered to listen to, or discuss the arguments of, their opponents. Their overbearing self-confidence led them to become morally less impressive (the language of the *Talmud* suggests by implication that they were not "kindly and humble") and probably led them to become intellectually less insightful (after all, how insightful can you be if you are studying only one side of the issue?)

Because the School of Hillel studied their opponent's arguments, when they issued a ruling, they were fully cognizant of all the arguments to be offered against their own position. Thus, their humility not only led to their being more pleasant people, but also likely caused them to have greater intellectual depth.

We can all learn a lesson from the behavior of Hillel and his followers: Don't read only books and publications that agree with and reinforce your point of view. If you do so, and many people do, you will never learn what those who disagree with you believe (at best, you will hear a caricature of their position, presented by people who, like you, disagree with it). It would be a good thing in Jewish life if Jews in the different denominations, or in different political camps, started reading newspapers and magazines of the groups with which they disagree, on a regular basis.

If you seldom hear, read, or listen to views that oppose your own, and if almost everyone you talk to sees the world just as you do, your thinking will grow flabby and intolerant. That is often the case with ideologues on the right and left, both in religion and in politics.

As this text teaches us, humble people are not only more pleasant human beings, but in the final analysis, they may well be the only ones who will have something eternally important to teach.



Argue Like A Jew: Part 2: How Not to Argue

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 84a

יומא חד הוה קא סחי ר' יוחנן בירדנא חזייה ריש לקיש ושוור לירדנא אבתריה אמר ליה חילך לאורייתא אמר ליה שופך לנשי א"ל אי הדרת בכ' יהיבנא לך אחותי דשפירא מינאי קביל עליה בעי למיהדר לאתווי מאניה ולא מצי הדר אקרייה ואתנייה ושויה גברא רבא יומא חד הוו מפלגי בי מדרשא הסייף והסכין והפגיון והרומח ומגל יד ומגל קציר מאימתי מקבלין טומאה משעת גמר מלאכתן ומאימתי גמר מלאכתן רבי יוחנן אמר משיצרפם בכבשן ריש לקיש אמר משיצחצחן במים א"ל לסטאה בלסטיותיה ידע אמר ליה ומאי אהנת לי התם רבי קרו לי הכא רבי קרו לי אמר ליה אהנאי לך דאקרבינך תחת כנפי השכינה חלש דעתיה דרבי יוחנן חלש ריש לקיש אתאי אחתיה קא בכיא אמרה ליה עשה בשביל בני אמר לה (ירמיהו מט) עזבה יתומיך אני אחיה עשה בשביל אלמנותי אמר לה (ירמיהו מט) ואלמנותיך עלי תבטחו נח נפשיה דר' שמעון בן לקיש והוה קא מצטער ר' יוחנן בתריה טובא אמרו רבנן מאן ליזיל ליתביה לדעתיה ניזיל רבי אלעזר בן פדת דמחדדין שמעתתיה אזל יתיב קמיה כל מילתא דהוה אמר רבי יוחנן אמר ליה תניא דמסייעא לך אמר את כבר לקישי בר לקישיא כי הוה אמינא מילתא הוה מקשי לי עשרין וארבע קושייתא ומפריקנא ליה עשרין וארבעה פרוקי וממילא רווחא שמעתא ואת אמרת תניא דמסייע לך אטו לא ידענא דשפיר קאמינא הוה קא אזיל וקרע מאניה וקא בכי ואמר היכא את בר לקישיא היכא את בר לקישיא והוה קא צוח עד דשף דעתיה [מיניה] בעו רבנן רחמי עליה ונח נפשיה

One day Rabbi Yochanan was swimming in the Jordan. Reish Lakish saw him and jumped into the Jordan after him. He (Rabbi Yochanan) said: "You should use your strength for *Torah*." He (Reish Lakish) said: "You should use your good looks for women." He said: "If you return to *Torah*, I will give you my sister (for a wife), who is better looking than I am." [Reish Lakish] accepted this offer. He tried to do a return jump to get his clothing and was unable. He then learned *Tanakh* and studied the *Talmud* and became a great man. One day, they were arguing in the *beit medrash* (study hall). "A sword, a knife, a dagger, a spear, a sickle and a scythe, from which point are they susceptible to ritual impurity? From the time that they are completed." * When is that point of completion? Rabbi Yochanan said: "When they are forged in the fire." Reish Lakish said: "When they are rinsed with water." [Rabbi Yochanan] said to him: "The bandit knows his trade." [Reish Lakish] said to him: "And how did you benefit me? There, [when I was a bandit,] I was called the master, and here I am called the master." He said to him: "I helped you because I brought you closer under the wings of the Divine presence." Rabbi Yochanan became depressed. Reish Lakish became sick. His sister came crying to Rabbi Yochanan. She said: "Do it [i.e., forgive Reish Lakish or pray for him] for my son." He said: "Leave your orphans; I will revive them" (Yirmiyahu 49:11). She said: "Do it because of my widowhood." He said: "The widows should trust in Me" (ibid.) (In other words, she begs Rabbi Yochanan to forgive Reish Lakish for the sake of the family, but Rabbi Yochanan refuses and says that God will take care of them.) Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish passed away. Rabbi Yochanan was very pained by his passing. The Rabbis said: "Who will go and help calm Rabbi Yochanan? Let Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat go, for he is sharp in learning." He went and sat in front of Rabbi Yochanan. Every time Rabbi Yochanan said something, Rabbi Elazar cited a supporting *Tannaitic* source. Rabbi Yochanan said: "Are you like the son of Lakish? When I said something, the son of Lakish would ask me twenty-four questions, and I would respond with twenty-four answers. As a result, learning increased. And you tell me a *Tannaitic* support. Do I not know that I say good ideas?" He walked, and tore his garment, and wept. He said: "Where are you, son of Lakish? Where are you, son of Lakish?" He was crying out until he lost his mind. The Rabbis asked for mercy on him and he passed away. Translation by Rabbi Yitzchak Blau, The Ideal *Chavruta* (Study Partner), The Israel Koschitzky Virtual *Beit Midrash*, <http://etzion.org.il/vbm/english/archive/aggada66/05aggada.htm>.



*At the time the rabbis were arguing, ritual impurity was a big deal. Something can become ritually impure only when it has been completed — not when it is in the middle of being created. Their argument here centers on when in the process we can consider weapons to have been completed, and thus susceptible to ritual impurity — is it when they go through the fire, or when they are later rinsed in water?

