



KINDER TORAH[®]

701

PARASHAS KORACH

THE PERSONAL CONNECTION

"An argument that is for the sake of Heaven (*li'shaim Shomayim*) will always be valid. And one that is not for the sake of Heaven will ultimately be shown to be invalid. Which argument is for the sake of Heaven? The argument(s) of Hillel and Shammai. Which argument is not for the sake of Heaven? The argument of Korach and his followers" (Pirkei Avos 5:20).

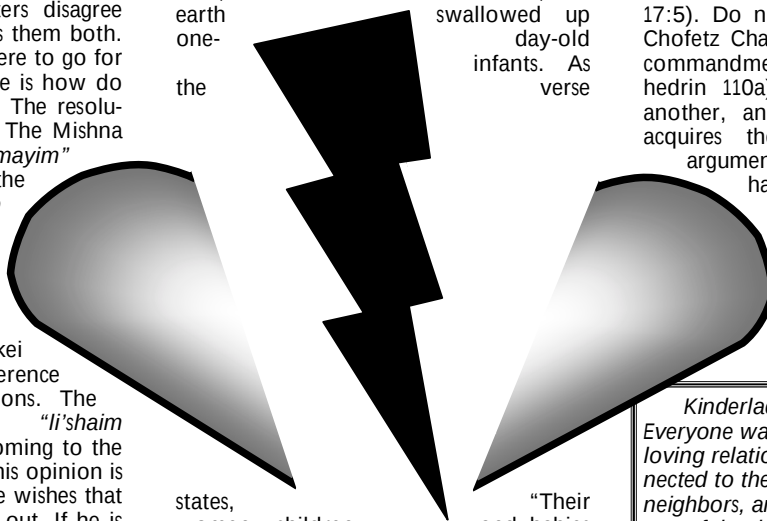
Disagreements are a part of life. Two *chavrusas* (study partners) disagree about *p'shat* (basic meaning) of the Gemora. A husband and wife disagree about which color to paint the walls of the house. Neighbors disagree about renovations in the apartment building. Sisters disagree about wearing a skirt that fits them both. A family cannot agree on where to go for a *tiyul* (outing). The challenge is how do we resolve these differences? The resolution begins with motivation. The Mishna teaches us that "*li'shaim Shomayim*" is the right motivation, and the argument is valid. "*Aino li'shaim Shomayim*" is the wrong motivation resulting in an invalid argument.

The commentary of Rav Ovadiah MiBartenura on Pirkei Avos explains the difference between the two motivations. The person who disagrees "*li'shaim Shomayim*" is interested in coming to the *emmes*. He understands that his opinion is the correct one. Therefore, he wishes that the *emmes* should be carried out. If he is shown to be wrong, he will gladly concede, because he realizes that his point of view was not the *emmes*. Contrast this with the one whose motivation is "*aino li'shaim Shomayim*." He is interested in power or satisfying his desires. He will not give in (unless he can gain more in the future by conceding now) because that contradicts his goal. His opinion, although it may incidentally be true, is based upon his own selfish motivation.

If the disagreement of the *chavrusas* about *p'shat* in the Gemora is "*li'shaim Shomayim*," they will ultimately agree when they come to the *emmes*. If the disagreement of the husband and wife about house painting is "*li'shaim Shomayim*," they will ultimately compromise when they realize that it is not worth sustaining a long-term argument about such a matter. The same is true about the neighbors, sisters, and family *tiyul*. However, if these arguing parties

are "*aino li'shaim Shomayim*" they will stubbornly stick to their opinions and cause countless problems.

How bad is *machlokes*? Terrible. The Torah brings several reasons. The Medrash (Tanchuma Korach 8) teaches us that four types of people are called *re-shayim* (evil). One of them is a *baal machlokes*. Hashem wipes out the memory of one who assists a *machlokes*, as the verse states, "A fire came out from Hashem and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense" (Bamidbar 16:35). Korach's horrible punishment reflects how serious his crime was. The Heavenly *Beis Din* (Court) only punishes offenders over the age of twenty. In addition, the *Beis Din* (Rabbinical Court) in this world only punishes criminals over the age of thirteen. However, in the *machlokes* of Korach, the earth swallowed up day-old infants. As the verse



states, women, children and babies . . . they and all that was theirs descended alive to the pit" (Bamidbar 16:27,33).

How do you spell *machlokes*? The Medrash Rabba (Bamidbar 18:12) relates five points, one for each letter of the word *machlokes*, that show how dreadful an argument really is. "*Mem*" is for *makko* (a beating). "*Ches*" is for *charon* (wrath). "*Lamed*" is for *likuy* (stricken). "*Kuf*" is for *kellalah* (a curse). "*Taf*" is for *toeivah* (abomination). Argument brings beating, anger, plague, curse, and abomination upon a person.

Why is *machlokes* so terrible? On the simplest level, *machlokes* breaks the connections between people. One of the pillars that hold up the world is *gemilus chassodim* - performing acts of kindness. Each act of kindness forges a connection between people. You helped me, therefore I feel gratitude towards you, I like you, I respect you, and I try to reciprocate

the kindness. How wonderful it is to be connected to people! This creates peace and security. *Machlokes* breaks the connections. The Targum Unkelos states that Korach separated himself from Moshe Rabbeinu and ultimately from Klal Yisrael. The disagreement was not resolvable; therefore, it created an irreparable rift. The divisiveness goes even deeper than that. The Malbim explains that even the *baalei machlokes* who are on the same side disagree amongst themselves. They destroy their own connections with their own people. Why? Because each one is really only interested in himself and his own honor.

Therefore, do not think that it is harmless to be stubborn in your daily disagreements in life. The Torah warns against this when it says, "Do not be like Korach and his congregation" (Bamidbar 17:5). Do not sustain a *machlokes*! The Chofetz Chaim counts this as a negative commandment, citing the Gemora (Sanhedrin 110a). One *machlokes* leads to another, and before long, the person acquires the bad *middah* of being argumentative. This will ultimately harm almost all of his relationships with people and degrade the quality of his life, and those around him. That is a crying shame. That is why *machlokes* is so bad. It ruins a person's life.

Kinderlach . . .

Everyone wants to feel the warmth of loving relationships. They want to be connected to their family members, friends, neighbors, and schoolmates. They are peaceful, relaxed, and happy with the people around them. What a wonderful life! *Machlokes* ruins all of that. The person is interested in himself and his interests. Therefore, when ordinary conflicts arise, he refuses to give in. He does not honor the other person or his wishes. Instead of compromising and promoting harmony, he separates himself. He breaks off the relationship. He is now uncomfortable with the person. His heart hurts over the loss. How terrible! That is what *machlokes* does to a person. Avoid it at all costs.

Parasha Questions:

- Why did Moshe fall on his face? (Rashi 16:4)
- How did Moshe begin to speak to Korach and why? (Rashi 16:8)
- How did Korach speak to the people? (Rashi 16:19)
- Did anyone ever die the way that Korach did? (Rashi 16:30)