

# On Use Of The Term Apikoros / Apiqoros / Bikouros Against Epicureans

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Rabbinical Judaism is almost radically dialogic. When I was participating in the weekly Talmud study, I early on (because I can't quite bite my tongue) said about some passage that I disagreed with what someone else in the class had said. I blushed, and apologized – saying something like, “Sorry: I'm a guest here.” To which one of the other students, wagging a finger at me, said: “No, no, no! That's what you're supposed to do: *argue!*”

There is a scene from the film “Yentl”, in which Yentl (in her disguise as a male in order to study Talmud) and her study partner are speaking *sotto voce*, when the rabbi comes around and asks: “Are you agreeing or disagreeing?” Response: “Oh, we're disagreeing, Rabbi. We're disagreeing!” Several Jewish commentators I once read said that whole scene was an accurate reflection of Torah study.

Some of this is based on the highly *polysemous* nature of classical (Torah) Hebrew. The Talmuds (there are two: the Bavli – Babylonian Talmud – and the lesser Yerushalmi – Jerusalem Talmud) are essentially a history (up to a point) of Rabbinical argument, and commentaries on the original arguments (the Mishnah). Sometimes the arguments appear to be resolved; sometimes not – and sometimes might give the appearance of resolution by truncation. But the Rabbis continue the process ...

There is a saying in the Talmud (going from memory): “The real Torah is not complete until you have added your [personal] torah to the Torah.” Thus, there is a dynamic open-endedness that derives from a certain hermeneutical freedom. But there is always argument – and you're expected to make yours. (“Torah,” here, could almost be translated as “Tao” – as I understand the Greek *Logos* is rendered in Chinese Bibles. There is the received written Torah – the biblical texts; the expanded interpretive Torah – the Talmuds and Midrash; and the ongoing Torah.)

[Note: I doubt that I would have been welcome in a strict Orthodox congregation. My background, experience – and interpretations – are personal. I spent some years, on my own, delving into various aspects – and Hebrew (though mostly how that language works: never proficient, though I could recognize a few words if I was reading “pointed” text). It was a great pleasure. But I couldn't find a home there.]