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מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Korach

What is the Forbidden Form of *Machloket* (Conflict)?

In *Pirkei Avot* [5:21] it states, "Every conflict that is for the sake of Heaven will ultimately endure. However one that is not for the sake of Heaven will not endure. What is an example of a conflict for the sake of Heaven? This is the conflict between Hillel and Shammai. One that is not for the sake of Heaven? This is the conflict of Korach and his assembly."

Questions on the Words of the Tanna

- 1- The commentators have asked that apparently the opposite is more logical, i.e., a conflict that is for the sake of Heaven should not endure, and only when it is not for the sake of Heaven should it endure.
- 2- Furthermore, why does the Tanna state "the conflict of Hillel and Shammai," and not *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*?
- 3- Why does the Tanna state "Korach and his assembly," and not "Korach and Moshe?" After all it was Moshe who Korach was arguing with and not with his assembly?

A Conflict Whose Source is Egotism is Forbidden

It appears that the holy Tanna is coming to teach us what is called *machloket* and what is not. *Machloket* is a something severe, as we find that even children and women were punished in the *machloket* caused by Korach. People generally think that a *machloket* is between two people or two parties; this is a mistake. For if this was so, we must ask on the words of our Sages: The Sages state that the same way that no two individuals have the exact same visage, so too, are their perspectives different. Therefore, if Hashem created everyone in the world with different perspectives, the entire world should be in a constant state of *machloket* - is this possible?

Therefore the Tanna is coming to teach us what is truly called *machloket*: First it must be realized that not every *machloket* is forbidden; rather, a conflict that is for the sake of Heaven, such as the one between Hillel and Shammai – this is not considered a *machloket*. Even though they are waging a battle over a *halachic* topic, our Sages state [*Kiddushin* 30b]: "Said Rabbi Chiya bar Abba: Even a father and son or teacher and student, who learn Torah together become enemies [-through arguing about a Torah topic], but do not move from there until they love each other." This teaches us that since the entire purpose of this conflict is to understand and analyze the truth of the Torah and is not at all connected to a person's traits that affect his relationship with others, it is not included in the category of *machloket*. Rather, it is simply considered a difference of opinion. This is something natural and understandable, since it is an element of creation. Secondly, a *machloket* refers to the *machloket* waged by Korach and his assembly, because theirs was a *machloket* which stemmed from negative character traits such as honor and haughtiness. This is as our Sages teach that the *machloket* began specifically after Elitzafan ben Uziel was appointed. In other words, the entire reason for the *machloket* was because of negative character traits and not because they wished to clarify the truth of a particular perspective. This is the form of conflict that is forbidden. It is one that stems from strife caused by egotism and self-centeredness which leads to hatred amongst brethren. This is the opposite of the of the essence of the Jewish Nation which is like one body and soul. This is entirely contrary to the Will of Hashem, Who has not found a vessel worthier of receiving blessing than peace, as our Sages have taught. The third thing the Tanna is teaching us is that there is no *machloket* that is caused by only one party. There must be two sides in order to have a *machloket*. However, it is not necessary for both sides to actually be involved in the *machloket*. It is possible that only one party is causing the strife, while the second party is not at all involved in the *machloket*. An example of this is Korach and his assembly against Moshe. This is the Tanna's intention when he states that a *machloket* which is not for the sake of Heaven refers to that of Korach and his assembly. We asked that this seems odd because their entire *machloket* was against Moshe. Therefore the Tanna teaches that Moshe was not involved in the *machloket*, and that it was not his negative traits or egotism which caused it. On the contrary, Moshe answered them that Hashem will reveal who is the chosen one. Instead, it was only Korach and his party who caused the *machloket*; one which stemmed from a thirst for



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honor and from haughtiness as our Sages teach. Therefore, in his case there was only one side who caused the *machloket* - Korach and his assembly, as the Tanna stated.

The Test Whether it is a *Machloket* or Simply a Difference of Opinion

The test whether the conflict is truly a *machloket* is whether or not feelings of hatred accompany it. If they do, then the conflict stems from personal interests. Therefore the parties become angry when they don't get what they wanted, and they turn into enemies. However, when the entire conflict is solely to clarify the truth then there is no hatred; rather, love is the end result, as stated by the Gemara in *Kiddushin* mentioned above. Therefore the Gemara [*Yevamot* 13b] relates about Hillel and Shammai that even though they differed in matters of *halachah*, *Beit Shammai* did not hesitate to marry women from *Beit Hillel* and vice versa. This is why the Tanna says only Hillel and Shammai and not *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*. Additionally, *Maran HaChida* and the *Meor Va'Shemesh* explain that specifically Hillel and Shammai differed for the sake of Heaven. Their students, however, sometimes got fired up in order to uphold the opinion of their teachers, doing so for the sake of honor. This cannot be considered for the sake of Heaven, and therefore not everyone could say that his conflict was purely for the sake of Heaven.

Machloket in Our Times

Throughout history there has always been, is, and will be conflicts amongst the Jewish people. But a person must know when it is a *machloket* and when it is a difference of opinion and perspectives. If it is indeed a *machloket*, he must also know who is the one causing the strife. I have seen and heard many individuals who mistakenly attribute each disagreement to a *machloket* and claim that each of the parties is the feuding party. Especially, in our times, much to our sorrow, there is an abundance of *machloket* also in the Torah world, amongst all segments of society. Especially because politics has become an inseparable part of our lives to the extent that the boundaries between *halachah*, Torah perspectives, and politics has become blurred. Especially when we see a conflict between *Gedolei Yisrael*, one must be careful about what he says because one should not "stand in the place of the great ones" [*Mishlei* 25:6]. We have already seen that the test of whether it is a *machloket* is whether it affects the character traits of an individual and causes hatred amongst Jews; that is a proof that it is strife. Even though it is possible that *Gedolei Yisrael* can have conflicts that are for the sake of Heaven, but the students who are pulled into the conflict act out of personal interest. They are termed *baalei machloket*, as we stated above.

Story About Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l

An example of this can be seen from a story involving Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l. Rav Shlomo Zalman once voiced opposition to a certain institution. The institution had appointed a *menahel* who Rav Shlomo Zalman felt did not meet the religious standards of the institution. Rav Shlomo Zalman did not hesitate to publicly voice his Torah opinion against the institution and the one who headed it. One night, the particular *menahel* visited the house of Rav Shlomo Zalman. His heart was pounding, fearing that Rav Shlomo Zalman would send him away angrily. However, the *rav* received him with a pleasant countenance and showed him honor befitting someone of greater stature. When he left, he accompanied him until the end of his courtyard, and explained that he has nothing against him personally; rather, he is only doing what is best for the institution. When the *rav* returned to his house, he called to his household and said, "I wish to teach you how one conducts a *machloket* for the sake of Heaven, without personal interests in mind." From here you see the difference between a *machloket* and a difference of opinion.

How To Act During a *Machloket*

On the other hand, from the deeds of Moshe and Aharon, the Torah teaches us how to act during a *machloket*. Despite the fact that they slandered them, suspected them of illicit relationships, and made a mockery of all that Moshe said, we do not find that Moshe was dragged into the *machloket* against Korach and his group. He did not try to defeat them or prove that they were mistaken. Rather, he fell on his face and said to them, "In the morning, Hashem will make known who is His." In other words, Moshe was saying, "It is possible that you are correct. We will see what Hashem says tomorrow." This is as our Sages have stated that the world endures because of the one



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who closes his mouth at the time of a quarrel. If he does so, Hashem will come to his aid, as the *pasuk* states, "Hashem will wage war for you, and you will remain silent." Therefore Moshe Rabbeinu did not respond nor try to disprove their mistake. The nature of *machloket* is that each side attempts to prove the error of his fellow and that heightens the *machloket*. Silence, on the other hand, helps to lessen the *machloket*. Therefore the rule is to flee from any type of *machloket* the moment it turns into a product of negative character traits and hatred. All those who get involved will be punished, similar to Korach and his entire assembly.

Words of the Rambam to a Student

In *Sheilot U'Tshuvot Pear Hador* [siman 142], the Rambam writes words of guidance to his student, R' Yosef Aknin regarding the *machloket* that arose surrounding the Rambam's works. The Rambam writes how he should act and respond: "I will not attempt to verbally defeat [those who condemn him]. For the honor of my soul and the level of my character traits are more of an honor for me that defeating the fools with my speech. Hashem claims the honor of a Torah scholar [Berachot 19a], etc."

Through Patience One Get What He Wants

In his will [quoted in the *Sefer Ish Le're'eihu*], Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes that through remaining patient, man attains what he wants more than by acting aggressively. He writes that generally one should act pleasantly with humanity. He should not speak excessively with everyone. He should always greet another and respond pleasantly to everyone. *Sefer Ish Le're'eihu* furthermore quotes the Chazon Ish zt"l as explaining that the reason for his influence on those both close and farther away from Torah, was because he did not speak harshly. Furthermore, he said that if he would raise his voice like a shofar, he would lose any chance of exerting influence on those who were farther away from the Torah path. He added that he loses nothing by acting in such a manner.

Words of Mussar

We have learned that any *machloket* that is a product of negative character traits and not that of clarifying the truth is forbidden. It is possible that both parties will be punished for the strife. On the other hand, there are times when there is an uninvolved party like Moshe Rabbeinu. However, a conflict to discover the truth is not a *machloket*, rather a difference of opinion. However, there are many who justify their *machloket* behind the guise of discovering the truth. This is what Korach did, claiming that the entire nation was holy or that Moshe and Aharon had elevated themselves above the people. He made various other claims as well. Our Sages describe Korach's attempts at luring the nation away from Moshe. He claimed that Moshe did things for his own benefit and brought numerous examples. However, the truth was that it all stemmed from his own personal interest to try and get a drop more honor. The test to determine if it is *machloket* is whether or not this conflict causes hatred amongst Jews. If it does, you know that it is *machloket* and one should flee from it like a fire. The wise one will take this message to heart and understand its ramifications.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka