

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
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*Korach*





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## Parshas Korach

In *parashas Pinchas* (26:11) the Torah tells us, *ובני קרח לא מתו*, “Korach’s children didn’t die.” They did *teshuvah*, and their *teshuvah* was accepted.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* תשנ"ב) states the first step of their *teshuvah*:

“They were sitting with their father, Korach, when they saw Moshe. They put their faces to the ground and said to one another, ‘If we stand up for Moshe, that will insult our father, and we are obligated to honor him (*kibud av ve’eim*). But if we don’t stand up for Moshe, we will be slighting Moshe, and we are obligated to honor him, as it states (*Vayikra* 19:39), *מפני שיבה תקום*, ‘stand up before a Torah scholar...’ They decided that it is more important to stand up for Moshe Rabbeinu, which they did. The Midrash

concludes, “Already then, they had thoughts of *teshuvah*.”

When the earth swallowed them, their *teshuvah* reached a higher level. Chazal say that as the earth swallowed Korach’s children, they did *teshuvah*.<sup>1</sup>

Rashi (*Bamidbar* 26:12) writes, “Korach’s children were there from the beginning of the *machlokes*, but then they regretted, and did *teshuvah*. Therefore, a high place rose in Gehinom, and they lived there.”

Some say that from that high altitude, they were able to climb out, and return to the earth (see *Mizrachi*). This fits well with the Midrash that says they did *teshuvah* and became *nevi'im*. It also explains how Korach has descendants.<sup>2</sup>

Others state that the children of Korach remain underground. The Gemara (*ibid.*)

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1. Moshe said the earth would open its mouth *שאוּלָה חַיִּים*, and they will fall live into the depths” (16:30).

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* asks, why did Moshe want them to fall in while alive? Wouldn’t it be less painful if they fell into the grave dead?

The answer is, Moshe wanted them to have a few more moments to do *teshuvah*. The children of Korach took advantage of these few moments, and did *teshuvah* (*Margalis HaYam, Sanhedrin* 109: 4).

2. Korach had many descendants. As Rashi (16:6) writes, “Korach, who was wise, what brought him to do this foolishness? He saw wrong. He saw a large chain of descendants coming from him, including Shmuel who is counted as an equal with Moshe and Aharon. He said, ‘In his merit, I will be saved.’ From his grandchildren, there will come twenty-four sets of *levi'im* (*משמרות*) all of them will have *ruach hakadosh*. As it states (*I Divrei HaYamim* 28), *כל אלו בנים להימן*. Korach said, ‘Could it be that all this greatness will come from me, and I will remain silent? Therefore, he relied on Moshe’s statement, that all of them will die, and only one — the one Hashem chooses to be holy — will survive. He mistakenly thought he would be the one. He didn’t see well, because his children did *teshuvah*. Moshe saw well.”

says that every thirty days the people who were swallowed in the ground shout, משה אמת ותורתו אמת והן בדאין, “Moshe and his Torah is true, and we are false.” These commentaries explain that Korach’s children say this. According to this view, they began doing *teshuvah* when Moshe came before them, their *teshuvah* increased as they were being swallowed into the earth, and they continue doing *teshuvah*, from under the earth, until today.

In any event, according to all explanations, we see that they did *teshuvah* and their *teshuvah* was accepted. The Trisker Maggid *zt’l* said that this is the reason we say, למנצה לבני קרה מזמור, “The song of Korach’s

children...” on Rosh Hashanah, before *tekiyas shofar*. This is to remind us that *teshuvah* is always accepted, regardless of the severity of the *aveiros*. Just as Korach’s children repented, and their *teshuvah* was accepted, so can everyone do *teshuvah*, and it will be accepted.<sup>3</sup>

Among Korach’s primary supporters were 250 heads of *Sanhedrin* (see *Rashi* 16:1). We wonder about the following points:

1] The Arizal teaches that one should make a *cheshbon hanefesh* and review his deeds every night before going to sleep.<sup>4</sup> The 250 heads of *Sanhedrin* were initially great *tzaddikim*, who certainly checked their deeds every day before

3. Moshe said to Klal Yisrael (16:29), בזאת תדעון כי ה' שלחני לעשות את כל המעשים האל כי לא, בליבי, “With the following you shall know that Hashem sent me to do these deeds [to appoint Aharon as *cohen gadol*, his children as the *cohen gadol*’s assistants (סגני כהונה), and Elitzafon as the *nasi* of Kehos] and I didn’t act on my own. ופקדת. אלה, אם כמות כל האדם ימותון אלה, “If they will die like all people die, and the decree of death will be on them as it is decreed on all mankind, Hashem didn’t send me. ואם בריאה יבא ה' ה' ופצתה האדמה את פיה ובלעה אותם ואת כל אשר להם וירדו חיים שאולה, but if Hashem will make a new creation, and the earth will open its mouth, and swallow them and everything they have, and they will go, living, into the abyss, וידעתם כי נאצו האנשים האלה את ה' then you shall know that these people angered Hashem.”

The Rebbe of Chechonov *zt’l* asked, how is a natural death a sign that Hashem didn’t send Moshe to do those deeds? If Dasan and Aviram would have done *teshuvah* right then, while Moshe was rebuking them, they would have died a natural death, even though Moshe was sent by Hashem. The answer is, the *pasuk* says, אם כמות כל האדם ימותון אלה, “If they will die like all people die...” The word אלה, “they” implies “as they are now.”

Because Chazal say, when one does *teshuvah*, he becomes a new person, like a newly born child. If they had done *teshuvah*, they wouldn’t be אלה, the same. Moshe said, אם כמות כל האדם ימותון אלה, “If the very same people die a normal death, that’s a sign that Hashem didn’t send Moshe.

4. The Arizal also taught that on *erev Shabbos* one should make a *cheshbon hanefesh* on how he acted during the week. On *erev Rosh Chodesh* one should review how the month passed, and on *erev Rosh Hashanah*, one should review his deeds of the entire year.

retiring for the night. The night of the *machlokes*, they certainly thought about whether their part in this *machlokes* was inspired from the *yetzer hara* or from the *yetzer tov*. After introspection, they should have realized that they sinned. So why did they carry on the *machlokes* in the morning?

2] Moshe said to the 250 heads of Sanhedrin, “This is what you shall do: Take pans... Put fire in them, and place *ketores* on the fire...” (16:6-7).

Rashi explains that Moshe told them, “The *ketores* is the most cherished service — more beloved than all the other *korbanos*. But there’s poison in it. Nadav and Avihu died from it... I warn you, don’t be responsible for your own lives. Only the chosen one [to be *cohen gadol*] will survive. Everyone else will die.”

Rashi (16:7) writes, “They weren’t fools, they understood the warning. So why did they bring the *ketores*? המאו על נפשותם (17:3) They committed suicide.”

The question is, why did they commit suicide?

3] Hashem said the copper of these *מהחות*, pans, should be flattened, and used to coat the *mizbeiach*. Why? What lesson did this teach Klal Yisrael?

All these questions are asked by the Arugas Habosem (ר"ה ולא יהיה בקרח).

He explains that the 250 people, heads of the Sanhedrin, were certainly *tzaddikim*. Moshe told them (16:5), בוקר וידע ה' את אשר, “Tomorrow Hashem

will let know who is His...” because he wanted them to have a night to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* and to recognize that they erred by joining up with Korach.

Indeed, that night they looked through their deeds and realized they sinned. They were heartbroken. They regretted with all their heart being part of this terrible *machlokes*, fighting with Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest prophet; with Aharon, the one chosen by Hashem; and ultimately with Hashem Who chose them and appointed them to their positions (see 16:11).

So, if they knew they were wrong, why did they bring the *ketores* in the morning? It is because they would rather die than to be unable to stand before Hashem to serve Him, due to their sin. The Arugas HaBosem explains that they didn’t believe Hashem would forgive them. They brought the *ketores* knowing they will die. They couldn’t imagine living with this sin on their soul, banished forever from *avodas Hashem*.

That deep remorse was *teshuvah* from love, and everything was corrected, but they didn’t realize that. They didn’t believe that Hashem accepted their *teshuvah*, and that was their error.

Hashem said to cover the *mizbeaich* with the copper of those pans. This tells us that when one does *teshuvah* out of love, even grave sins, such as the sin of *machlokes*, become a *mitzvah*.

The Arugas HaBosem writes:

“Moshe said, בוקר וידע ה', [the test of the *machtos* should take place in the

morning] because all of these 250 heads of Sanhedrin were tzaddikim and Moshe Rabbeinu knew they would make a *cheshbon hanefesh* for everything they did that day [before going to sleep]. And that is what happened. They all did *teshuvah*. But they were terribly ashamed. They thought, ‘How can we stand before the King, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, after we sinned before Him?’ As a result, they chose death over life. Their desire to live is solely to serve Hashem, but they were so ashamed of what they did, they lost hope of ever serving Hashem again.

“But Hashem Yisbarach’s hand is always stretched out to accept *teshuvah*. They didn’t have to worry. Since they were so ashamed, the primary part of *teshuvah* was already accomplished. As Chazal (*Brachos* 7.) say, מובה מרדות אחת בלבו של אדם, ‘It is good, an intense feeling of regret...’ [They had their atonement through their shame and] were suited to serve Hashem. Rashi writes, הם חטאו בנפשותם, ‘They sinned for giving themselves over to die.’ They should have trusted in Hashem’s kindness, that He forgives sins.

“Hashem desired that *baalei teshuvah* shouldn’t lose hope and say, ‘Yesterday, I was disgusted before Hashem because of my sins. How can I ever stand before the holy great King again and do His service? This is the reason Hashem commanded that the pans (מחרות) should cover the *mizbeiach*. This shows that with immense regret, one turns everything into mitzvos.”

In *Shemonah Esrei* we say, הרוצה בתשובה, Hashem desires *teshuvah*. Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa *zt'l* notes that we don’t say, המתרצה בתשובה, “Hashem becomes appeased with *teshuvah*.” We say, הרוצה בתשובה, Hashem desires *teshuvah*. The Yismach Yisrael (*Purim* 8) writes, “The holy tzaddik, Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshesicha *zt'l* explained the *brachah* הרוצה בתשובה, “Who desires *teshuvah*” ... It is as though even the *aveirah* was Hashem’s will. When one does *teshuvah* from love, it becomes revealed למפרע, that when he committed the sin, he didn’t transgress Hashem’s will.”

#### ***Tefillah* of Low People**

Moshe said (16:15), אל תפן אל מנחתם.

The Ramban explains that מנחה means *korbanos* and prayers. Moshe prayed that Hashem shouldn’t accept the *korbanos* of the 250 heads of *Sanhedrin*, nor should He accept their prayers.

Some explain the 250 men were praying that Korach should be the *cohen gadol*. Moshe prayed את תפן אל מנחתם, "Don't listen to their prayers."

Apparently, the *tefillos* of the 250 men would have been answered and Korach would become the *cohen gadol*, had Moshe’s not contested it with prayer. This is because Hashsem listens to the prayers of everyone.

They made a *machlokes* against Moshe and Aharon, nevertheless, their *tefillos* had the potential to grant them their heart’s desires. Such is the power of *tefillah*!

Reb Dov Cohen lost many of his children to illnesses. Rebbe Pinchas of Koretz *zt'l* told him, “My dear friend, I beg you: How do you allow children to die? Don’t you believe that even the greatest *rasha*, if he prays a lot to Hashem, can receive whatever he wants?”

Reb Moshe Kobriner *zt'l* said, “If a person isn’t able to pray to Hashem even immediately after he committed very severe sins, he hasn’t passed the threshold of *avodas Hashem*.”

*Tefillah* is called, *בחרבי ובקשתי*, “My sword and my arrow” (*Bereishis* 48:22). Why? Whoever carries a sword or arrow can succeed to use it. Even a fool that carries a sword can potentially harm and kill the enemy with it. *Tefillah* is called “my sword, my arrow” because it doesn’t make a difference who is using this tool called *tefillah*. It could be a fool; it could even be a sinner. Regardless of who is davening, his *tefillah* will take effect.

Furthermore, a person at war who doesn’t have a sword or a bow-and-arrow in his hand, is totally lost. He is in the battlefield without his weapons! This is how one should feel when he lacks *tefillah*. He doesn’t have the tools necessary to battle against the *yetzer hara*! Therefore, *tefillah* is called *חרבי וקשתי*, sword and arrow.

The Torah (*Shemos* 23) discusses the mitzvah of *perikah*, to help unload a donkey that collapsed under its heavy load.

Reb Yehudah of Assad *zt'l* said, “It is

known that Hakodosh Baruch Hu keeps the entire Torah. He therefore certainly keeps the mitzvah of *פריקה*, and He will unload us from our troubles.

If one says, “But I’m a sinner. Why should Hashem unload my troubles?” The answer is, the mitzvah of *פריקה* is to help even sinners. As it states (*Shemos* 23:5), *כי תראה חמור שנאך רובץ תחת משאו*, ‘If you see your enemy’s donkey collapsed under its load.’ The Gemara (*Pesachim* 113:) asks, “How is it possible that there is someone you hate? Isn’t it forbidden to hate another Yid?”

The answer is: The *pasuk* is referring to a sinner, and there is a mitzvah to hate him. Even for him, there is a mitzvah of *פריקה*.

The only issue is that it must be *כי תפגע*, “If you meet” (*Shemos* 23:4). Chazal teach that this means the obligation to help unload the donkey is solely when you meet the donkey when it is collapsing under its load. If you see a buckled donkey from the distance, you aren’t obligated to go to the donkey to help.

Hashem will certainly keep the mitzvah of *פריקה* and redeem us from all our troubles, but it is up to each individual to be close to Hashem. If one is distant from Hashem, the mitzvah doesn’t apply.

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 31.) states that after the *Churban*, Hashem *keviyachol* left the earth. How can one become close to Hashem? The answer is through *tefillah*. As it states (*Tehillim* 145:18), *קרוב ה' לכל קוראיו*, “Hashem is close to whoever calls Him.” By

davening, one becomes close to Hashem, and Hashem will keep the mitzvah of פריקה and save us from our hardships.<sup>5</sup>

Once, Reb Yehudah Leib Kostelanitz *zt'l* traveled the long, hard journey from his home in Teveria to his Rebbe, the Divrei Shmuel *zt'l* of Slonim. He began his journey on a donkey, from Teveria to Chaifa. From Chaifa's port, he sailed to Odessa. The port in Odessa had a train station, which brought him all the way to Grodna. And then he hired a horse and buggy to bring him to Slonim. The trip was long but uneventful. Finally in Slonim, Reb Yehudah Leib made the most of every moment, basking in the light of his Rebbe, the Divrei Shmuel.

On the way back home, on the train from Grodna to Odessa, he had very great stomach pains. He was old, and he often had stomach problems, but now he was traveling, only at the beginning of his journey, and he was very worried how he would manage.

Someone heard him moaning and asked whether he can help. When he understood that that there was nothing he could do, he said a brief *vort*: It states (*Tehillim* 89:27), הוא יקראני אבי אתה, when a person recognizes that Hashem is our Father, א-לי וצור ישועתי, then

Hashem saves him.”

This *vort* resonated with Reb Yehudah Leib. He understood that one must acknowledge that Hashem is our Father and everything happens by His *hashgachah*, and for the good. With this realization, one is redeemed from all his troubles. He began shouting, מאמאני העלפמ! “Father help! Father Help!” and the pains immediately left him.

Throughout the rest of the train ride, and later on the ship, he kept on shouting “*Tatenyu helft* – Hashem help!”

Reb Yehuda Leib said he never had such an easy trip. The entire way (aside from the hard beginning) was peaceful and tranquil. For example, when he debarked the train and he needed help to carry his bags from the train to the ship, a gentile lad offered, to carry the bags. He didn't even want money for it. There weren't any storms or strong winds on the sea voyage, which is rare. Debarking in Chaifa, an Arab boy offered to carry all of his bags on a mule, straight to Reb Yehuda Leib's home in Teveria.

Throughout all this time, Reb Yehuda Leib kept repeating, “*Tatenyu helft* – Father help!” Because when one knows א-לי וצור ישועתי, that Hashem is our father,

5. Once, a wagon driver made a bad turn, and the wagon turned over. Riding in the wagon was the great tzaddik and scholar, Reb Yehuda Assad *zt'l* (known as the Mahar"i Asad). He had to climb out from under the wagon. The wagon driver said to the Mahari Asad, “If you had said *tefillas haderech* with *kavanah*, this wouldn't happen.”

The Mahar"i Assad replied, “How do you know that I'm at fault? Maybe I said the *brachah* with *kavanah*, only the *tefillas* weren't answered yet. I see that you davened this morning, אתה חונן לאדם דעת...חננו מאתך חכמה בינה ודעת, and your *tefillas* weren't answered yet...”

immediately, א-לי וצור ישועתי, Hashem is present to save us.

### Good Jealousy

Korach's problem was jealousy, but it is important to know that there is a good jealousy. As Chazal say, קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה, jealousy increases wisdom. When you see others more advanced in Torah than you, it ignites your jealousy, and brings you to emulate them.

However, one must be cautious that he doesn't try to be exactly like others, because Hashem wants a different *avodah* from each person. Good jealousy means to be jealous of others who serve Hashem well, and to seek to serve Hashem superbly, in your individual way.

A jealous ox once stood in the field and watched the eagles soar gracefully in the sky. The ox also wanted to fly, so it climbed up a mountain, waited for a strong wind, and jumped.

It isn't necessary to spell out the end of the story. A wiser ox would say, "I'm jealous of the eagles who use their wings so well. I will therefore use my horns well, and I will use my strength to do what I can do."

Jealousy can be used to ignite your passion and desire to grow. But always keep in mind the ideal, to grow in your path without trying to be exactly like others.

Chazal (*Avos* 4:21) say, הקנאה התאוה והכבוד, מוציאן את האדם מן העולם, "Jealousy, temptation, and honor take a person out of the world." Some compare these three

*middos* (קנאה תאוה כבוד) to three powerful horses. If you use them correctly, you can travel long distances with them. But if you let the horses lead you wherever they want, they will ruin your life and dump you somewhere in a distant pit.

The *nimshal* is: Jealousy, temptation, and honor have a good side. They can be utilized for good purposes, but one must be cautious with them, to use them correctly, as they can also be hazardous. They are called מדות, measurements, because they need to be used in the right measure, in the right places.

A fire can be good. One cooks and heats his house with fire. But if one isn't careful with fire, and it gets out of hand, it can burn the house down. Jealousy is the same. If one isn't cautious with it, it can cause much heartache.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88-89) says that when Hashem gave the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu, the *malachim* complained that they want the Torah. Hakaodsh Baruch told Moshe to answer the *malachim*. Moshe said, קנאה יש בניכם... יצר הרע יש בניכם... "Do you have jealousy...? Do you have a *yetzer hara*...?"

We can ask, isn't jealousy an aspect of the *yetzer hara*? Why is it listed separately?

We can explain that Moshe was telling the *malachim*, "You don't have jealousy (קנאה) and without it you can't receive the Torah. Because the path towards acquiring Torah is קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה, "The jealousy of the scholars increases wisdom."

The Midrash (*Shochar Tov, Tehillim* 37) states: Hakadosh Baruch Hu says... If it weren't for *kinah*, the world wouldn't exist: No one would marry; no one would build a house. If it weren't for *kinah*, Avraham wouldn't have acquired heaven and earth. When did Avraham have *kinah*? He met מלכי צדק [Shem] and asked him, "How did you leave the *teivah*?"

Shem replied, "It was in the merit of *tzedakah*, that we did there."

Avraham asked, "Which *tzedakah* did you do in the *teivah*? Were there poor people in the *teivah*? Only Noach and his children were there."

Shem replied, "We did *tzedakah* with the cattle, wild animals, and birds. We didn't sleep. We fed the animals all day long and all night."

Avraham said, "If it weren't for the *tzedakah* they did with the animals, they couldn't leave the *teivah*. Because of their kindness to the animals they were saved. If I do kindness for human beings, it will be even greater!"

That was when Avraham pitched his אש"ל in Be'er Sheva, which stands for אכילה, שתיה, לינה, and began his lifelong mission of *hachnasas orchim*.

The Orchos Tzaddikim tells this Midrash and concludes, "Jealousy, such as this one, is good, as it brings more goodness into the world. Unlike many other kinds of jealousy, which brings destruction to

the world.... Everyone should have this kind of jealousy."

#### From Your Place...

Rebbe Dovid of Lelov ז"ל said, "If Korach knew he could create a *nachas ruach* for Hashem by serving Him behind the oven of the beis medresh that is<sup>6</sup> just as special as the service of the *cohen gadol* on Yom Kippur, he would not have made the *machlokes*."

Everyone is created differently. Some are geniuses, while others have simple minds; some have time to study Torah all day long, while others are only able to study for a few moments a day. There are people who were brought up in a home basked in Torah and *yiras shamayim*, and there are people who were raised in irreligious homes. Everyone has their own, individual set of *middos* and character traits. Similarly, there are many other variables that differentiate people. However, we must know that whatever the circumstances, if we do our best to serve Hashem from there, we can create a *nachas ruach* for Hashem, just like the greatest people of our nation. Korach didn't know this. He thought the *cohen gadol* could serve Hashem better than he, and therefore he made the *machlokes*. If he knew that he has potential to do great things for Hashem from the place where Hashem placed him, he would have been satisfied with his lot, and not lead a *machlokes*.<sup>7</sup>

6. In Europe, the beis medresh had an oven to provide heat. Generally, the simple people would daven behind the oven, to warm themselves from the cold.

7. Tzaddikim are humble even when they are with simple people because they remember

The Gemara says that when Hashem created the world, He first asked each creature whether it agrees to be created. As Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 11) say, לדעתן ונבראו, "The entire creation was created in accordance to their will..."

Rashi writes, "[Hashem] asked them if they want to be created, and they replied, 'yes!'"

When Hashem wanted to create the earth, the earth agreed. This is implied by the word ארץ, as the Midrash says, "Why is it called ארץ? Because רצתה לעשות רצון קונה, it wanted to do Hashem's Will." (*Bereishis Rabba* 5:7)

The earth is very physical; quite distant from the spiritual heavens. Yet, it agreed to be created this way, because it knew that this was Hashem's Will. The earth didn't protest and say, "Why can't I be like the angels in heaven? Why must I be so physical and distant from spirituality?" The earth realized that by being created this way, she will be doing

Hashem's Will. Hashem's Will in the world wouldn't be complete without the earth, and therefore the earth agreed to fill this position.

The Arugas HaBosem (*Bereishis* 24:3) writes, "We should learn *mussar* from this. One shouldn't complain and say *why can't I be among those who sit in the beis medresh all day? Or, why did Hashem create me with a weak mind? Why didn't Hashem make me sharp and intelligent? If Hashem made me that way, I would certainly serve Hashem better.* Because it is certain that since Hashem created him this way, he can only reach his perfection in this manner..."

We add that this explains why Korach was punished by being swallowed up by the earth. The earth's specialty was רצתה לעשות רצון קונה, it wanted to do Hashem's Will even when the mission appeared lowly. Korach, who didn't grasp this truth, was swallowed up by the earth, which did.

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that it is possible that these simple people are creating a *nachas ruach* to Hashem better than they. Whoever does his maximum, in the situation he is in, is equal to the *cohen gadol* on Yom Kippur.

Rebbe Hershel of Ziditchov *zt'l* taught another thought, which tzaddikim can use to attain humility. He said: One separates a small percentage (1/50th) of his crop for *terumah*. The *terumah* becomes holy and has several halachos: Only a *cohen* may eat it, it may not become *tamei*, and so on.

Everyone understands that the produce that was designated for *terumah* was the same as the rest of the crop. It didn't have a greater *kedushah*, but when it was chosen and separated it became holy. Similarly, when someone is chosen to be a Rebbe, or a leader, he should consider himself to be essentially equal to everyone else. He should think that his "position" made him unique, and not because of whom he is.

This is alluded to in the *pasuk*, נחשב לכם תרומתכם, Your exalted position, should be considered, כדגן מן הגורן וכמלאה מן היקב, like grain that was separated for *terumah*.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 35) tells us of a famous disagreement between Reb Shimon bar Yochai and Reb Yishmael as to how people should lead their lives. According to Reb Shimon bar Yochai, one should learn Torah all day long, and shouldn't be concerned with *parnassah*. Reb Yishmael however says, הנהג בהן דרך ארץ, "Conduct [yourself] with Torah in the way of the world."

According to Reb Yishmael, in addition to Torah study, one should follow the ways of earth and work for a living. He called it דרך ארץ (and he didn't call it, for example, דרך העולם) because the specialty of the ארץ is that it wants to do Hashem's will, even when it doesn't appear glorious.

People would prefer to study Torah all day — and it is good for people to aspire for this privilege — yet, one must also know that he can sanctify Hashem's name and make a *nachas ruach* (pleasure) to Hashem in whatever position Hashem places him.

The Gemara (*Tanis* 21) tells us that Abba Umna would receive greetings from heaven every day. Abaya would receive this greeting once a week, on *erev Shabbos*. Rava received the greeting once

a year, on *erev Yom Kippur*. Abaya was upset that Abba Umna was receiving more greetings than him. Heaven told Abaya, "You can't do what Abba Umna does..." and the Gemara explains at length that Abba Umna was a doctor who treated his patients with generosity, *tznius*, and with extra respect for Torah scholars. Therefore, he received daily greetings from heaven.

Some explain that Heaven told Abaya, "You can't do as Abba Umna does because each person has his own role in life, and it is impossible for one to copy the role of others." If Abaya would copy Abba Umna, he would lose his greatness, and he would never reach the levels that Abba Umna had. One maximizes his potential and greatness specifically in the place where Hashem put him.

The Mishnah (*Avos* 4:3) says, אין לך אדם, שאין לו שעה ואין לך דבר שאין לו מקום, "Everyone has his time, and everything has its place." Everyone was created differently. When they serve Hashem from the place in life that Hashem put them, they will reach the highest levels.<sup>8</sup>

### Speech

The Midrash (18:3) tells that Korach asked Moshe whether a house filled

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8. Rashi (16:5) writes, "Moshe told Korach, 'Hashem set boundaries in the world. Can you turn morning into night? Similarly, you are unable to change [Hashem's choice, that he chose to make Ahron the *cohen gadol*].'"

Night never complained about its fate. It never said, "Why must I cover the world with darkness? Why can't I shine brightly like the morning?" Night understood that each creation has his individual destiny and role. Similarly, Moshe told Korach, "You should be happy with the lot that Heaven gave you. You can't be *cohen gadol*, because that was given to Ahron, but you can serve Hashem just as well in the position that Hashem put you."

with *sefarim* requires a mezuzah on the פתח, doorpost. Moshe told him that it is required.

The Chasam Sofer ז"ל teaches that hinted here is that a person can be holy, he can know a lot of Torah and do a lot of mitzvos —like a house filled with *sefarim* — but if he isn't cautious with the פתח פיך, the mouth, he remains impure.

The *Orchos Tzaddikim* (introduction) compares Torah scholars who aren't cautious with their speech to an old leaking barrel. Only a fool would pour wine into that barrel. If the wine is very expensive, he is an even greater fool, because everything will go to waste. He must first seal the holes and then pour in the good wine. The *nimshal* is that if his mouth is sullied with *lashon hara*, how can he put Torah and mitzvos in there? They will get ruined and go to waste, just as a leaking barrel ...

The *Shav Shmatsa* (introduction, ד"ה ר' (שמעון בר יוחאי) teaches that the oral Torah and the written Torah both have to be contained in a vessel. The vessel for the written Torah is parchment, and the vessel for the *Torah shebe'al peh* is a Yid's mouth, and therefore it must be kept holy and pure. The *Shav Shmatsa* writes, "Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, 'If I were at Har Sinai, I would have asked for two mouths: One mouth to study Torah with, and one mouth to speak worldly matters.' ... The mouth is the parchment for the oral Torah. Just as the parchment for the written Torah needs to be made *lishmah*, and it must be pure

and not *tamei*, so too, the parchment of the oral Torah, which is the mouth, must be solely *lishmah*..."

In contrast, if one is cautious with his speech, but he isn't holy in other ways (he isn't filled with Torah and mitzvos) we can nevertheless call him holy. Like a house that has no *sefarim* in it requires a mezuzah on the doorpost, so too, his caution with his mouth sanctifies him, although he is imperfect in other ways.

Chazal (*Yomah* 8:9) say, "Just like a *mikvah* purifies, Hakadosh Baruch Hu purifies..." Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil ז"ל taught, how does a *mikvah* purify? When one immerses in a *mikvah*, he closes his eyes and mouth. This is what purifies him.

We must be cautious with our words, never to harm our fellow man. In contrast, we must be aware that when one says a kind word to his fellow man, it sanctifies him immensely.

At a *sheva brachos* speakers often praise the *chasan*, often saying praises that aren't even true. Once, *bachurim* asked Reb Yechezkel Levinstein ז"ל, the *mashgiach* of Ponovezh, that this seems to be forbidden, because the Torah says, מדרב שקר תרחק, "Distance yourself from lies." The *bachurim* often made *sheva brachos* for their friends, but they wondered whether they should keep up the practice of saying all those false praises.

Reb Yechezkel replied, "This generation has been stricken with a disease that no one is willing to say a kind word to his

fellow man. There is only about once in a lifetime when people tell their fellow man some praises, and that is at a *sheva brachos*. Do you want to take away that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to say something kind to your fellow man?!"

### **Fighting Over Spirituality**

As a Levi, Korach, was bestowed with the most prestigious honor of carrying the *aron*. The Arizal taught that in the era of *techiyas hameisim*, Korach will be *the cohen gadol*, and the Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* says that if not for this *machlokes*, Korach would have become the *Levi Gadol* — an extremely great honor, which no one ever received. So, if Korach was so great, where did he go wrong?

In all likelihood, Korach didn't realize he was sinning. He thought his ambitions were altruistic, that he was fighting for Klal Yisrael's honor, and for his own spiritual rights. Had he looked closer he would have discovered that behind his *machlokes* was jealousy and a drive for honor. He would discover that what he thought was righteous indignation was the *yetzer hara*.

Many disputes took place throughout history — among individuals and among communities — the motive being the preservation and continuity of *Yiddishkeit*, and/or to stand up for Hashem's honor. At times those fights were indeed important, and due to those disputes, our unwavering adherence to Torah and mitzvos continues until the present day. However, there were many times when people thought that they

were fighting *leshem shamayim*, but it was really just the *yetzer hara*

The Baal HaTanya (*Igeres HaKadosh* 56) writes, "Most *tzaros*...come due to disputes '*leshem shamayim*.' May Hashem save us from them."

Consequently, whenever you're about to create a *machlokes* "*leshem shamayim*," be cautious. Realize that you may be mistaken. Give yourself time to think things over carefully and to check things out. Often, jealousy, hatred, or some other bad *middah* lurks.

Kayin and Hevel had a dispute, which ended with Kayin killing Hevel. What was the dispute about? The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 22:7) states two opinions. One is they were debating on whose property the Beis HaMikdash will be built. A second explanation says they were arguing about the earth; who owns the land and who owns the *מטלטלים*, transferable items that are on the earth.

"Kayin and Hevel said, 'Let's divide the world between us.' [They did so: One owned the land, and the other became the owner of all *mitaltelen*. The landowner said, 'you're standing on my land!'

"The other replied, 'And you're wearing my clothing. Remove the clothes.'

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

*Baalei mussar* say that both explanations of the Midrash are telling the same story. The real *machlokes* was about wealth, the ownership of the land and its

resources. But they were ashamed to fight over such petty issues, so they fought over who will host the Beis HaMikdash. But the core of the *machlokes* was about money.

Kayin and Hevel claimed their *machlokes* was spiritual — who will host the beis HaMikdash — and they probably convinced themselves that this was their true intent. However, the Midrash reveals that the real motives were selfishness, as they both wanted to be the exclusive owner of the world.<sup>9</sup>

The famous *maggid*, Reb Shalom Shwardon *zt'l* told the following personal story:

He was once in *chutz le'aretz* for a Shabbos Rosh Chodesh. Since he was a talented *chazan*, he assumed the *gabbai* would ask him to lead *Hallel*, but he didn't. When *kriyas haTorah* was about to begin, Reb Shalom was certain the *gabbai* would call him for *cohen* (he was a *cohen*). He stood up, before the *gabbai* said anything, so certain was he that he'd be called to say the *brachos* over the Torah, but the *gabbai* gave the *aliyah* to someone else.

Reb Shalom figured that the *gabbai* wants to give him *maftir*, but the *gabbai*

didn't! Reb Shalom was becoming annoyed with this *gabbai*, but then he was *dan lekaf zechus*. "Apparently, the *gabbai* will honor me with *אתה יצרת*" (the special *Mussaf* of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh) but then he heard the *gabbai* himself begin *Mussaf*! While the *chazan* was warbling, ... *ובל העוסקים בצרכי ציבור באמונה*... Reb Shalom thought, "This is called *עוסקים בצרכי ציבור באמונה*? He doesn't know how to honor distinguished guests that come to his beis medresh!"

When the *gabbai* began *chazoras haShatz*, he forgot that it was Rosh Chodesh and he began *תכנת שבת*. Reb Shalom said, "For some reason, I was the first to catch the mistake. I banged on the *shtender*, 'Nu! אתה יצרת!' I said it three times, אתה יצרת! אתה יצרת! אתה יצרת! The table almost broke from my bang. Everyone thought my intentions and zealousness were purely *leshem shamayim*, to correct the *chazan* so he says the right *tefillah*, but I know the truth. I was taking sweet revenge. With my first shout *אתה יצרת* I was soothing myself for the fact that the *gabbai* didn't ask me to lead *Hallel*. With the second *אתה יצרת*, I was avenging that I didn't get an *aliyah*. The third was a complaint against the *gabbai* for not letting me daven *Mussaf* from the *amud*."

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9. Someone came to Reb Ben Zion Abba Shaul *zt'l* with a halachic question. Reb Ben Zion Abba Shaul understood that this man wasn't really interested in getting an answer; he wanted to fuel a dispute. At the time, there was a fierce dispute among the *gedolim* regarding a certain halachic matter, and this person wanted to hear Reb Ben Zion Abba Shaul's opinion, to add to the already existing conflict. Reb Ben Zion Abba Shaul said, "Regarding your question, there are two halachic opinions, and whichever way one acts, he will have *poskim* who support him. However, there aren't any opinions that permit a *machlokes*..."

He humbly admitted that what he initially thought was purely *leshem shamayim*, was actually laced with personal interests. We too, must check ourselves to discover the true motivation of our actions, especially when we decide that we must make a *machlokes leshem shamayim*.<sup>10</sup>

Reb Yohonasan Eibshitz, zy'a, (*Yaaras Dvash, drush* 8) writes, "At every *machlokes*, the *yetzer hara* assures us that our intentions are purely *leshem shamayim*, and *chas veshalom* to even suggest otherwise! So, how can we recognize whether a *machlokes* is *leshem shamayim* or not? This is the test: If both parties love each other with all their heart and soul — aside for the issue they are arguing about — that is a sign that their argument is *leshem shamayim*. However,

if they harbor hatred towards one another [in other matters, unrelated to the *machlokes*] that's a sign the *machlokes* isn't *leshem shamayim*.

The Mishnah hints to this when it states, אִיזוֹ הִיא מַחְלֻקַת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, which can mean, how do we know that a *machlokes* is *leshem shamayim*? The answer is, וְיִשְׁמְאוּ מַחְלֻקַת הַלֵּל וְשַׁמַּי, if it is similar to the *machlokes* of Shamai and Hillel, for Shamai and Hillel loved one another and honored each other.<sup>11</sup> This is the proof that their *machlokes* was *leshem shamayim*. But Korach and his followers had animosity towards Moshe. They almost stoned him... This proves that their dispute wasn't *leshem shamayim*. This is how one knows whether his intentions are *leshem shamayim* or not."

10. In last week's *parashah* it states, וְלֹא תִתְּרוּ אֶחָד לְבַבְכֶם, which can be read, לֹא תִתְּרוּ, don't be *matir*. Don't permit that which is forbidden. The *yetzer hara* says, "It's a mitzvah to speak *lashon hara* on that person. You must hate him..." The Torah says, לֹא תִתְּרוּ, don't permit these grave sins and consider them mitzvos. Realize that your ambition for *machlokes* may actually be a serious sin.

When the Jewish nation was still in Egypt and the time for redemption arrived, they didn't have mitzvos and merits to be redeemed. Hashem gave them דָּם פֶּסַח וְדָם מִיֵּלָה, the *korban Pesach* and *bris milah*. In the merit of these two mitzvos they were redeemed from Mitzrayim. Chazal also tell us that during מַכַּת חוֹשֶׁךְ four-fifths of the nation perished. During those days, the Jewish nation was busy burying their 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 more merits? The answer is, burying others isn't always a merit.

The Sar Shalom was suggesting that sometimes people think it's a mitzvah to bury someone, to shame him, and to take away *parnassah* from a third party, claiming *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 mitzvos we should seek. You think you're doing the greatest mitzvah, but think again, because it might be the greatest sin.

11. The Gemara (*Yevamos* 14) says, "Although Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel argued... חִיבָה וְרִיעוּת נוֹהֲגִים זֶה בְּזֶה, they treated each other with love and friendship."

The Bnei Yissaschar *zt'l* gives us another indication to determine whether your intentions are *leshem shamayim* or motivated by jealousy. Generally, when one is fighting with "religious zeal" he is very passionate. He feels like an exploding volcano, ready to knock down all people who are going against Hashem. He should gauge and see whether he ever has such frenzy when doing mitzvos, such as talis and tefillin, *succah*, helping the poor, etc. If his passion is solely in the *machlokes* it's an indication that he's being driven by the *yetzer hara*, and not by the *yetzer tov*.

The Imrei Noam *zt'l* teaches that the worst sins can be committed when one thinks he's motivated by spiritual, altruistic goals. No G-d fearing person would agree to destroy someone's *parnassah*, or to ruin someone's life. But 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 with a community. If he is wrong, and Hashem doesn't want the *machlokes*, then he is taking Hashem's name and using it as a powerful weapon to do terrible things.

The Imrei Noam said that this is hinted at in the words (*Succah* 52:), יצרו של אדם, מתגבר עליו כל יום, The *yetzer hara* incites man each day, ואלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו, but if it weren't for his claim that he is fighting for Hakadosh Baruch Hu's honor, לא יכול, לו, the *yetzer hara* couldn't convince him to do such terrible deeds.

Another problem with a *machlokes*

*leshem shamayim* when it is distorted is, that such a *machlokes* can last a very long time. No one repents, because they think they're acting righteously. This is hinted at in the 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* [the fighting parties don't claim spiritual motivations] it won't last." Eventually, they will regret the *machlokes* and make up with each other.

There is a *machlokes* on how to pronounce אדני, whether the emphasis is on the 'ד' or on the 'נ'. Once, when this was being hotly debated, the Noda b'Yehuda said, "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 you to have a *machlokes* over the pronunciation of His name..."

#### The Severity of *Machlokes*

The Shlah Hakadosh writes, "We do not need to discuss the severity of *machlokes*, because there are many *sefarim* which discuss it at length. But take this rule with you: The sin of *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zorah*, as is seen from Achav and Shaul."

The Shlah is referring to the following *Yalkut Shimoni* (218): "[Almost] everyone in Achav's generation was idol worshipers, but they won all their wars because no one spoke *lashon hara*. In David HaMelech's generation, even young children knew Torah...but they

went to war and lost, because there was *lashon hara*." We see that *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*.

A similar lesson is taught by the Chasam Sofer *zy'a*. He explains that Aharon made the *egel* because he realized that if he stands up against them, a great *machlokes* would break out in Klal Yisrael. He chose *avodah zarah* over *machlokes*. He said, let them make the *egel*, and afterwards they will do *teshuvah*. But if there is division in Klal Yisrael, who knows where it will lead?

Aharon was very embarrassed that he sinned, and when he was chosen to be the *cohen gadol* he was ashamed to bring the *korbanos*. Moshe told him, למה אתה בוש לך נבחרת, "Why are you ashamed? This is the reason you were chosen" (*Rashi, Vayikra 9:7*). The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* explains, Moshe told him, "You were chosen to be *cohen gadol* because you made the *egel*, which protected the Jewish nation from *machlokes*."

The Shevet Mussar (37:22) states that the *manna* fell almost every day in the desert, even on the day they made the *egel*. However, the *manna* didn't fall on the day Korach made a *machlokes*. This demonstrates that *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*.

The *Afrakasta d'Anyah* (165) writes the following story: The community of Kempna was looking for a *chazan* and chose someone called Shimon. Although Shimon had a beautiful and powerful voice, he wasn't G-d fearing; he was a

*baal aveirah*. The Rav of Kempna, Reb Yosef Shmuel *zt'l*, was very upset with their choice. He shouted, "How can we take Shimon? How can we have a *chazan* a *baal aveirah*?"

The Kempna community was divided over this matter. Some sided with the Rav, and others wanted to hire Shimon.

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

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

The Shlah HaKadosh (*Korach*) writes, "From Korach's *machlokes* we acquire awareness of the severity of *machlokes*. Consider the great punishment given to Korach. His future progeny didn't help him either. He was a great person, a prince in Yisrael, he carried the *aron*. Dasan and Aviram and all their children perished. Although the *beis din* of heaven doesn't punish people younger than twenty years old, this time, even children died, because *machlokes* is very severe, as Chazal tell us. Everyone should take *mussar* from this to increase peace."

Reb Chaim Palagi *zt'l* writes, "Since my youth, I have seen several times that any man or woman, family, country, or city that was 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*... For whatever he loses, he will earn reward in this world and in the next world..."

In this quote, Reb Chaim Palagi testifies that both parties of the *machlokes* are punished. It is understood that the party that was wrong is punished. But why should the innocent party also be punished? The answer is, *machlokes* is like fire, and whoever comes near fire gets burned, regardless whether he is innocent or guilty.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the Maharal (*Gur Aryeh* 16) asks, why is the sin of *machlokes* more severe than all other sins, that even young children are punished? He answers, "It isn't that Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings a punishment on the child, rather, wherever there is a *machlokes*, Gehinom is present. Because both *machlokes* and Gehinom were created on the second day of Creation, which means they are synonymous. Therefore, even

young children die... because *machlokes* is united with the punishment."

The Rambam wrote his son the following letter: "Don't contaminate your soul with *machlokes*, which destroys body, soul, and money. I saw... families die, cities destroyed, groups collapse... the respected disgraced, all because of *machlokes*. The *nevi'im* discuss how bad *machlokes* is, and the *chachamim* added on more ideas, and they haven't yet reached the depths of its evil. Therefore, hate it; run away from it, keep away from all its friends, lest you perish..."<sup>13</sup>

Why was it necessary for Korach and his group to die with a new creation, that the earth swallowed them live? We can explain that Hashem wanted everyone to remember the severity of *machlokes*. If they would die a natural death, people would eventually forget, and the gravity of *machlokes* wouldn't be known, as it is now.

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12. The Gemara (*Kesubos* 62:) says, "Rav Rechumi would learn with Rava in Mechuza, and would come home every *erev Yom Kippur*. One time, he was engrossed in a *sugya* [on *erev Yom Kippur*] for a long time, while his wife was looking out [to see him. She was saying] 'Now he's coming! Now he's coming!' He didn't come. She felt bad (חלש דעתה) and a tear dropped from her eye. [At this time] he was sitting on a roof. The roof collapsed from under him, and he died."

Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l* asked, what was gained by his death? Will the wife be happier now that he will never come home? The answer is, *machlokes* is fire, and therefore there aren't set rules of who should get hurt, and how much. Whoever is involved with fire gets burned.

13. Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* said, "For sins *ben adam lamakom*, there is a vast Gehinom in heaven. For sins *ben adam lechaveiro*, people suffer in this world."

No one ever gained from *machlokes*. Rashi (*Bereishis* 28:11) says that the stones were fighting, as each stone wanted Yaakov to place his head on them. A miracle occurred, and all stones became one. We can ask, if a miracle took place, why couldn't the stones turn into a comfortable soft cushion? The answer is, softness never emerges from a *machlokes* ...