POST THE TALMUD / DISCUSSION GUIDE

Hillel, Shammai & a very short lesson

Shabbat 31a:6 | Beta teaching adaptation

THE CORE QUESTION

How do you offer a beginner a genuine starting point without pretending the subject is simple?

THE ARGUMENT IN FOUR MOVES

1. A prospective convert requests the whole Torah while standing on one foot.
2. Shammai pushes him away with the measuring stick in his hand.
3. Hillel converts him and offers a principle: do not do to another what is hateful to you.
4. Hillel calls the rest explanation and tells him to go study; the introduction leads into further learning.

WHERE THIS GOES NEXT

Read the neighboring conversion stories on Shabbat 31a and compare the teachers' responses.

DISCUSS

1. What assumptions might each teacher make about the request?
2. Why does "go learn" matter as much as the short principle?
3. How would you introduce a complex subject in one sentence without claiming to exhaust it?

TEACHING NOTE

Distinguish the individuals Hillel and Shammai from Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, their later schools. The comic follow-up about homework is invented.

Source: https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.31a.6

Classroom thread: https://postthetalmud.com/one-foot/?mode=study&classroom=1

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