



Judaism's Great Debates: Timeless Controversies from Abraham to Herzl

Barry L. Schwartz

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Ever since Abraham's famous argument with God, Judaism has been full of debate. Moses and Korah, David and Nathan, Hillel and Shammai, the Vilna Gaon and the Ba'al Shem Tov, Spinoza and the Amsterdam Rabbis . . . the list goes on. Jews debate justice, authority, inclusion, spirituality, resistance, evolution, Zionism, and more. No wonder that Judaism cherishes the expression *machloket l'shem shamayim*, "an argument for the sake of heaven."

In this concise but important survey, Rabbi Barry L. Schwartz presents the provocative and vibrant thesis that debate and disputation are not only encouraged within Judaism but reside at the very heart of Jewish history and theology. In his graceful, engaging, and creative prose, Schwartz presents an introduction to an intellectual history of Judaism through the art of argumentation.

Beyond their historical importance, what makes these disputation so compelling is that nearly all of them, regardless of their epochs, are still being argued. Schwartz builds the case that the basis of Judaism is a series of unresolved rather than resolved arguments.

Drawing on primary sources, and with a bit of poetic license, Schwartz reconstructs the real or imagined dialogue of ten great debates and then analyzes their significance and legacy. This parade of characters spanning three millennia of biblical, rabbinic, and modern disputation reflects the panorama of Jewish history with its monumental political, ethical, and spiritual challenges.

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