How To Navigate Your Family This Thanksgiving



Trump vs. Biden (or Kamala), Israel vs. America, Orthodoxy vs. Conservatism: The dinner table becomes a forum where my family feels a need to fervently defend our deepest convictions between bites of turkey and cranberry sauce.

My memories of Thanksgiving are very warm, for the most part. Every year, my family gets in the car and drives five hours to my *Safta*'s house in upstate New York. We take in the fall colors, enjoy an enormous meal, maybe run a 5K to earn it—and inevitably, without fail, fall into heated fights on all sorts of religious and political issues.

I cannot deny that I enjoy the passion, and maybe most can relate, but there's probably a better, more respectful way to do things. Holidays shouldn't feel like ideological battlegrounds, and sometimes all it takes is a little curiosity—and a lot of self reflection and humility—to shift the tone of the conversation. After all, beneath the arguments is, more often than not, a shared desire to feel understood, connected, and at home.

As we head into another Thanksgiving, here are a few ways 18Forty can help you navigate heated family conversations with curiosity, keep gratitude at the center, and remember what we ought to be thankful for.

1. Building better, healthier family relationships

What happens when family relationships fray? Can they still be salvaged? In this episode on estrangement and reconciliation, explore “teshuva” for our relationships.

If you are someone nervous to see others at the Thanksgiving table this year—for past bickers, ongoing beef, or just plain awkward encounters—this episode offers language to improve, frameworks, and possibilities for growth in your relationship.

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2. Understand that all generations change over time

What does it feel like to stand between the Millennials and the Boomers, the Gen Zers and the Gen Alphas? In this essay on generational divergences, explore why absorbing values from the past and passing them onto the future is so complicated.

If you are someone trying to understand why older and younger relatives talk past each other, this essay by Dovid Bashevkin will help you bridge the gaps without dismissing anyone.

Read here

3. Move Jewish left–right conversations from conflict to clarity

Why do Jewish communities across the political spectrum so often misunderstand one another? How can they discuss more productively? In this podcast on Jewish outreach, political scientist Eitan Hersh explores the habits, assumptions, and emotional triggers that block real dialogue — and what it takes to replace defensiveness with genuine listening.

If you find yourself bracing for the inevitable Trump/Biden, Israel/America, or Orthodoxy/Conservatism debates at family gatherings, this episode offers practical tools to stay calm, hear the other side, and respond without spiraling.

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4. Rethinking what debate is actually for

What if debate isn’t actually a contest to see who’s right, but rather is a disciplined search for understanding? This essay shows how meaningful disagreement can help reveal what we value and strengthens our relationships, and details healthy debate skills like patience, clarity, and genuine curiosity.

If you’re someone who feels debates in your family or community turn into dominance struggles, this piece shows how disagreement can actually be an expression of care—a sign that people are invested enough to wrestle with important ideas together. It offers concrete ways to listen without dismissing, respond without defensiveness, and stay connected to each other through the whole process.

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5. Parent children who grow in unexpected directions

What happens when parents and children no longer see life the same way, or want the same things? Dr. Rivka Press Schwartz lays out the “fundamental theorems of parenting”: our children are who they are—not who we imagined—and raising them often means adjusting to a story we didn’t script.

If you’re wrestling with a child whose life is unfolding differently than you expected, this essay offers a grounded way to work through the shift. It acknowledges the real strain and adjustment involved while giving parents a vocabulary for staying connected to their children without trying to control the outcome.

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