

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Shlita*

Korach



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Table of Contents

Torah Wellsprings - Korach

The Severity of <i>Machlokes</i>	4
Strategies to Avoid <i>Machlokes</i>	5
Korach's Mistake	9
A Life and Death Situation	10
Avoid <i>Machlokes</i>	13
Righteous Indignation	15

Torah Wellsprings - Korach

The Severity of *Machlokes*

Rashi, at the beginning of the *parashah* writes, *פרשה זו יפה נדרשת במדרש רבי תנחומא*, "This *parashah* is taught beautifully in the Midrash Tanchuma."

It is rare for Rashi to provide references. What is Rashi telling us?

The Pri Megadim (תיבת גומא עה"ת ד"ה קהלת) writes, *אומרים הלצה*, "people say a cute hint to explain this Rashi. It states (*Mishlei* 15:23), *ודבר בעתו מזה*, 'How good is a word in its time.' When it isn't the right time, it isn't nice. For example, during Pesach, it isn't the right time to discuss *hilchos Succos* or *hilchos Yom Kippur*. Rashi writes, *פרשה זו יפה נדרשת*, it is always the right time to speak about *parashas Korach*. This is because *machlokes* can happen at any time, so it is always appropriate to discuss this topic."

The Rambam (in a letter) describes the severity of *machlokes*. He writes, "Don't contaminate your souls with *machlokes* that destroy the body, *neshamah*, and wealth. I saw families perish; cities destroyed, communities dispersed, chassidim lost, honored people disgraced, all because of *machlokes*. The *nevi'im* foretold prophecies, and scholars spoke wisdom regarding the severity of *machlokes*, but even they haven't fully described just how bad it is. Therefore, hate it, run away from it, and keep away from all those who love *machlokes*, lest you be punished with them."¹

The Shlah (*Shaar HaOsiyos* י"ד, ט"ז) writes, "Why do I need to elaborate on the ugliness of *machlokes*? All *sefarim* are filled with this subject! The sin of *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*. The lowest Yid

would certainly be *moser nefesh* rather than worship *avodah zarah*. So how could a person not be *moser nefesh* to avoid *machlokes*, for it is worse than *avodah zarah*! Even a drop of *machlokes* is too much! One spark of *machlokes* can create a fire that destroys everything."

This Shlah is a chiddush. *Machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*! The proof is in the following Midrash.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 218) states: "[Nearly] everyone in Achav's generation worshiped idols, yet they succeeded in their battles. This is because they didn't speak *lashon hara*. On the other hand, in David HaMelech's generation, even young children knew much Torah...but went to war and lost because there was *lashon hara*." The Shlah quotes this Midrash as a source that *machlokes* and *lashon hara* are worse than *avodah zarah*.

The Shevet Mussar (37:22) points out that the *manna* fell almost every day in the desert. It even fell on the day Bnei Yisrael made the *egel*. But it didn't fall on the day Korach made a *machlokes* because *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*. This is another source that *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*.

The *Afrakasta d'Anyah* (165) writes that the community of Kempna hired Shimon to be their *chazan*. Reb Yosef Shmuel *zt'l*, the Rav of Kempna, was very against this choice. He shouted, "How can Shimon be our *chazan*? He is a *baal aveirah*!"

Some sided with the Rav, while others wanted to hire Shimon. The Kempna community was divided in two.

Reb Yosef Shmuel sent a letter to Reb Yosef of Posen, seeking his counsel. The rav

1. Reb Chaim Palagi *zt'l* writes, "I have seen several times that any man or woman, family, country, or city involved in a *machlokes*, both sides didn't come out clean. They were smitten on their bodies and with their money, *rachmanah litzlan*. Someone who has wisdom will think about this and be *mevater*..."

of Posen wrote back, "A *tzelem* [cross] in the Beis HaMikdosh is preferred over a *machlokes* in *klal Yisrael*."

The Chasam Sofer zt'l explains that Aharon HaKohen agreed with the nation and helped them make the egel because he understood that if he refused, there would be *machlokes*. Aharon preferred the sin of *avodah zarah* over the even greater sin of *machlokes*.

We are surprised that *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*. But that is what the Torah tells us, so we must be vigilant to avoid *machlokes*.

We add that every *machlokes* contains an element of disbelief in Hashem. If one believed in Hashem, he wouldn't stir up a *machlokes*. Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa zt'l teaches, "*Emunah* means that one believes that he has everything he needs, and if he needs more, Hashem will give him more. So, there is no reason to be jealous [or to fight to get more]. If you suffer from jealousy, work to remove it from your heart with all your strength and attach yourself to the *emunah* in Hashem's *hashgachah pratis*" (Beis Yaakov, Korach).

On a similar note, the Divrei Yisrael zt'l said that Korach's error was ויקח קרח, that he tried to take positions on his own. He thought it was in his hands to accomplish his desires and become the kohen gadol. But one doesn't take on his own. Hashem gives, we receive, and everything is Hashem's decision.

Strategies to Avoid *Machlokes*

Having briefly emphasized the severity of *machlokes*, we share some counsels to help overcome the urge to engage in *machlokes*.

Mevater

A primary approach is to be *mevater*. If someone wants something, don't fight; let him have his way.

Reb Pinchas Koritzer zt'l (Aseres Yemei Teshuvah 513) wrote, "It is better to be *mevater* on some mitzvos so that there won't be a division among Yidden." If one should be *mevater* even on spiritual matters, you should certainly be *mevater* on worldly issues because the benefits of peace are great.

It states (Koheles 4:9) טובים השנים מן האחד. The Ahavas Shalom zt'l explains that if you see two people getting along, מן האחד, it is because one of them is *mevater*. Specifically, in marriage, many problems are avoided when there is *vitur*. The Satmer Rav says, "We have a *kabalah*, tradition, that with *shalom bayis*, the one who is *mivater* is the winner."

A common brachah given to a new chasan and kallah is that their marriage should be bound with a *kesher shel kayamah*, an eternal knot. Why is the bond of marriage referred to as a knot? We could have called it a connection of glue (דבק), as it states in the Tanaim document, וזה הטוב יאמר לדבק טוב!

The answer is that a knot represents *vatranus*, because to tie two ropes together, each must give of itself.

Let's say you take two 100-yard ropes and glue them together. You will now have a long rope of 200 yards. But if you connect the two ropes with a knot, it becomes a rope of only 198 yards. Each rope was *mevater* of itself to create the knot that binds them together. We bless the chasan and kallah that their marriage should be eternal, as if tied in a knot. They should both be *mevater* for the sake of peace.

I heard from one of the gabai'im of Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l that, towards the end of his life, some askanim spoke out brazenly against Reb Shlomo Zalman. The gabbai told Reb Shlomo Zalman that he wanted to be *mocheh* and protest in honor of Reb Shlomo Zalman's Torah. Reb Shlomo Zalman didn't let him do so. He said, נער הייתי ולא, וגם זקנתי, "I was young, and now I am old, ראיני, and I haven't yet seen someone who lost out from *vatranus*, from being silent during a *machlokes*."

I heard the following story from Reb Eliezer Turk Shlita:

A din Torah came before him. A man was renovating his home, and a debate arose over who must pay the five-thousand-shekel cost for the construction of a wall shared by two neighbors.

In the middle of the din Torah, one of the baalei dinim (the one who was renovating his home) said, "I don't want to fight. I am mevater! I will pay the five thousand shekel."

He owed his contractor 15,000 shekel for other work he did, so he gave him a check for 20,000 shekel to cover the cost of the wall and the other construction.

Sometime later, he asked his contractor, "You don't need the money? Why didn't you cash the check for 20,000 shekel?"

He replied, "Weeks ago, I gave the check to an Arab who worked for me. I don't know why he didn't cash it."

The contractor asked the Arab why he didn't cash the check, and he told the following:

The check was for 20,000 shekels. The Arab added a zero to cash the check and take out 200,000 shekel. But he didn't realize there were words under the numbers, which read "twenty-thousand shekel." The bank clerk realized what was happening and nearly threw him out of the bank. That is why the check was never cashed.

So, did this person lose out from his vatranus? He agreed to pay five thousand shekels and earned fifteen-thousand shekels profit!

The Rambam (*De'os* 6:7) teaches, "It is proper that a person should be מעביר על מדותיו, to be *mevater*, when it comes to worldly matters because to the wise, everything in this world is foolishness and not worth fighting over."

The ger tzedek, Reb Avraham ben Avraham Pototski, was arrested by the

church and burned alive, hy'd. The ger tzedek said, "I know who slandered me, causing my arrest, but I didn't take revenge in this world, and I certainly won't take revenge in the next."

He explained with a parable:

A young prince was playing at the beach, building a sand castle. Someone came along and broke his masterpiece. The prince ran to his father, crying that someone had broken his artistic work. To his surprise, the king didn't react. The prince thought to himself, 'Why isn't my father doing anything? When I grow up, I will take revenge on this person who ruined my sculpture.' But when he became an adult and a king, he didn't take revenge because he realized the "crime" was nothing. Similarly, I'm not taking revenge in this world; I certainly won't take revenge in the next world." As the Rambam writes, "To the wise, everything in this world is foolishness and not worth fighting over."

Postpone the Machlokes

Sometimes a person feels that he has to speak up. This is common with issues related to ruchniyos, and one feels he cannot remain silent. At these times, it is advisable to wait for the next day.

The Yismach Moshe zt'l said, "I think a person shouldn't rush to machlokes. If it is an aveirah, he certainly shouldn't rush. And if it is a mitzvah, he also shouldn't rush because a mitzvah needs preparation.

So, when you feel you should start a machlokes, push it off until tomorrow. By then, you will likely see things differently. And even if not, you will be able to respond in a more level-headed manner.

When Korach and his followers wanted to make a machlokes with Moshe, Moshe replied (16:5), בקר וידע ד' את אשר לו, "In the morning, Hashem will make known who is His." Tomorrow, Hashem will reveal to us who should be the kohen gadol.

Rashi writes, "[Moshe's] real intention was to delay, with the hope that they might retract [their opposition]." He wanted to push off the machlokes for the next day. Maybe by then, they would recognize their error.

Make Peace Quickly

Another important piece of counsel is to make peace as quickly as possible. Some quarrels last so long that the parties involved have long forgotten why they are fighting. This is because they didn't stop the machlokes when it was small. The quicker you let go of the machlokes, the better.

Reb Hershel Zidichover zt'l said that when two people hold onto opposite ends of a rope in a game of tug-of-war, and one lets go, the other will fall. So, too, when someone is fighting you, you are best off just letting go and not participating in the machlokes. Your opponent will fall and leave you alone. But if you fight back, the dispute will continue.

It states (Tehillim 38:14) ואני כחרש לא אשמע, וכאלם לא יפתח פיו, "But I am as a deaf person, I do not hear, and like a mute, who does not open his mouth." This pasuk is a counsel for machlokes. Pretend that you didn't hear. Pretend you can't speak; let the matter pass, and the machlokes will dissipate.

It is written (Mishlei 17:14) פוטר מים ראשית מדון, "The beginning of strife is like letting out water..." When water pushes through a small opening, the water comes forth as a small trickle, a flow that can easily be sealed. But when the flow widens, it becomes much harder to stop.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 7) says that the pasuk refers to a trickle of water coming from a river and is beginning to form a new path. You can throw some earth against the soft current, and the problem is resolved. However, if you don't do anything about it, the trickle will become a strong current, becoming much harder to close.

This metaphor for machlokes. In the beginning, a machlokes can easily be rectified. Ask for forgiveness, laugh, and it is over. But when it goes on for a long time, it is harder to mend.

The Shlah HaKadosh teaches that this counsel is found in the letters of מחלקת. The ׀ has a small opening on the bottom, hinting at a minor breach in the peace. If the problem is resolved immediately, everything will be fine. However, when the gap isn't fixed, it will become wider. This brings us to the next letter of מחלקת, the letter ך, which has a wide opening at its bottom, suggesting that the machlokes had taken root and the breach has widened. Afterward comes the ך and ך. The lamed has a line going up, and the kuf has a line going down. This hints that the fire of the dispute has become extreme, with the flames of their dissension blazing in all directions. Finally, we reach the letter ך, which stands securely on its two feet, implying that the fight has become firmly entrenched and very difficult to uproot. This can all be avoided if the machlokes is resolved when it was still small.

It states (Bereishis 13:7) ויהי ריב בין רעי מקנה אברם, ובין רעי מקנה לוט והכנעני והפרזי אז ישב בארץ, "There was a quarrel between the herdsmen of Avram's cattle and between the herdsmen of Lot's cattle, and the Canaanites and the Perizzites were then dwelling in the land."

ויאמר אברם אל לוט אל נא תהי מריבה ביני ובינך ובין רעי (Bereishis 13:8), "And Avram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no quarrel between me and between you and between my herdsmen and between your herdsmen, for we are brothers.'"

The first pasuk uses the word ריב while the second pasuk states מריבה. The Alshich explains that both mean disputes, but ריב is a dispute in its masculine form, and מריבה is a dispute in a feminine form. A feminine dispute means that it bears fruit, or, in other words, a dispute that grows. More people become involved, and the division widens. Avram told Lot, "Let's stop the dispute now

when it is still a ריב, because if it becomes a מריבה, and develops into a great machlokes.

The Alshich writes, "Chazal (Sanhedrin 7.) say, 'A dispute is like a trickle of water. After it widens, it gets greater and greater.' The nature of a dispute is to begin small, but eventually, it grows, and more people become involved in the machlokes. It seems that Avram said, 'Until now, the fight is solely between the shepherds, and even between them, it isn't a מריבה, feminine, giving birth and growing. It is only a ריב, masculine. Therefore, let us be cautious that this ריב doesn't become a מריבה and extend ביני וביניך, between us as well. It isn't proper that we should fight, for two reasons: One is that a machlokes is only befitting low simple people, not people of esteem and importance. Furthermore, brothers shouldn't fight. The pasuk alludes to these two reasons. First, we are אנשים, which means important people, and furthermore, we are אחים, brothers.

"We should learn from the Canaanites and the Perizzites, who aren't brothers, rather two countries, and yet they live with achdus, unity, as it states יושב בארץ, in singular tense, and it doesn't state יושבים (in plural)."

מריבה is the same word as ריב; only it has two more letters, the letters מ"ה. It states (Iyov 40:7) תולה ארץ על בלימה, "He suspends the earth on nothing." The Gemara (Chulin 89.) says that בלימה means silence, such as בולס פיו. The pasuk is saying, "The world exists in the merit of those who close their mouths and don't respond when there is machlokes."

We can read בלי מ"ה that the pasuk is saying that the world exists on those who take the מ"ה out of מריבה and are cautious to halt disputes before they get out of hand.

Life is Short

Life is short. Isn't it a shame to waste it arguing? For the wise, this should be enough incentive to avoid machlokes.

The Gemara (Chulin 58:) says that the *baka* bug lives no longer than one day. The Gemara asks from that which people say that there was a *baka* couple that fought for seven years.²

The Gemara replies, בשני דידהו, "in their years." For the *baka*'s short lifespan, it was like they were separated for seven years.

Reb Yankele Galinsky zt'l repeated this Gemara and expressed what we would certainly want to tell the *Baka* couple. "You are alive for only one day. Why fight? Just enjoy the short life that was given to you." But we then realize that the same question can be asked of people who engage in machlokes. Life is short. Is it really so important to fight in this short time?

A man was crying bitterly at a levayah. After the levayah, people approached him and asked, "Are you related to the niftar?"

"No."

"Oh, so you are a friend."

"No. I never knew him."

"So why are you crying so much?"

"I came from Eretz Yisrael to collect money. I raised a large sum, but the money was stolen last night. I needed to cry but couldn't do that in public, so I came to a levayah where I can cry and shout."

The idea is that when someone begins to shout or starts a fight with you, it is likely not about you. Something is going on in his life that he is upset about, and he is looking for a place where he can let out some of his frustrations. It is foolish to answer back. Isn't

2. This is the story (stated in Chulin 58:):

"A female *baka* separated from her husband for seven years. She said, 'You found a fat person in Mechuzah who had just come out of the river and was wrapped in sheets. You landed on him, sucked his blood, and didn't tell me!'"

it enough that he is suffering? Why cause him more distress?

Let us use our common sense to utilize the value of our limited time in this world and live in peace and tranquility.

Tefillah

And, as for all matters of life, tefillah is of utmost importance. We should daven that we be spared from machlokes.

It states (Bamidbar 26:11) וּבְנֵי קֹרַח לֹא מָתוּ, "Korach's children didn't die." Rebbe Mendel of Riminov zt'l explains that the בני קרח means Korach's students. Korach has many students, and they are still very alive. They are the people who stir up machlokes and discord. They learned and inherited from Korach the machlokes lifestyle.

Rebbe Mendel Riminover adds that prayer is the only way to be saved from machlokes.

At the end of the kaddish, there are two lines requesting peace. One is יְהִי שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא... and then we ask עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִדְרֹמֵינוּ, etc. The Aruch HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 56:8) explains, "Peace is one of the pillars of the world. Therefore, at the end of the tefillah, before people go out to the world, we pray that there should be peace among us. Then we add עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִדְרֹמֵינוּ, that if chalilah a machlokes does break out, Hashem should help us make peace."

Korach's Mistake

Rebbe Dovid Lelover zt'l said: Had Korach known that he can serve Hashem from behind the oven [where the simple Yidden used to sit] and his avodah will be as precious as the avodah of the kohen gadol, he wouldn't have started a machlokes."

Korach wanted to serve Hashem in the best possible way, which is why he wanted to be the kohen gadol. But he didn't realize that everyone could serve Hashem in his own unique way. There is no reason to be jealous of others – just do the avodah that Hashem expects from *you*, and it will be as precious to Hashem as the service of the kohen gadol.³

The Gemara (Pesachim 50.) tells that Rav Yosef, the son of Reb Yehoshua Ben Levi, was *niftar* and then returned to life. His father asked him what he saw in heaven. He replied, "I saw an upside-down world. Those on top here were at the bottom there, and vice versa."

His father corrected him, עוֹלָם בְּרוּר רֵאִיתָ, "You saw a true world."

Rashi explains that in this world, people honor wealth, but in heaven, honor is accorded to those who study Torah.

The Mabit (introduction to Beis Elokim) disagrees with this explanation because Rav Yosef wouldn't have been surprised by seeing that only Torah study is important in heaven. Therefore, the Mabit explains that Rav Yosef was referring to the way we perceive the servants of Hashem in this world. There are ovdei Hashem who are very respected in this world but less so in Olam HaBa and visa-versa – people who we think are mediocre or less in their spiritual practices but are highly honored in heaven. This is because Hashem measures each person according to his abilities and the level of mesirus nefesh he has in serving Hashem.

This was Korach's error. He thought he must have the most prestigious position in this world to earn the highest place in Gan Eden, but it isn't so. With the position, challenges, and services that Hashem

3. Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa zt'l (quoted in Sifsei Tzaddik, Korach 8) explains that Korach was upset that he couldn't daven in the Kodosh HaKadoshim like Aharon HaKohen. He didn't know that one can attain the same perfect tefillah wherever he is in the world.

arranges for each individual in this world, he can attain the highest place in Gan Eden.

The Arugos HaBosem (*Chayei Sarah*) quotes the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 11.) "Everything in creation was created according to their agreement and consent." This means that the earth also agreed to be created as it was. Indeed, it is called ארץ, from the word רצה, want, because the earth wanted to do Hashem's will and was willing to be created this way, although it seems that it would be so much loftier if it were made like the heavens and not a coarse gashmiyus earth. This is because heaven and earth are indeed the same because they both serve Hashem as Hashem wants from them.

Therefore, the Arugas HaBosem explains, no one should complain, "Why can't I be like him? If I had a sharper mind and lived under better circumstances, I would also be a genius in Torah!" Don't say that, because Hashem created you the way you are because this is the only way you can reach perfection."

It states (*Tehillim* 101:6), עֵינֵי בְּנֵאֲמָנֵי אֶרֶץ. The Arugos HaBosem explains that Hashem's eyes are with those who have *emunah* like the earth and are prepared to do Hashem's will, even when they think there are more prestigious deeds to do for Hashem.

Korach was on a high spiritual level. As a Levi, Korach was bestowed with the honor of carrying the *aron*. Arizal taught that in the era of *techiyas hameisim*, Korach will be the *kohen gadol*. The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* says that if it weren't for this *machlokes*, Korach would have become the *levi gadol* — an extremely great honor, which so far, no one has ever received.

But he wanted more. He wanted to serve Hashem in the most perfect way. And his error was that he failed to understand that he had the potential to be the greatest *tzaddik* in his position, with the portion Hashem gave him.

The Arugas HaBosem explains that the earth swallowed Korach because it was the earth that understood that one should only

want and focus on the portion Hashem set out for him.

A Life and Death Situation

The Shlah (Korach, *Derech Chaim Tochachas Mussar*, 26) writes, "From the story of Korach's dispute, we can learn mussar to avoid *machlokes*. Think about the severe punishment that came to Korach... Dasan and Aviram also died, together with their infants, although the court in heaven doesn't punish people below twenty (*Shabbos* 89:). But this time, even children perished. Such is the severity of *machlokes* (*Tanchuma*, Korach 3). Let us learn from this always to embrace peace."

A rosh kollel of a large kollel in Yerushalayim brought the kollel *yungerleit* to the Steipler Gaon *zt'l*, for the Steipler to test them on the *sugya* they were learning.

When their Torah discussion concluded, and the kollel *yungerleit* were leaving, the Steipler asked the rosh kollel to stay behind because he wanted to speak with him.

The Steipler asked the rosh kollel for his name. The rosh kollel wrote his name on a piece of paper and showed it to the Steipler (the Steipler was hard of hearing).

The Steipler asked again, "What is your name?"

He wrote his name a second time. "My name is Yankel."

"Your name is Yankel? Why do I see Shlomo written on your forehead?"

The confused rosh kollel replied, "I don't know why the Steipler sees Shlomo on my forehead. However, I just remembered a story, and perhaps it will somehow explain why the Steipler sees Shlomo on my forehead."

This is the story:

"Some years ago, I arrived at a community in *chutz l'aretz* to collect funds for the kollel. My first meeting was with the president of

the community, a wealthy man whom everyone called President Shlomo. Unfortunately, I have a loose tongue and said something that angered the president. He demanded that I leave the community and not fundraise there at all. I answered that I would fundraise and that I didn't need his consent.

"It won't be worth your while," President Shlomo retorted, and he was right. President Shlomo warned the community not to give me any money, and they all obeyed.

"I left in humiliation and went to another community. Over there, I met a person who loved to support Torah. He gave me a check for five hundred dollars. (This story occurred fifty years ago when five hundred dollars was a huge sum.)

"The problem was that this kind man was President Shlomo's brother-in-law, and President Shlomo somehow found out that his brother-in-law gave me five hundred dollars. He told his brother-in-law to stop the check, and he did so. Then something dreadful occurred. The moment he stopped the check, President Shlomo died!"

The rosh kollel concluded, "I don't know if this story has anything to do with why the Steipler sees Shlomo on my forehead, but since I just remembered the story, I repeated it."

"The story explains everything," the Steipler said. "It explains why Shlomo is written on your forehead."

The Steipler explained, "You were destined to die on this trip. Your quota of years was over. But then President Shlomo humiliated you and caused others not to help you. Even after you had a check in your hands, he told his brother-in-law to cancel the check. Heaven decreed that Shlomo must

die, and you will take his years. This is the reason I see Shlomo on your forehead. You are now living President Shlomo's years."

I heard this story from Reb Eliezer Zusya Stern Shlita, who heard it on the day of his chuppah from his grandfather, the previous Skulener Rebbe zt'l, who heard it from the rosh kollel. The Skulener Rebbe told Reb Eliezer Zusya Stern, "I will tell you why I am telling you this story now, on the day of your chuppah: The Arizal teaches that all one's aveiros and all one's mitzvos are written on the forehead. Perhaps you thought this didn't apply in our times, so I told you this story. The Steipler lived recently to our days, and he was able to see what's written on the forehead. So, be aware that it is true. All your mitzvos and chas v'shalom, the opposite, are written on the forehead. Tonight, when you are under the chuppah, if you cry, rub those tears on your forehead because it is written in sefarim that tears erase all the sins written on the face."

We tell this story here because it demonstrates the severity of machlokes. President Shlomo's life ended because he engaged in machlokes.⁴

Before World War Two, there was a massive machlokes between two Chasidic courts in a city in Romania. Each kehillah had its own *shochet*, with each claiming that the meat of the other *shochet* was *treif*. A bitter *machlokes* broke out, lasting for two years, until the Nazis came, *r'l*, and the city was destroyed.

A righteous Jew, Reb Yitzchak Wertzberger zt'l, lived in this city but refused to participate in the machlokes. He ate from both *shechitos* because both *shochtim* were *yirei Hashem*. He told himself he would leave the town the day he became involved in the machlokes.

4. This story has other lessons. It is a reminder that everything is for the good. Reb Yankel, the rosh kollel, was very upset when President Shlomo caused him financial loss. But these disappointments granted him life. Similarly, all situations we perceive as unfavorable are really for our good.

One day, someone asked Reb Yitzchak, "Why doesn't your rebbe speak up in favor of our *shochet*?"

Reb Yitzchak replied, "It is because of *machlokes* that all the troubles began, and you want my rebbe to have a part in this?" (He was referring to the troubles of the Holocaust – attributing it to *machlokes*.)

Suddenly, Reb Yitzchak put his hands to his head and shouted, "Oy. What did I just do? I just spoke about the *machlokes*!" He came home and told his wife that they must leave immediately. "We can't stay in this city anymore."

It was Thursday – not an easy day to pick up and leave. But she was a loyal wife (an *אשה כשרה העושה רצון בעלה*), and they packed up and left the city that day. They moved to Arad, Romania.

This move saved their lives. Soon afterward, the Germans entered the city where the *machlokes* reigned, and almost no one survived. Today, Reb Yitzchak has grandchildren who are *erlicher* Yidden, some of them *poskim* and *magidei shiur*. They all owe a debt of gratitude to Reb Yitzchak, who fled from the *machlokes*, and saved their lives.

In Shechetz, Poland, there were two *shochtim*, and it was debated who was the primary *shochet*, and this resulted in a *machlokes*. The Piltzer Rav *zt'l* (author of *Sifsei Tzaddik*) wrote to one of the *shochtim*, "*Machlokes* is fire, and one must run away from fire. Pick yourself up and leave Shechetz immediately." Unfortunately, the *shochet* never received the letter. The letter came into the hands of someone who wanted him to remain the *shochet* in Shechetz, so he didn't deliver the letter. The *shochet* was *niftar* shortly afterward. The fire of the *machlokes* consumed him.

The family never forgave the person who withheld the letter.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 7.) says that one is punished with one hundred punishments

for making a *machlokes*. This is learned from the *pasuk* (*Mishlei* 17:14), פוטר מים ראשית מדין, and מדין is *gematriya* one hundred. Furthermore, מאה דיני spells מדין, a hundred punishments, *r'l* (see *Rashi*).

We have discussed the dangers of *machlokes*. Now let's see the reward for avoiding *machlokes*.

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 7.) say, "Fortunate is the person who is accustomed to hearing his disgrace and remains silent. Remaining silent saves him from a hundred punishments that come from *machlokes*" (see *Rashi*).

The Iyun Yaakov on this Gemara explains that the court on earth punishes with forty lashes, and the court in heaven punishes with שישים פולסי דנורא, sixty whips of fire, as stated several times in Chazal (see *Yuma* 77). Forty plus sixty is one hundred. He is saved from troubles from above and below when he is cautious and avoids *machlokes*.

Reb Shmuel Wosner *zt'l* was once asked which good deed enabled him to live a long life. He answered that it was because he avoided *machlokes*.

He told the following *mashal* from the *Imrei Noam*:

A lion asked a sheep to smell his breath and to tell him how it smelled. The sheep sniffed the lion's breath and told the lion the truth: "Your breath smells terrible."

The lion replied with anger, "Where is your respect for the king of all animals?" and devoured the sheep.

Next, the lion asked a wolf for his opinion. Having witnessed the sheep's fate, the wolf replied, "My master, your breath smells lovely."

"How dare you lie to me!" the lion roared and devoured the wolf.

Then the king went to the fox and said, "Smell my breath and tell me how it is."

The fox pointed to his nose and said, "My nose is stuffed. I can't smell anything."

The Imrei Noam says this is what one should do when a *machlokes* is raging. Just stay away because getting involved will only cause you trouble.

Reb Wosner *zt'l* explained, "I have been a rav in Bnei Brak for the last seventy years, and I always avoided *machlokes*. Someone who has a stuffed nose and doesn't smell will live long. שומר פיו ולשונו שומר מצרות נפשו, by guarding your speech, you save yourself a lot of heartache and trouble."

Avoid Machlokes

The Torah commands us (17:5), ולא יהיה כקרח, "Don't be like Korach and his congregation." We must do everything possible to avoid *machlokes*.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* said, "When one is in the wrong and doesn't have a valid reason to make a *machlokes*, of course he shouldn't make a *machlokes*. The Torah refers to when there is a legitimate reason to be angry. Nevertheless, the Torah says, ולא יהיה כקרח, don't be like Korach. Seek ways to avoid *machlokes*."

Aharon was the exact opposite of Korach; he was a man of peace. Pirkei Avos (1:12) states, "Be among Aharon's students: Pursue peace, love people, and draw them to Torah."

The Ramban (16:4) writes, "Aharon, following his path of mussar and kedushah,

remained silent during this *machlokes*. He was quiet as though he agreed that Korach was greater than him [and more suitable for the position of kohen gadol], and was merely acting upon Moshe's command, and was keeping the king's decrees."⁵ Amazingly, the *machlokes* was against him, but he didn't partake in it. Pirkei Avos (5:17) says that an example of a *machlokes l'shem shamayim* is the *machlokes* between Hillel and Shammai. "A *machlokes* that isn't *l'shem shamayim* is the *machlokes* of Korach and his community." Notice that the Mishnah doesn't state "Korach and Aharon." This is because Aharon was never part of the *machlokes*. Korach was running the *machlokes* on his own, and Aharon completely removed himself from the dispute.

Moshe Rabbeinu was also a man of peace and sought with all his strength to end the *machlokes* and make peace. As we see, (16:12, and 16:25), וישלח משה לקרא לדתן ולאבירים... ויקם משה, וילך אל דתן ואבירים. Moshe was trying to make peace with Dasan v'Aviram. Rashi (16:22) writes, מכאן שאין מהזיקין במחלוקת, "We learn from here that one shouldn't persist in *machlokes*." We should try to make amends and end *machlokes* as quickly as possible.

Rashi (*Sanhedrin* 110.) writes, "We must learn from Moshe Rabbeinu. He forgave Dasan and Aviram for disgracing him and went to them to end the *machlokes*."⁶

5. Moshe said (16:11) ואהרן מה הוא כי תלוננו עליו, "Who is Aaron that you should complain against him?" Reb Wosner *zt'l* heard from Reb Meir Shapiro *zt'l* who heard from Reb Meir Arik *zt'l* that we can explain this pasuk according to the Gemara (*Eiruvim* 65), which says, "A person's nature can be recognized through three things: בכיסו בכוסו בכעסו, how he acts with his money, with his drinking, and his anger. As we will explain, Aharon couldn't be tested with money or drinking, only with how he responds to anger.

He couldn't be tested with drinking because Aharon served in the Beis HaMikdash, and it was forbidden for him to drink wine. He couldn't be tested with money because he was very wealthy. (The halachah is that the Jewish nation must make the kohen gadol rich, as Chazal say, גדלוהו משל אחיו). So, the only test possible is in regards to anger. This is the meaning of the pasuk, ואהרן מה הוא, if you want to know who Aharon is, כי תלוננו עליו, you can try to get him angry and to see how he reacts. As we know, he passed this test perfectly.

6. The Or HaChaim (16:25) asks why the pasuk states ויקם משה וילך אל דתן ואבירים, "Moshe arose and went to Dasan v'Aviram." "Why does the Torah need to tell us ויקם, that Moshe stood up?

The Or HaChaim replies, "It states ויקם משה to tell us that Moshe rose to a higher level when he went to

The Shlah (Korach, Derech Chaim Tochachas Mussar, 26) writes, "Whatever a person can do to increase peace and to extinguish the fires of machlokes, he should do so. Moshe Rabbeinu was a king and the greatest navi, but that didn't stop him from reaching out to Dasan and Aviram to make peace. When Dasan and Aviram refused to speak to him (they said Bamidbar 16:14) לֹא נֵעֲלָה, 'We will not go up,' Moshe went to the elders of Yisrael, all for the sake of restoring peace."

There is a Talmudic concept called "*chazakah*," which means we assume that the current status of something will continue to remain the same.

The Chasam Sofer says that אין מחזיקין במחלוקת can be translated as, "When it comes to *machlokes*, we don't assume (חזקה) that what was, will continue." Dasan and Aviram were always causing *machlokes*. Our first encounter with Dasan and Aviram takes place in Mitzrayim, where it states (*Shemos* 2:13), והנה שני אנשים עברים נצים, "[Moshe saw] two Jewish people fighting," and Rashi tells us that they were Dasan and Aviram. From the very

beginning, we find them to be the instigators of quarrels. Later, Dasan and Aviram tattled (מלשין) to Pharaoh that Moshe killed the Mitzri, forcing Moshe to escape Mitzrayim (see *Rashi, Shemos* 2:15). Dasan and Aviram challenged Moshe when Pharaoh increased the workload on Bnei Yisrael (see *Rashi, Shemos* 5:20). They also disregarded Moshe's command and kept manna for the following day (see *Rashi, Shemos* 2:13). At the *machlokes* of Korach, Dasan and Aviram were there again.

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* writes that Moshe had every reason to say, "Dasan and Aviram are always fighting. They create *machlokes* at every opportunity. It is impossible to make peace with such people." It would have been rational for Moshe to claim this, but Moshe didn't. He tried to make peace with them. He thought, "Perhaps this time I can make peace with them." אין מחזיקין במחלוקת, when it comes to *machlokes*, we don't assume it will continue. Perhaps this time I will succeed in ending the *machlokes*.⁷

Dasan and Aviram. "The Or HaChaim bases this on the pasuk (*Mishlei* 18:12) לפני כבוד ענוה, "Before honor there is humility." Moshe humbled himself to go to Dasan v'Aviram to end the machlokes, and therefore, he attained honor. לפני כבוד ענוה, humility is followed by honor.

In contrast, about Dasan and Aviram, the pasuk (*Mishlei* 16:18) states לפני שבר גאון, "before destruction comes pride." Their pride led to their downfall.

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* asks why Dasan v'Aviram's name are mentioned explicitly, while we don't know the names of the 250 people who joined Korach's machlokes.

The Chidushei HaRim replied that Dasan v'Aviram were worse (so we shame them by mentioning their names) because they had nothing to gain from this machlokes. They weren't from shevet Levi, and couldn't become the kohen gadol, so why did they get involved? The 250 men were hoping to become the kohen gadol, so there is at least a limud zechus for them to be involved in the machlokes.

7. The Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* says that having false shalom is better than having true machlokes. This means it is better to pretend there is peace, even when there isn't. In this scenario, this is more important than being truthful.

The Torah tells us that Yaakov Avinu came to Har HaMoriah and placed stones around his head. Rashi (*Bereishis* 28:11) writes, "The stones started quarreling. Each one said, 'Let the righteous man lay his head on me.' Immediately, Hakadosh Baruch Hu turned them into one stone."

One of the gedolim asked (some say that it was the Vilna Gaon *zt'l*) that if a miracle was to occur, and the stones would unite and become one, why couldn't they become a comfortable cushion? The answer is that the stones were fighting, and no good can come from a fight.

Righteous Indignation

Hashem says קשה עלי פרידתכם (Bamidbar Rabba 21:22 about Shemini Atzeres). The Imrei Noam translated it, "It is painful for me when there is machlokes and division amongst you. It is especially painful for Me when the machlokes is עלי, about Me – when you claim you are fighting for My honor."

Throughout Jewish history, there were many disputes – among individuals and communities – and the motives were often the preservation and continuity of *Yiddishkeit* and to stand up for Hashem's honor. At times those fights were indeed important, and thanks to those disputes, our adherence to Torah and mitzvos continues to the present day. However, sometimes, people thought they were fighting *leshem shamayim*, but it was just the *yetzer hara*.

Likely, Korach thought his ambitions were altruistic, fighting for Klal Yisrael's honor or his spiritual growth. However, had he looked closer, he would have discovered that behind his *machlokes* was jealousy and a drive for glory. He would have discovered that what he thought was righteous indignation was the *yetzer hara*.

The Baal HaTanya writes, "Most *tzaros* come from machlokes '*leshem shamayim*.' May Hashem save us from them."

Kayin and Hevel had a dispute, which ended with Kayin killing Hevel. What was the disagreement about? The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 22:7) states two opinions. One is they debated on whose property the Beis HaMikdash should be built on, each wanting the Beis HaMidash on their property. A second explanation is that they were arguing over the ownership of the earth, who owns the land, its elements, and substances.

"Kayin and Hevel said, 'Let's divide the world between us' [and they did so]: One got the land, and the other became the owner of all *mitaltelen* (elements/substances). The landowner said, 'You are standing on my land! Get off' "The other replied, 'And you are wearing my clothing. Remove the clothes.'

"And you must fly [in the air].'" This was the spirit of the dispute, which ended with murder.

Baalei mussar say that both explanations of the Midrash are, in fact, telling the same story. The real impetus of the *machlokes* was wealth. But they were ashamed to fight over such petty issues, so they turned it into a fight over who would host the Beis HaMikdash. But the core of the *machlokes* was money.⁸

8. In last week's *parashah*, it states, ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם, which can be read, לא תתירו, don't be *matir*, don't permit that which is forbidden. The *yetzer hara* comes to a person and says, "It's a mitzvah to speak *lashon hara* about that person... or on that community," and the like. The Torah says, לא תתירו, don't permit these sins and consider them mitzvos.

When the Jewish nation was in Egypt, and the time for redemption arrived, they didn't have any mitzvos and merits through which to be redeemed. Hashem gave them דם פסח ודם מילה, the *korban Pesach* and *bris milah*. In the merit of these two mitzvos, they were redeemed from Mitzrayim.

Chazal also tell us that during מכת חושך, four-fifths of the nation perished. During those days, the Jewish nation was busy with the mitzvah of burying the dead. The Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* asks, why weren't the merits of those funerals and burials sufficient to redeem them? Why did they need additional merits? The answer is that burying others isn't always a merit.

The Sar Shalom suggested that sometimes people think it's a mitzvah to bury someone, shame another, and take away the *parnassah* from a third, and they claim that they're doing it *leshem shamayim*. The Torah didn't count burying the dead as a merit to be redeemed from Mitzrayim to remind us that harming and burying others with *lashon hara*, *machlokes*, and the like aren't the mitzvos we should seek. You think you're doing the greatest mitzvah, but think again because it may be the greatest sin.

Reb Yohonasan Eibshitz, zy'a, (*Yaaras Dvash*, drush 8) writes, "In every *machlokes*, the *yetzer hara* assures us that our intentions are purely *leshem shamayim*, and *chas veshalom* even to suggest otherwise! So, how can we recognize whether a *machlokes* is *leshem shamayim*? This is the test: If both parties love each other with all their heart and soul aside from the issue they are arguing about, that is a sign that their argument is *leshem shamayim*. However, if they hate each other, the *machlokes* isn't *leshem shamayim*. The Mishnah hints at this when it states, איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, which can mean, how do we know that a *machlokes* is *leshem shamayim*? The answer is זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי, if it is similar to the *machlokes* of Shamai and Hillel, for Shamai and Hillel loved and honored each other.⁹ This proves that their *machlokes* was *leshem shamayim*. But Korach and his followers harbored animosity towards Moshe. They nearly stoned him. This proves that their dispute wasn't *leshem shamayim*. With this test, one can know whether his intentions are *leshem shamayim* or not."

The Bnei Yissaschar *zt'l* gives us another sign to help determine whether your motivation is *leshem shamayim* or jealousy. Generally, when fighting with "religious indignation," one's emotions are passionate. He feels like an exploding volcano, ready to knock down all people who are going against Hashem. Therefore, he should gauge himself and see whether he possesses such furor when performing a mitzvah, such as tallis and tefillin, *succah*, helping the poor, etc. If this passion surfaces only by *machlokes*, that's an indication that it is inspired by the *yetzer hara*, not the *yetzer tov*.

The Imrei Noam *zt'l* taught that the worst sins can be committed when one thinks he's

motivated by spirituality. No G-d-fearing person would think of destroying someone's life or *parnassah*. But when the *yetzer hara* convinces a person that he must take a stand to avenge Hashem's honor or to preserve *Yiddishkeit*, and so on, and that he must fight with an individual or a community, he becomes liable to do sins he would never consider doing otherwise. If he is wrong, and Hashem doesn't want the *machlokes*, he is taking Hashem's name and using it as a powerful weapon to do terrible things.

The Imrei Noam writes that this is hinted at by the words, יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו כל יום (Succah 52:). This can be translated, אולמלא הקב"ה עוזרו לא יכל לו, if it weren't for the *yetzer hara*'s claim that it must be done for Hakadosh Baruch Hu's honor, לא יכל לו, the *yetzer hara* couldn't have convinced the person to do such awful deeds.

Another problem with a *machlokes* "*leshem Shamayim*" is that such a *machlokes* can last a very long time. This is because the instigators don't repent, for they think they're acting righteously. While a dispute over mundane matters can be resolved over time, it can last forever when Hashem's name is involved. This is hinted at in the following Mishnah (*Avos* 5:17): כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים, "A dispute that's *leshem shamayim* will last." ושאינה לשם שמים אין סופה להתקיים, "but a dispute that isn't *leshem shamayim* won't last."

There is a *machlokes* on how to pronounce "אדני", whether the emphasis is on the ד or the א. Once, when this was being hotly debated, the Noda b'Yehuda commented, "Hashem says, 'My name that was written in holiness should be erased for the sake of peace.' Peace is more important to Hashem than His name. Surely Hashem doesn't want us to fight over the pronunciation of His name."

9. The Gemara (*Yevamos* 14) says, "Although Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel argued... Beis Shamai didn't refrain from marrying into Beis Hillel, and Beis Hillel didn't refrain from marrying into Beis Shamai. חיבה וריעות נוהגים; they treated each other with love and friendship. As it states, האמת והשלום אהבו, 'You shall love truth and peace'" (*Zechariah* 8:19). As Reb Yohonason Eibshitz taught, this proved that their *machlokes* was *leshem Shamayim*.