

From the Abravanel Jacob Solomon

Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will have a constructive outcome, but one that is not for the sake of Heaven will not have a constructive outcome. What type of dispute was for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. And not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his entire company (Avot 5:20).

The commentators offer explanations of a machloket she-eino leshem shamayim, a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven.

One suggestion is the underlying motive of those involved. Hillel and Shammai were interested in one thing: understanding the sources and traditions to decide the practices that Am Yisrael should follow. In contrast, Korach's motivations were selfishly ambitious, in quest of ego, high status, and power (Quoted in Tosafot Yom Tov).

A second suggestion is the attitudes of those involved. Though their halachic interpretations differed in character and substance, Hillel and Shammai esteemed and respected each other. But Korach and his company had just one thing in common: demands that were motivated by jealousy and hatred of Moshe and his position (Quoted in Noam Elimelech).

Abravanel's interpretation illuminates both explanations of machloket she-eino leshem shamayim. He explains that Korach and his assembly had three distinct disputes with Moshe.

The first was Korach's own. He claimed that he should have been the kohen gadol instead of Aharon, on the grounds of his yichus, his lineage. Moshe was the great-grandson of Levi: through Amram the first son of Kehat. Korach was also the great-grandson of Levi: through Yitzhar the second son of Kehat.

Korach's claim was motivated by selfish ambitions and personal resentment at being passed over. A machloket she-eino leshem shamayim.

The second came from some of the firstborns who were not happy at being ousted from their birthright position in favor of the Leviyim after the sin of the golden calf. They felt that the tribe of Levi had become too influential. They were motivated by jealousy.

"You have been taking on too much" (16:3).

Those firstborns involved showed personal resentment in having been passed over for their traditional role of the birthright. Another machloket she-eino leshem shamayim.

The third came from some members



of the tribe of Reuven, through Datan and Aviram. They felt that they should have been part of the royalty: Reuven himself was Ya'akov firstborn.

They continued to take exception to not having firstborn-privileged status despite Ya'akov's explicit exclusion of Reuven in favor of Yehuda. They were also motivated by jealousy. A third machloket she-eino leshem shamayim.

In sum, the machloket she-eino leshem shamayim involved Korach in his selfish ambitions "taking" two other groups of people whose feelings of personal resentment made them want to take part.

And indeed, Korach and his company ended with destructive rather than constructive outcomes.

Thus the story of Korach indicates that both selfish ambitions and personal resentment are the wrong reasons for seeking involvement and promotion. The worthy ones would be the opportunity to provide services that are needed and are of value. 🙏

