

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר
רבינוביץ זצ"ל

*Shmuessen from
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פרשת קרח

Volume 6 Issue # 35

לעילוי נשמת
האשה החשובה טובא ע"ה
אשת הרב אפרים זצ"ל רבינוביץ
תנצב"ה

פרשת קרח

רב-לְכֶם בְּנֵי לְוִי (במדבר ט"ז ז')

"It is too much for you, Children of Levi!"

וְלֹא-יִהְיֶה כְּקֹרַח וְכַעֲדָתוֹ (י"ז ה')

One should not be like Korach and his congregation.

רב *he* lectured, and with the word *רב* *he* was lectured.

When Moshe Rabbeinu was pleading with Korach and Shevet Levi to back down from their complaints, he said the words רב לכם בני לוי / *"It is too much for you, Children of Levi!"* He then went on to reason with them that they already had such an elevated status as the *Shevet* who assists the *kohanim* in the *avodah* of the *Mishkan*, and they need not seek *kehunah* as well.

The Gemara takes note of the fact that the identical phrase רב לך was employed in a different part of the Torah. This was at the end of the 40 years in the *midbar*, when Moshe pleaded with Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisroel. Hashem responded to him רב לך אל תוסף דבר אלי עוד / *"It is too much for you! Do not continue to speak to Me anymore about this matter!"* Chazal (סוטה י"ג:) tell us, that it was not a coincidence that the same phrase is used; rather, a message was being conveyed: *רב* *he* lectured, and with the word *רב* *he* was lectured.

Rashi explains that this reproach was in accordance with the concept that HaKadosh Boruch Hu is extremely exacting in His judgement of *tzadikim*. Hashem was subtly conveying to Moshe that he should not have used those words when speaking to Korach. The implication would seem to be that Moshe's use of this expression was even slightly responsible for his own *tefillah* not having been accepted. Just as he rejected Korach with those words, so too was his own *tefillah* rejected with those words.

The question we may ask is, what did Moshe do wrong in uttering these words? True, Hashem is exacting on *tzadikim* even for slight *aveiros*, but where is the slight *aveirah* here? Korach was staging a rebellion which was putting the entire Klal Yisroel at risk, and it was imperative that he be put in his place. Moshe was seemingly quite correct

when he told him to accept Hashem's will to be part of Shevet Levi, rather than demanding to be a *kohen* as well. Where did Moshe go wrong?

Not to Squelch Another's *She'ifos*/Aspirations for *Ruchniyus*

The answer is, that mixed in with Korach's complaint was the positive desire to achieve a higher level of closeness to Hashem. Was this Korach's primary desire? No. Perhaps this desire only existed on an entirely superficial level. However, once such a desire was expressed, be it in Korach's mind or in his words, it cannot be put down lightly.

Rav Ahron Kotler speaks at length about שאיפות/*the ambition* a person must cultivate within himself to constantly rise in his *madreigos*. A person should never be satisfied with his present state in *Avodas Hashem*. No matter what level he is on, there is room for him to grow in his *ruchniyus*.

- *A working man can be someone who spends every possible minute in the Beis Medrash; only going to his workplace when he must. During any day that he is off from work, he is in the Bais Medrash for the entire day. He davens seriously, and he tries to raise his family with an ahavas haTorah and ahavas Hashem. Such a person is a true Ben-Torah. Alternatively, one can have a seder once a week for half an hour, and the majority of that half-hour is spent shmoozing and talking on his cellphone.*

These are examples of two opposite extremes in regard to these particular levels. Most people would probably find themselves somewhere in between these two levels. Rather than being content with their level, they should always yearn to conquer even higher levels.

- *The same applies for yungerleit who are involved in learning throughout the day. There are always different ways they can strengthen their learning, both in quality and quantity.*
- *In one's davening, in one's middos, in one's level of ahavas Hashem, in his dikduk hamitzvos – in every area of *ruchniyus*, a person should always desire and strive for higher *madreigos*.*

It is through these *She'ifos* that a person will indeed be able to climb new heights. If Korach verbalized what ostensibly was a yearning for new *madreigos* of closeness to Hashem, Moshe was not to quell such yearnings. On the contrary, such a desire is commendable, as we learn from the story of those who were *tamei* during the time of the Korban

Pesach. They came to Moshe with the complaint of (במדבר ט' למה נגרע ('/Why should we be less?', and they were commended for this. In fact, as the result of their complaint, they merited that the *parshah* of *Pesach Sheni* would be transmitted through them. Clearly, desiring and seeking more *ruchniyus* is considered a positive and praiseworthy action. Because Moshe responded to Korach with words that seemed to silence this yearning, Moshe was punished by being told these very same words when he himself yearned for the high *madreigah* available for one who is in Eretz Yisroel.

A Foundation of Good Middos

However, we must still understand: It was obviously very necessary for Moshe Rabbeinu to rebuke Korach. Korach was causing a rift throughout Klal Yisroel, and the existence of the Nation was in danger. What message should Moshe have given that would put Korach in his place, while at the same time, not being guilty of this fault of squelching his yearning for *ruchniyus*?

The answer is that *She'ifos* and *shteiging* are so important, but they must be based on a foundation of good *middos*. Moshe would tell Korach, 'Your desire to *shteig* is wonderful, but you must not be jealous of other people's positions and of their honor. Seek to *shteig* in your own circumstances, not by negating the success of others!'

The Lowly Middah of Kinah/Jealousy

If a person does not work on the *middah* of jealousy, he will never be content. Such a person is like a donkey who is led around by having a carrot hung on a stick in front of it. The donkey tries to chase the carrot for the whole day, never realizing that as it itself is moving the carrot is moving as well. Similarly, a man of jealousy will always chase that elusive dream of being on top, never realizing that in whatever situation he finds himself, he will always be chasing that elusive success which he will always see in someone else.

One who does not try to overcome his jealousy will find himself plagued with the *middah* even in ways which are completely unseemly for his age or position.

My father z"l was at a chasunah, seated at the table of rabbanim. Next to him sat the rav of another shul and they were conversing together while the main course was being served. As a plate was served to each of them, this other rav realized something truly dreadful: The piece of chicken on my father's plate was bigger

than the one on his plate! Oy vey, this was terrible! How would he ever be able to get that piece for himself?!

The rav suddenly hit upon a good plan. As he and my father were shmoozing, he asked my father a question.

"R' Yisroel," he said, "did you ever hear that the world is constantly spinning around? Well, I would like to give you a live demonstration!"

And with that, the rav deftly exchanged the two plates. Phew! Now he had that piece of chicken for himself! My father just gaped at him, completely stunned. He could not believe that a grown, respectable man would care about such pettiness, even lowering his dignity in such a manner.

Eradicating our Negative Middos

This story seems to be an extreme example, but in truth, if we do not work on our negative *middos*, they will stick with us. We may try to conceal them, and perhaps we will be successful in doing so much of the time. The *middah*, however, will remain with us. The only way it will leave us is if we actively work on eradicating the *middah* from within ourselves. This is accomplished through *mussar* and training for years on end.

The Gra writes that a person was put in the world to overcome his negative traits and make himself become a better person. This is more basic than the Torah and *mitzvos* one accomplishes in his life. Certainly, one must live a life of continuous accomplishment; but it must have a foundation of *middos*. A *talmid chacham* without a foundation of good *middos* will eventually topple, as demonstrated by Korach who got swallowed into the ground. One who perfects his *middos*, however, has a solid foundation and a clean *neshama*, even if he does not accomplish his full potential. It is certainly very important to build a structure of *ruchniyus* on the foundation of *middos*, but even before that, the foundation itself has tremendous value.

Talmidei Chachamim Are Only Valued When They Have Positive Middos

There is a fundamental difference between brilliant scholars of other studies, and *lehavdil, talmidei chachamim*. Those who are proficient in worldly subjects can become the greatest professors and lecturers etc., and yet, how they act in their own home is completely irrelevant. They

can perform the most despicable or lowly acts and it does not affect what they teach during their 'hours'. After all, what does one have to do with the other? They are experts in their subject matter and therefore they teach it; it has no bearing upon whom they themselves are.

In regard to *talmidei chachamim* however, this is not the case whatsoever. Only one of impeccable character is accepted as a teacher and a leader. This is because the Torah is a way of life, and one who studies it is absorbing the teachings into his *neschama*. If he simply knows the information contained therein, he has in no way achieved the fulfilment that is inherent in the acquiring of Torah.

The Leaders of Klal Yisroel Excelled in their Middos

In fact, the *talmidei chachamim* and leaders of the Jewish People have always been tremendous *tzadikim* and *baalei middos*. Klal Yisroel has an innate understanding of who has absorbed the teachings of the Torah within themselves, and it is men of such stature who are accepted as leaders.

Rav Chaim Brisker is known for his brilliant chidushei Torah and for the penetrating, analytical derech halimud which he introduced into the yeshiva world. No less than his greatness in Torah, however, was his greatness in chessed and middos. His home was open to all, and many needy individuals – and families! – resided in his home for months on end.

It happened once that a woman who was shortly expecting a child knocked on his door. "Rebbe," she begged, "please help me. I will have a child soon, and I do not have any place to live!"

Rav Chaim inquired about the circumstances of this woman and why she had not been helped by the local chessed which was under his leadership. He was told that this woman's husband had abandoned her more than a year earlier, and now, she was expecting a child. No one had wanted anything to do with this sinner and her mamzer-child.

Rav Chaim was not impressed. "True," he said, "she did an aveirah, and true that the child will be a mamzer, unable to marry a Jewish person. But they are still people. This unfortunate woman is a Jewess who must be helped! Her child must be cared for like any other Jewish child!"

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Rav Chaim took the woman into his home and supported her. When she gave birth to her son, he paid for a mohel. She continued staying in his home with her child for many months afterward, until she was able to find a place for herself to live.

Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski once traveled to Brisk to confer about an important matter with Rav Chaim Brisker. Rav Chaim Ozer arrived in Brisk in the late hours of the night, and the only light in the town was in the home of Rav Chaim. He peeked in the window, and he discovered Rav Chaim in front of two small babies, feeding them! Rav Chaim Ozer waited until Rav Chaim was finished and he then knocked on the door. As he was let inside, he expressed surprise about the scene he had just witnessed.

"I would have expected to find you writing your chiddushei Torah at this hour! Whose children are these, and why are you feeding them?!"

Rav Chaim explained that a poor mother had just knocked on his door and run away, leaving her two kids at the door. "There are two hungry children in my hands. I have no choice but to feed them," he explained.

Rav Shach would relate that Rav Chaim Ozer confided to him that his practice had changed since his youth.

"In my younger years," Rav Chaim Ozer said, "I used to write teshuvos to permit agunos to remarry. I thought I was doing a great service in Klal Yisroel. Afterwards, I became older and wiser. I actually cared for the agunos personally!"

These *gedolim* were masters of *chessed* and *middos tovos* – and that, alongside their vast Torah knowledge, is what made them true *gedolim*.

Machlokes – Positive or Inherently Negative?

As explained, negative *middos* can mar even what is in its essence a positive concept. *She'ifos* for greatness in *ruchniyus* are commendable, and yet, when tainted by bad *middos*, they can produce terrible *machlokes*, as in the case of Korach. What about the actual *machlokes* – is that also considered a positive concept at its root, or is *machlokes* what it would seem to be – a negative concept in its entirety?

The Importance of *Machlokes* in Torah

The answer is that *machlokes* as well, is an important and necessary concept for Torah and *ruchniyus*. This is evidenced by the fact that virtually every page of Gemara or Mishnayos is filled with *machloksin* between the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim*. Every *sugya* has many arguments between the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* about what is the correct *pshat*. Clearly then, *machlokes* is an integral aspect of our Torah.

Why is *machlokes* so important for our Torah? Because the Torah Shebal Peh was given to the minds of the *chachomim* of Klal Yisroel to understand and to extend to all applications of the *halacha* in any circumstance. So important is the understanding of the *chachomim*, that the way in which they understand the Torah becomes the Torah, even when they are in error.

The understanding of each *talmid chacham* then, is of tremendous value in the Torah, because it reveals another dimension of the Torah's wisdom. It is so necessary for each person to arrive at an understanding of the Torah according to his own perception, because his perception is actually a new facet of the Torah Shebal Peh. As we say in our davening, ותן חלקנו בתורתך / *Give us our portion in Your Torah!* Each person has his own portion in the Torah according to his own mind.

In order to arrive at the proper conclusions and understandings, each individual must put forth his understanding, and they must be measured against each other. After weighing each side properly, the proper *halacha* can then be decided. In fact, the Chazon Ish used to say that the true *shteiging* is when one strains himself to understand the other point of view. After he has understood both sides of the coin, a *talmid chacham* can then determine what he thinks is the correct approach.

Rav Nochum Partzovitz excelled in this point. At times during his shiur in the Mir yeshiva, a bachur would pose what seemed to be a silly question. Those present in the shiur would try to stifle their laughter.

Rav Nochum would then silence those people and reproach them. "If he asked a question, he must have a good point to make!"

He would then proceed to draw out the bachur's line of reasoning and demonstrate how he in fact was bringing a new perspective to the sugya.

It is for this reason that *machlokes* is so essential for Torah. Every side must be heard, and carefully analyzed and discussed. As each individual defends his position, the truth will be able to be discovered.

Machlokes L'sheim Shamayim

There is, however, one vital condition. The *machlokes* must be *l'sheim shamayim*. Each side desires the truth of Torah and will back down when it is demonstrated that he is wrong. Such a *machlokes* leads to *shalom*. As the Gemara (קדושין ל:) teaches us, 'Even a father and son or a rebbe and talmid who are learning become אויבים/enemies to one another; yet they do not budge from there before they become אוהבים/they love each other.' They reach this love for each other because they shared a common goal of arriving at the truth, and they achieved that goal together. Even if they did not end up actually agreeing with each other, they still heard each other's positions, and their own understanding was strengthened. The *mishnah* in Avos (ה' י"ז) tells us that the *Machlokes* of Shammai and Hillel was *l'sheim shamayim* and is סופו להתקיים/*it will last*. Shammai and Hillel did not resolve most of their disputes, and yet their arguments still led them to *shalom*. As the Gemara in Yevamos (י"ד:) teaches, love and friendship existed between Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel, as they both searched for truth together, even while arriving at different conclusions.

A fascinating *gematriya* reflects the concept we are discussing. The word צד/*a side of a dispute* equals 94. When one puts both sides together – 94×2 , i.e. he considers both sides of the argument, the result is 188, the *gematriya* of פקה/*an intelligent person*. When two intelligent people – 188×2 – discuss an issue together, the sum is 376, the *gematriya* of שלום/*peace*.

Machlokes Shelo L'sheim Shamayim

If, however, one allows his negative *middos* to influence him in *machlokes*, it then becomes a *machlokes* which is not *l'sheim shamayim*.

Such a person will continue to defend his position in his learning even after it is thoroughly clear that he was in the wrong. It is not the truth that he is after, but his own honor. Indeed, one should avoid such a chavrusa like a plague. It is so important that two chavrusas share the goal of discovering the truth of Torah, not that each one be interested in his own glory. Not much Torah will amount from such a chavrusa.

Such a *machlokes* will have absolutely no positive outcome. The *mishnah* tells us that Korach's rebellion was a prime example of such a

machlokes, and its end will be סופו להתקיים / *it will not last*. What became of Korach and his family? They were swallowed into the ground along with every last possession they owned. Similarly, when one is involved in a *machlokes* which is not *l'sheim shamayim*, he will gain nothing and walk away with nothing, and losing everything in the process.

The *mishnah* compares the *machlokes* of Korach to the *machlokes* of Shammai and Hillel; the difference lay only in the fact that the former was not *l'sheim shamayim* while the latter was. This implies that the actual *machlokes* of Korach had substance. Had he intended *l'sheim shamayim*, he may have had solid ideas to suggest. Not *chas v'shalom* in regard to challenging Hashem's appointment of Moshe and Ahron, but in other areas of Torah and *Avodah*, he could have raised important points to be considered. However, because he allowed his negative *middos* to come into play, he lost everything.

Avoiding Machlokes Shelo L'sheim Shamayim – and Only Gaining as a Result

When there is a *machlokes* which is *shelo l'sheim shamayim*, one must avoid it all costs. In fact, the Gemara (סנהדרין ק"י) teaches us that there is a specific prohibition against holding a *machlokes*. This is learned from the *passuk* (י"ז ה') ולא יהיה כקרח וכעדתו / *One should not be like Korach and his congregation*.

One should not feel that he will lose anything by avoiding such a *machlokes*. He will rather only be saving himself in the process. In fact, quite the opposite is true: He will actually gain so much by avoiding the *machlokes*.

Rav Herschel Zaks z"l had spent five years building a yeshiva after the war. After all the work that he put into it, a contender came, claiming that the yeshiva really belonged to him. Rav Herschel did not wish to be involved in such a machlokes. He just picked himself up and moved to Eretz Yisroel.

I used to visit his home in Eretz Yisroel, and every so often his rebbitzen would let out a krechtz/sigh about how the yeshiva was unjustly taken from them. She would express a thought that perhaps they should have tried to fight back to try to keep the yeshiva. However, she would always immediately stop herself with a smile.

"We surely did the right thing," she would say. "We could either have a machlokes and end up with nothing, or we could take the

'nothing' without the machlokes! Why should we opt for machlokes when it would gain nothing for us anyway?!"

In truth, they did not end up with nothing. They had a beautiful life in eretz Yisroel with many talmidim. Had they been machzik b'machlokes, they would have been exchanging so much for what was indeed nothing.

I myself am personally aware of other such stories as well. There was indeed unfair treatment, and the wronged party had the right to complain and cause machlokes over what was done to him. However, because the path of shalom was chosen, the individual ended up gaining what he would never have gotten had he pursued machlokes.¹

Lessons for our Lives

Let us take these important lessons for own lives. We have discussed modes of behavior which, when practiced in the proper fashion, are positive and commendable.

- She'ifos are so crucial for Avodas Hashem. We should set our goals and sights on high madreigos, thus giving ourselves the potential to reach these heights.
- Even *machlokes* is an important aspect of Torah and *Avodas Hashem*. There are always many different outlooks and viewpoints on a given issue, and each individual will have his unique perspective. One can, and should, express himself and seek to demonstrate the correctness of his point.

However, we must be so careful that our negative selfish *middos* do not get involved in these behaviors, thereby disqualifying them completely and transforming them into terrible *machlokes, chas v'shalom*. We must be ever cautious about this, and we must work on our *middos* to eradicate the roots of these behaviors. Bez"ח we should reach this *madreigah* and live our lives with *she'ifos*, and with intentions *l'sheim shamayim*.

¹ This is not meant to imply that one should allow himself to be willfully taken advantage of and stepped on at all times. Each situation requires its own *psak* and *daas Torah* about what is the correct behavior.

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