**Evan Portnoy**

During our KT trip to New York we visited the Chabad headquarters in Crown Heights. One of the things that struck me there were the hundreds of Jewish scholars packed wall to wall poring over the Talmud or conversing with study partners. The cacophony of argument in the room was almost deafening, but each person there sought to understand regardless of their initial beliefs.

This experience emphasized the importance of disagreement and being open to different ideas and ways of looking at a situation: When the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yochanan would present a teaching, his revered study partner, Reish Lakish, would raise 24 challenges. Rather than silence his opposition Rabbi Yochanan would match it. And when Reish Lakish passed away, Rabbi Yochanan mourned the resulting impoverishment of his study and decline in the quality of this thinking. “I have seen, firsthand, how the Talmudic method of Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish, of insisting on counterarguments and thinking them through to their logical conclusion in a spirit of growth, has made my students better thinkers.” Prof. Paul E. Nahme

Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish show the benefit of genuinely considering points of views that oppose our own. However, in discussion with those with opposing views, many choose unproductive goals, hoping to spread their opinions or “win” the argument. When we argue for the sake of proving ourselves right, we are not growing as people.

This is the essence of what Judaism considers arguments for the sake of heaven, where participants seek truth over self validation. This Talmudic approach to learning requires us not just to listen, but to momentarily let go of our own beliefs and opinions in order to realize another’s perspective. When we do this, we open ourselves up to new ideas even if it means our initial understanding was incorrect. And that is what I saw in Crown Heights - hundreds of discussions for the sake of heaven.

During our KT meetings at Rabbi London’s house we also practiced this, spending many Wednesday evenings in spirited discussions about our unique perspectives on what it means to be Jewish, our interpretations of God, and the Israel/Palestine conflict. As I reflect on my experience in KT, I am grateful to have been able to learn with and from my classmates, stretching the way I view Judaism and the world around me. I will always look back fondly on those evenings and would like to thank Rabbi London for making it possible.

As I continue on my life’s journey, I hope to bring arguments for the sake of heaven with me. I will not always be surrounded by those who agree with me, but Judaism shows that this is a good thing and an opportunity for growth.

Next time you come face to face with someone you don’t agree with, I encourage you to try to let go of what you believe, just for a moment, and try to appreciate new perspectives through unbiased eyes.

Thank you and Shabbat Shalom