

## BEING ABOVE MACHLOKES

Chazal said, "A *machlokes* (argument) not for the sake of Heaven was the argument of Korach and his followers." What are the roots of *machlokes*, and how can we connect ourselves to a reality that is the antithesis to *machlokes*?

There are three stages that lead to *machlokes*: Having a *cheilek* (portion) in something, then a *chalukah* (division), and then, *chas v'shalom*, a *machlokes* that may result, from the divided shares. Before an inheritance is split, each of the siblings have a *cheilek*, a portion, which hasn't yet been allocated. When brothers split an inheritance, it becomes a *chalukah*, with each portion being split and divided amongst each other. But a further and unnecessary level of dividing may occur if the division leads to a *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.

Thus 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.

The more a person lives inwardly and truthfully - living a life of *pnimiyus* - the further he will be from *machlokes*. He realizes that whatever he has is from Hashem and whatever is taken from him is also from Hashem. Even if his own 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 *olam pnimi*, his own rich, internal world - recognizing that *this* is his true portion in this world.**

With such a perspective, a person will be far from entering *machlokes*. And even if he is forced to somehow take sides in a *machlokes*, he will be unscathed. It might seem as if he is getting hurt by the *machlokes* - he might have to incur financial loss, and his honor might be attacked by others, and people may humiliate him. But no one can damage his true portion, which is his *pnimiyus*. No one can take away one's inner world from him.

If a person will lose money due to not being aggressive in a *machlokes*, there is no obligation of "*hishtadlus* (effort)" upon him to try to get the money. The world is filled with lies, flattery, and all kinds of falsehood. This is not only referring to the 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 realize that being involved in a *machlokes* is not considered "doing *hishtadlus*" (i.e. to earn or save money).

All of this goes against 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*. *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 being in a *machlokes*. When one 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*, he understands that it was all from Hashem.

When we look at the world today, either we can superficially see a world full of pettiness and pain or we can see a pure world if we are connected to our own *pnimiyus*. Korach didn't have *emunas chachamim* in Moshe because he didn't discover his own unique *cheilek*.

When one discovers his own *cheilek*, his inner world that is unique only to him, he is then able to have *emunas chachamim*. and then he will be able to trust the *Chachomim* of every generation. And, more importantly, one will be able to have *emunah* in *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. (from *Bilvavi On The Parsha*)

## Q&A – GETTING A GRIP ON OURSELVES

**QUESTION** How can I deal with *tzedakah* collectors when they act annoying, i.e. when they keep nudging me to give them more money and I tell them I don't have (after I already gave them some money) and they continue to pressure me to give to them (asking me to pay through a credit card)?

**ANSWER** 1) Establish clear boundaries [when giving *tzedakah*], but do it in a *pleasant* and *graceful* manner. 2) When you give money to others, it should be done out of a desire to be a *nediv lev*, to be magnanimous to others, which is an exalted *middah* that comes from our *nefesh Elokis* (G-dly soul). That should be your intention when giving *tzedakah*, as opposed to a mere desire to take off the pressure and guilt that's on you, which is a reaction of the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul). 3) Carefully and calmly consider how much money you should give. Try to determine the amount of money that Hashem expects of you to give for another. 4) After you have determined that, establish clear boundaries of how much you will give and where to draw the line of your giving. But, even when you keep to your boundaries, do it *pleasantly* and *gracefully*.

**QUESTION** We keep hearing story after story, of all the different *tzaros* (tribulations) that people have *Rachmana Litzlan*, tragedy after tragedy, and it is difficult for us to hear of all these tragic circumstances that so many people are going through. Even to hear these stories just on a very superficial level, without becoming too emotionally connected to it is already overwhelming. How can we cope emotionally after what we have just heard?

**ANSWER** Ideally, one should avoid hearing or reading about tragic circumstances as much as he can, and only to the extent that he can handle emotionally. On one's own level, one should join with another's pain and also with the pain of the *Shechinah*. Anything that a person cannot handle emotionally is beyond his current level, and it can only be comprehended by him intellectually. Alternatively, one can temporarily allow himself to remain callous to all of the stories that he hears, until he eventually develops his own *pnimiyus* (inner world), and after that, he should try hard to repair that callousness. However, ideally, one should still try to avoid hearing or reading about these things in the first place. This is what the Chofetz Chaim did [in order to avoid becoming callous from reading all the sad stories of the world]. However, with the more that one's *pnimiyus* becomes opened to him, the ability to remain balanced is not simply a thought or a feeling, but a *makom pnimi*, an internal "place" in oneself. Just like when a person is in a noisy building and he can find a room in the building where he hears less of the noise (and the more rooms that he goes into, the less noise he hears), so can a person enter into a "room" inside himself (the *chadrei halev*, chambers of the heart) where one can be "alone", separated from everything that is taking place outside. One needs to keep alternating back and forth, between being "alone" versus being involved with the outside world. One needs to be involved with others when there is a need for it, and to the extent that he can handle at his current level. In addition, a person also needs to develop strong, clear thinking abilities, which gives him a balance between his emotions and his thoughts. Just as one's emotions can become opened, so can a person open up his thinking abilities and expand the power of the mind. A clear thinking mind can balance one's emotions. After develop-

ing the mind and attaining a balance between the mind and the emotions, one acquires the ability to maneuver his way through his mind and emotions. He can leave his emotional state and enter into his thinking abilities depending on the situation, and with being consciously aware of his ability to alternate between his emotions and his thinking abilities. In order to reach this ability of being in control of one's emotions and being able to maneuver his way from his emotions to his mind and vice versa, one needs to first strengthen his thinking abilities, as mentioned. Along with this, one also needs to develop the ability of quieting his mind or emotions, and this can be done through emptying out one's thoughts by forcing oneself to think about nothing for a few minutes.

**QUESTION** When I hear of the *tzaros* that another (i.e. a neighbor) is going through, my *emunah* is weakened and I wonder why Hashem is letting this good person suffer. How can I restore my *emunah* after hearing of others' *tzaros*?

**ANSWER** A person has two very fundamental abilities in the soul: (1) *Seichel*, our logical understanding, and (2) *Emunah*, belief in Hashem - which is really the ability of *temimus* (unquestioning trust in Hashem). Your *emunah* gets weakened because you are trying to *logically* understand another's situation, trying to make sense of it with your *seichel*. However, you first need to see the different good things that Hashem has done for that person. That will satisfy your need to logically understand why the other has to go through this situation. But you also need to sharpen your *emunah* and your *temimus*. Hashem, in His *Hashgachah*, has certainly sent this person to be your neighbor so that you should realize how you need to improve your *emunah*, your *temimus*. The way you can work on your *temimus* is by developing the awareness that Hashem oversees every last detail, and everything He does is good, whether it is obvious or hidden. "*For My thoughts are not their thoughts.*" Think about this and internalize this. You don't have the capacity to understand how everything Hashem does is perfect, and that Hashem's goodness is endless.

**QUESTION** How are we to live with *emunah peshutah* these days when *chas v'shalom* there can be so many frightening outcomes of what might happen as we get further into the final days?

**ANSWER** On one hand, live in the simple state of *Ain Od Milvado* ("**There is nothing besides for Hashem**") discussed in *Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar III*. In that way, you rise above this world and you are not really living here. After you are able to live with those thoughts, return to your normal *madreigah* (level) with the newfound awareness that no one is in control other than Hashem. Be happy every moment and every day, feeling a joy and a calmness, thanking Hashem for all of the good that He gives, and to you personally. Keep becoming aware of *Ain Od Milvado* and then returning to your day-to-day life, with the newly acquired awareness that there is nothing in control except for Hashem and that everything He is doing is good. And keep repeating that cycle.

**QUESTION** Is there a particular *mussar sefer* which is suitable for our generation to learn?

**ANSWER** This is different with each person, but a good example would be any of the *sefarim* of **Rav Shimshon Pincus** zt"l. (*from the Bilvavi Q & A archive*).