

## Eilu v'Eilu

This summer, the TBI Board voted to designate our theme for the year, “אלו ואלו,” “Eilu v'eilu” – “these and these.” This is a reference to the story in Masechet Eruvin 13b in the Talmud, which describes the legendary debates between the schools of the great sages Hillel and Shammai. After three years, those debates culminated in a *bat kol*, a heavenly voice, declaring, “[Both] these and these are the words of the Living God, though the *halacha* [Jewish law] is in accordance with the house of Hillel.”

As long as there have been Jews, there have been arguments about how we should practice as Jews. The arguments that Hillel and Shammai had – from how to appropriately observe Shabbat, to what invalidates a marriage – felt no less life or death than the arguments Jews have today about how we relate to Jewish community locally and globally. The story from the Talmud reminds us, emphatically, that there is not one exclusively correct one. At the same time, the story goes on to explain that Jewish law follows the house of Hillel, “because the students of Hillel were kind and gracious. They taught their own ideas as well as the ideas from the students of Shammai – and even taught Beit Shammai’s ideas first.”

The students of Hillel understood that it is not enough to be right. For “the halacha to go accordingly”, one has to be willing to consider and even honor the viewpoints of those with whom one disagrees. As we prepare for a new Jewish year in our community and for what will likely be a contentious election season in our country, I hope we will commit to considering truths not only from those whose opinions we share, but from those whom we find challenging. I hope we will remember that our community is more diverse than we think, even and sometimes especially on questions that feel enormously existential. In the spirit of “Eilu v'eilu,” I’ll be working with a small advisory group to create programming where we can gather to practice *machloket* [passionate dispute], and build our skills as hanging in with each other through disagreement and discomfort. Respectful conflict is one of the great Jewish arts - it’s one we can and should reclaim.

May we do so while remembering, like the students of Hillel, to be kind and gracious with each other.