



A **Vikuah** is an argument.

Sometimes people get angry at other people. Sometimes people argue with each other.

There are good ways of arguing with each other and there are bad ways of arguing with each other. It is always better to argue with words. Hitting is almost never a good thing.

Also there are good reasons to argue and there are bad reasons to argue. When two students argue



over what is true both of them can learn from that argument. That is a good argument. Jews call it “an argument for heaven.” When a person argues just to make another person feel bad, this is a bad argument. Jews call it “an argument not for heaven.”

Here are the stories of two arguments. One is “an argument for heaven.” One is not.

The Argument Between Moses and Korah

Moses, Aaron and Korah all had the same grandfather. In Egypt Korah was a very rich and important scribe. Korah had collected and counted money for Pharaoh. He left Egypt with lots of gold and silver.

God chose Moses and Aaron to lead the Jewish people. Korah was jealous. He was not very important anymore. He said to himself, "I am as important as Moses. I am as important as Aaron. I should be in charge, too."

Korah was looking for a way to be important. One day Moses taught the people the law of the *Tallit*. Moses said, "God says every Jew should wear a garment with four corners. On each corner he should tie four threads. Three threads should be white and one should be

blue. *Tzitzit* is the Hebrew word for these threads.”

Korah said, “I think wearing clothes of all blue is good enough. All blue is better than just four blue threads. I say that anyone in all blue needs no blue threads.”

Moses said, “God told us to have *tzitzit*. God said that one should be blue and three should be white.”

Korah said, “I was at Mt. Sinai. I heard God tell us to celebrate Shabbat. I heard God tell us not to murder and not to steal. All of us heard God teach the ten commandments. No one but you heard the *tzitzit* law. Moses, I think you made it up. I think you made up most of the laws. You did it so that you could be leader.”

Moses said, “God said to wear *tzitzit*. You know what is right.”

The next day Korah and 250 followers came to Moses. All of them were dressed in blue. None of them wore *tzitzit*.



Korah said to Moses, “You think you are so important. You think you are so special. You are wrong. God made everyone. You are no better than anyone else. All of Israel is holy.”

This began a big argument. It ended badly for Korah. He and all his followers died in an earthquake.

(Midrash Be-Midbar Rabbah 18.1)

The Argument Between Hillel and Shammai

Hillel and Shammai were important rabbis. Each of them had a school. Hillel and

Shammai never agreed. They agreed on only one thing. They agreed that it was good to argue. The School of Hillel almost always won.

One day the rabbis were deciding the rules for Hanukkah. Hillel said, “Light one candle on the first night. Light one more each of the other nights. On the last night you will light eight.”

Shammai said, “You’ve got it backwards. Light eight candles the first night. Light one less each of the other nights. On the last night you will light one.”

Hillel asked Shammai, “Why do you think we should count down?”



Shammai answered, “To make it like Sukkot. On Sukkot we bring eight bulls to the Temple on the first night. We then bring seven bulls on the second night. Each night we bring one less. We bring only one on the last night.”

Shammai asked Hillel, “And why do you think we should count up to the last night?”

Hillel said, “I think that you should always make things more holy. I think one should never make things less holy. The last night should have the most candles.”

The rabbis voted. Hillel won. Today we count our Hannukiyah his way.

After the vote Hillel said to Shammai, “Thank you for teaching me something today.” Then Shammai said to Hillel, “Thank you for teaching me something today.”

Hillel and Shammai argued a lot. Each argument was a chance to learn something new about the Torah.

TO THINK ABOUT

1. What was wrong about the reason that Korah argued with Moses?
2. What was right about the reason that Hillel and Shammai argued?
3. What is a good reason to argue? What is a bad reason to argue?