

# THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF AVOIDING DISPUTES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

## Parshas Korach

### The Most Effective Way of Avoiding Disputes

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #818 Bikur Cholim on Shabbos. Good Shabbos!*

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Parshas Korach is the parsha in the Torah of "machlokes" [disputes], which all too often is a very practical topic. It would be pleasant if we would be able to say "This is an esoteric topic. When will we ever be involved in disputes in our lives?" Unfortunately, for those of us who do not live in caves but have to deal with people - and all too often with family members - the topic of "machlokes" is all too relevant. I would like to share two insights into how a person should react when he is involved in "machlokes".

The Torah teaches (when Moshe heard the remarks of Dassan and Aviram) "and he fell on his face" [Bamidbar 16:4]. The Gemara [Sanhedrin 110a] asks "What was it that Moshe heard?" Remember that Moshe was a person who had experience dealing with Klal Yisrael. This goes all the way back to Egypt. Clearly, Moshe was not a thin-skinned individual who was not accustomed to the rough and tumble of dealing with the Jewish people. What could Moshe have heard that made him fall on his face?

The Gemara says Moshe heard that they suspected him of having illicit relations - or at least allowing himself to be secluded privately -- with married women! The Gemara expounds the pasuk in Tehillim [106:16] "They were jealous of Moshe in the camp" (va'y'kanoo l'Moshe). The Gemara links the word for jealousy with the term "Keenui" used in Tractate Sotah regarding the warning of a jealous/suspicious husband that his wife not allow herself to be isolated with a specific man.

This is what Moshe was accused of - something that is literally mind-boggling! Truly incredible! It would have been totally understandable if Moshe's reaction would have been "You ungrateful, disgusting people! After all I have done for you!" He would have been 100% in the right to let them have it in the starkest of terms.

What was Moshe's reaction? The Talmud says his reaction was "He took his tent and pitched it outside the camp." [Shemos 33:7] His reaction was he walked away from the machlokes without saying a word! This is a difficult lesson to practice, but it is the most effective way of avoiding machlokes. Be quiet, do not say anything, and walk away! This method is guaranteed to nip machlokes in the bud.

I have a friend who is a very successful congregational Rabbi. He told me he has one rule which he has never violated in all his years in the rabbinate: Whenever a congregant accuses him of something or says something inflammatory or disrespectful - situations in which he has every right to put the congregant in his place, his rule is that he does not say anything. Invariably, the next Yom Kippur or 5 or 10 Yom Kippurs down the road, the person will come to him and say "I apologize for talking that way to you." This takes tremendous strength of character, especially when the charges are so outrageous!

This is the Torah's lesson when it says that "Moshe fell on his face": The best way to deal with machlokes is to avoid it.

Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, the "Ponevezher Rav", was not only a genius and a pious person; he was a loveable individual as well. He was perhaps the most effective fund-raiser among all Roshei Yeshiva in the 20th century. A person is not an effective fund-raiser if he is not a likeable individual. People do not like to give money to people they can't stand. This is Rule Number 1 that is taught in fund-raising school. Rav Kahaneman was an outstanding fund-raiser. He could get money out of a stone!

Rav Kahaneman tells the story that once when he went to London, a member of the community started yelling at him and hurling accusations at him. The London Rabbinate was appalled at what happened and they wanted to put the person in Cherem [excommunication]. The Ponevezher Rav told the Rabbis that he has a tradition from the Chofetz Chaim which precluded that option. The Chofetz Chaim gave Rav Kahaneman a blessing that he would be successful in all his endeavors except one: He will never be successful in any machlokes he takes part in! "Everything you touch will be gold. You will be tremendously successful. But you will lose badly every dispute in which you take part."

He urged the Rabbinate to take no action against the person who insulted him. This attitude takes a tremendous amount of self-discipline.

I saw a story in which a family who was involved in a machlokes came to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach for guidance. Rav Shlomo Zalman expounded for them the pasuk in Tehillim [38:14] "And I am like a deaf person, I don't hear and like a mute person who will not open his mouth." Rav Shlomo Zalman notes that the beginning of the pasuk is in first person (Lo Eshma) while the end of the pasuk is in third person (Lo Yiftach Piv). This is grammatically inconsistent.

Rav Shlomo Zalman explained that the pasuk is emphasizing the proper way to deal with

**machlokes:** If the person who is insulted can say "I will be like a deaf person and not listen to what was said against me" then he - the other party to the machlokes - will have no one to argue with and he will therefore also not open his mouth any further in the future! It takes two to Tango; it takes two to fight!

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## **A Whimsical Comment On A Famous Mishna**

A well-known Mishna in Pirkei Avos [Ethics of the Fathers] says: "Any argument that is for the sake of Heaven will in the end exist (sofo l'hiskayem) and any argument that is not for the sake of Heaven will in the end not exist (ayn sofo l'hiskayem)."

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once said whimsically in homiletic fashion that we see from this Mishna that the worst kind of machlokes that exists is one that is "for the sake of Heaven". Those are the arguments that last forever. When a person argues with his neighbor over whether he is keeping his grass mowed properly or not -- and neighbors exchange words over such trivial matters -it is easy to forgive and forget. You called him a slob and he called you a slob, but when Erev Yom Kippur comes, you can say to each other "listen, it is only grass; neighbors should not fight over such things". A machlokes which is not "l'shem shomayim", which is over something menial and trivial, is not destined to last.

However, when a person has a machlokes that IS "l'shem Shomayim" - a machlokes over a shul or a school or a Rav or a Rebbe then watch out! I can be magnanimous when it comes to grass and overlook minor behaviors and differences of outlook when it comes to lawn mowing or watering. But I cannot give in on something that is "l'shem Shamayim", matters of holiness!

That is what Rav Yisrael Salanter whimsically said the Mishna alludes to. An argument for the sake of Heaven is the worst type of machlokes. It goes on forever! When one "fights for the Truth" there is little room for compromise. When each side has different visions of that "Truth", the dispute is unfortunately destined to go on and on.

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## **A Typically Pungent Comment From the Kotzker Rebbe**

The Medrash in Sefer Bereishis says that when G-d was about to create Man, the Heavenly angels took sides in the matter. Some angels advised that man should be created; others advised that he should not be created. The Medrash interprets the following pasuk in Tehillim [85:11]: "Chesed [Kindness] and Emes [Truth] met; Tzedek [Righteousness] and Shalom [Peace] kissed each other."

The Medrash elaborates: The Attribute of Chesed argued that Man should be created, for he does

kindness. Emes argued that Man should not be created for he is full of deceit. Tzedek said Man should be created for people give charity [Tzedakah]. Shalom said Man should not be created because people are entirely quarrelsome. It was thus two against two. The Almighty had a dilemma. What should He do?

The Medrash continues that the Almighty seized Truth and threw it to the ground, as it is written [Daniel 8:12] "And He threw Emes to the ground." It was therefore two against one, and the Almighty created Man. Thus ends the Medrash.

The Holy Kotzker Rebbe asked, but how did the Almighty deal with Shalom? Shalom argued that Man should not be created because he is always fighting. What happened to that argument? In his classic pungent fashion, the Kotzker Rebbe answered: "When Emes is thrown to the ground, then peace can prevail." It is only when people are interested in !!EMES!! that there will be fighting. Once Emes is disposed of, the lack of Shalom amongst man is not that pronounced. Then we are merely dealing with our neighbor's grass. Those disputes can be resolved!

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*This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:*

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