

UNEDITED INTERNET VERSION

[06.13.2018]

WEEKLY SHMUESS

Parshas Korach

Avoiding Machloches

DRASHAS FROM THE
AUTHOR OF BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH

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Korach – How You Can Avoid Machlokes

Understanding The Negative Power of Machlokes (Dissension)

In *Parashas Korach*, the Torah tells us of Korach's rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. *Chazal* teach us that "An argument that is not for the sake of Heaven – this is the argument of Korach and his followers." Let us reflect into the concept of *machlokes* (arguing and dissension), what its roots are, and what the personal *avodah* in our soul is - of how we can connect ourselves to a reality that is the antithesis to *machlokes*.

The Inner Workings of "Machlokes"

In the way that Hashem has designed the world, there are always details within a whole. The many details in a whole are to be viewed as the parts (*chalakim*) that make up the whole. The whole (*klal*) can include all of the many details (*peratim*) and bind them all together, and by way of the whole, all of the details are interconnected, as opposed to being apart from each other and standing on their own.

But when ruination occurs to the whole, the details become separate from each other, and this very disparateness is already the beginning step of destruction. Instead of the details being *chalakim* (parts) of one whole, they each become a *chalukah* – a division.

To illustrate, when brothers split an inheritance with each other, this is called a *chalukah*. The monies of their father had been one unit, and until the inheritance, each brother was entitled to a rightful portion in his father's monies. Now that they are

splitting up the inheritance and each brother is taking his own share, the money now becomes divided between them; the money has gone from being a *cheilek* (part) to a *chalukah* (division).

A further level of disparity occurs when the division becomes that of *machlokes* (dissension). In a situation of *machlokes*, the brothers will want to take the portions of their other brothers, either totally or at least some of it. A brother may feel entitled to take another sibling's portion either out of malicious intent, or because he is simply blinded by a lust for more money, or he has some rationalization of why he feels deserving of this money. In either case, he wants the portion that is designated for another.

The opposite of *machlokes* is the concept of *someiach b'chelko*, one who is "happy with his portion". When a person can appreciate his own portion and he feels happy with whatever he has received, he is far from *machlokes*, because *machlokes* thrives on a desire to take another's portion, but if one is happy with his own portion, he feels no need to take another's portion.

Now that we understand that, we can see that there are two root attitudes that are responsible for *machlokes*.

One attitude that shapes *machlokes* is when a person doesn't recognize what his own portion is. Another attitude that forms *machlokes* is, that even if a person does recognize what his own portion is, if he isn't happy with it, he will want to take another's portion.

In order for one to be happy with what he has, he has to first recognize what his own portion is. After recognizing what he has, he then has to be happy with it. When one does not recognize what his portion is in the first place, he cannot be happy with it, because he doesn't know what he has, and then he may want to enter into *machlokes* in order to be satisfied. Conversely, when one can recognize what he has, he can be happy with it, and then he has essentially uprooted the entire idea of *machlokes* from his perspective.

Machlokes – A Child's Perspective

Now we will explore this from a subtler perspective.

In the episode of Korach's rebellion, the Heavenly Court decided that all of those who took part in the *machlokes* must incur the death penalty, including the children - a matter which requires explanation. Why were even the children sentenced to die?

The *Maharal* explained that when a person is a "*baal machlokes*" (a collaborator of dissension), he invites *Gehinnom* (hell) upon himself, and not because this is a punishment, but because his very being is connected with *Gehinnom*, when he allows himself to be connected with the very idea of *machlokes*.

We can also offer the following deep perspective.

Chazal define a minor as "one who still relies upon his father's table" – anyone who is financially dependent on his father is considered to be a minor, even if he is a fully grown adult. The depth of this matter is because a child can only take from others, and he has no portion of his own. Take a look at the average child. Children are not happy with what they have, and they will always want to

take away what others have. This is the way Hashem has made the world, and this is the natural orientation of a child. Besides for the problem of not recognizing others' boundaries, and for a simple lack of decent behavior, there is a deeper reason why children often want to take what others have: they do not recognize what they have, and they cannot recognize that others have their own portion. They do not understand that each person has his allotted share; they cannot relate to this. Therefore, children want everything for themselves.

This is total immaturity (*katnus mochin*), and when a person as an adult still hasn't grown past this immature orientation – this total level of *katnus mochin* – he is still living within the "world of disparity" (*alma d'piruda*), and he cannot connect to others, because he thinks that everything must become his. He is totally immersed in his own life, in his own details that he considers important, without connecting them to the greater whole.

That is why *Chazal* define a person as a "minor" as long as he relies on parental support – it is because he has no portion of his own, and all he can do is take from others. A child has no shame to keep receiving from his parents, it doesn't feel to him like "bread of shame"¹, and he will keep asking his parents for more and more things. (Teenagers and adult children may do this too, but that is a separate topic). A child's constant reliance on his parents is not simply because he lacks *daas* (mature understanding), which is also true,

1 The Ramchal in sefer Daas Tevunos explains that the reason why Hashem created the system of reward and punishment is so that the reward shouldn't feel to our soul as "nahama d'kisufa", "bread of shame"; that we shouldn't feel ashamed when we receive our eventual reward, because this would detract from the enjoyment of our reward.

but because he thinks that everything in his surroundings must belong to him.

That is the child's thinking, and this is the immature perspective of *katnus mochin* which may remain in an adult who hasn't grown past the child's perspective: "Everything belongs to me." It is like the person in the *Mishnah* who says, "What's mine, is mine; and what is yours, is mine" – he does not recognize that there is such a thing as his own portion and the portion of others.

Such a person invites *Gehinnom* upon himself, as the *Maharal* explains, because *Gehinnom* is a situation of disconnectedness from anything else other than the person's own existence – and that is exactly *Gehinnom*. Unlike Gan Eden, which is a place where Torah scholars sit and learn Torah together, place of connection and friendship, *Gehinnom* is called *Tzeil-Maves* (the shadow of death), because it is a deathlike existence, a place where there is entirely "*alma d'piruda*", the world of disparity.

A person who cannot connect to others is called a "*bar Gehinnom*", someone who is destined for *Gehinnom*, and this is the depth of the *Maharal's* words that *Gehinnom* is not a 'punishment' for one who engages in *machlokes* – rather, it becomes the very reality for one who places himself in this "*Gehinnom*"-like state of existence: the immature perspective that is called "*katnus mochin*".

The Rampant Amount of Machlokes Today

There is a force in the world called *machlokes* (dissension), and let us try to understand it.

When Korach rose up against Moshe to argue with him, this was not just against

Moshe. It was against the entire *Klal Yisrael*, for Moshe is the root of all souls in the Jewish people. Therefore, when Korach instigated the *machlokes*, the damage he had done was that he engraved the idea of *machlokes* into every soul in the Jewish people. Ever since then, we have been afflicted with the negative character trait of *machlokes*.

Our generation is far away from when we stood at Har Sinai, when we were on a level of perfection. The spiritual level of the generations has been descending ever since, and currently, we are in a generation where there is total *katnus* (immaturity). Our generation is like a child, who does not recognize his own portion or the allotted portion of others.

It is possible that a person learned Torah, keeps all the *mitzvos*, and even does *chessed*, yet he can be very far from his own self - he has no self-recognition at all. He hides underneath the "cloak" of Torah, *mitzvos*, *chessed*, and *kedushah* (holiness) yet he justifies his involvement in *machlokes*, thinking that this is all in the name of Torah and *kedushah*. He might even claim that it is all for the sake of "making *shalom*" (peace), but this can just be another disguise for *machlokes*.

In the times we live in, the world is filled with *machlokes*.

The first *Beis HaMikash* was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins, and the second *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed to baseless hatred.² These sins were not just commonplace in those times – they were everywhere; they filled the world. In the times of the first *Beis HaMikdash*, idolatry was so rampant that the *Gemara* says that every rooftop in Jerusalem had an idol. In the times of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, the world was

steeped in baseless hatred, and that has been the situation ever since, as anyone with even a little bit of sensibility can see.

Machlokes fills every corner of the world today! It is everywhere, and the only question is how much, and to what extent. But *machlokes* is found in every place in the world today. It is not simply that each person wants his own *chalukah* (divided portion) – today, it goes further than that. Today, people are demanding the portions of others – because they do not recognize their own portion that they have.

A person may go to a *din Torah* today in *Beis Din* and win the case, but that doesn't necessarily mean that in Heaven he has won. The *Beis Din* here may tell him he is entitled to a certain portion, but in Heaven, they know that it is not his real portion....

When a person doesn't search for the inner world found within him, he has not found his own "portion". The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that "man is obligated to make true and clarify his obligation on his world" – the emphasis is on the "his", because each person must find his own unique portion on this world, and that is his personal, unique obligation.

Peace – External and Internal

Moshiach will come to the world and make peace throughout the entire world. This will not be just peace in the external sense, but the inner meaning of peace. External peace is when people are behaving peacefully towards each other, and we certainly should strive for this; as important as this is, it is not yet the main part of the peace process.

Chazal teach that Aharon *HaKohen* "love peace and pursued peace, loved people, and drew them close to Torah." He helped others

be peaceful to each other, and this was the external part of the peace, but he didn't stop there – he also "drew them close to Torah." This refers to the inner meaning of peace, which is to reach one's own portion – Aharon *HaKohen* helped people reach their own unique portion, and then there could be true peace between everyone. Aharon *HaKohen* didn't just pursue peace. That would have been external peace alone, and the external layer of peace without the inner layer of peace is sorely lacking.

Of course, we should all strive for even external peaceful behavior towards others, even if it is missing the inner level; it is wonderful to behave peacefully towards others. But we must also strive for the inner layer of peace. *Shalom* (peace) comes from the word *shleimus* (completion). Each part of Creation is a part of a greater whole, and when all the parts are unified, the Creation is whole. If each person recognizes his own portion and he can also recognize that others have their own unique portion, this is the inner level of *shalom*.

The inner level of *shalom* (peace) is to see a connectedness in Creation, how each part in Creation makes up a greater whole. It is to see a unified, connected Creation – to recognize that each part in Creation is joined and connected with all the other parts in Creation.

Avoiding Machlokes By Remaining Connected To Your Inner World

The more a person lives inwardly and truthfully, the further he is from *machlokes*. He realizes that whatever he has is from Hashem, and whatever is taken from him is also from Hashem. Even if his rightful portion gets taken away from him, he is aware that "*Hashem has given, and Hashem has taken.*" A

person can learn to live with his own inner world, and that is his true portion on this world. With such a perspective, in most situations, he will be far from entering *machlokes*.

Even if he is forced to somehow take sides in a *machlokes*, he will be unaffected by it. It might seem as if he is being hurt – he might have to incur financial loss, and his honor might be attacked, and people may humiliate him. But no one can damage the person’s inner world.

If a person will lose money due to a lack of aggressiveness in the *machlokes*, there is no obligation of “*hishtadlus* (effort)” upon him to try to get himself the money. Being involved in a *machlokes* is not called *hishtadlus*!

The world is filled with lies, flattery, and all kind of falsehood. This is not only referring to the secular world out there, but it is also true even within our own inner circles. We must be wary of this and avoid any *machlokes*, and to realize that being involved in a *machlokes* is not considered doing *hishtadlus* to make money. This attitude is the opposite of the general attitude of the world today, which is filled with all kinds of situations of *machlokes*.

People who live inwardly and truthfully will not enter a *machlokes*, and even more so, they are far from the very idea of *machlokes*. The great *tzaddikim* didn’t become involved with *machlokes* not just because they had great *ahavas Yisrael* (which was also true), but because they were far from the pettiness of *machlokes*. When a person is clear that he is *someiach b’chelko* (happy with his lot) – when he clearly feels joyful in his own portion on this world – he already avoids most situations of *machlokes*. He is far from demanding his own honor. And if he incurs financial loss rather than involve himself in a *machlokes* to

try to get money, he understands that “*Hashem has given, and Hashem has taken.*”

In Conclusion

When we look at the world today, either we can see a world full of pains, aches, and lowliness – that is the world today that is full of *machlokes* – or we can see a pure world in front of us, when we are connected to our own inner world.

When one discovers his own unique portion on this world – his own inner world that is unique only to him – he can then reach the level of *emunas chachamim*, trusting the Sages; and specifically, to have *emunas chachamim* in the wise leaders of our own generation. And, more importantly, one can have *emunah* in *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who Was, Is, and Will always Be.