

Dear Rabbi:

If actual tradition of the Torah was transmitted accurately, as Orthodox Judaism maintains, than how could there be differing opinions and arguments in the Talmud and in Jewish law?

Byron L.

Dear Byron:

Your question is one that is discussed by the Talmud itself, and entire scholarly volumes have been written to decide this subject, which touches the core of the oral transmission. I urge you to study this in depth, but I will offer a few points for your consideration.

The classified sources, such as the Talmud, are replete with arguments (two Jews, three opinions). If you look carefully, you will find that the arguments are not over the most core axioms or principles, but over **details**. For example, the tractate Kiddushim (marriage laws) opens with pages of discussion between Hillel and Shamai about the value of the gift to consummate a betrothal. They don't disagree about the need for betrothal, its status as a mitzvah, or how it should be given. They argue about the detail of the amount, which is subject to interpretation, based on correlations to other transactions in the Torah.

As long as one stays within the decision and argues "by the rules", G-d purposely put gray areas in the Torah to involve us, His people, in the process of Torah. Jewish law is called "Halacha," a path to walk on, to always move ahead with throughout life. It works as long as one stays within the parameters of the path, and finds individuality of understanding and practice in that way.

Two can argue if the ocean is blue or green, but not if it's H<sub>2</sub>O.