

Machloket Shesofah Lehitkayeim by Rabbi Zev Alon

The Mishna (Avot 5:17) cites Korach's machloket (dispute) as an example of a machloket which is not for the sake of Heaven:

"Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven is destined to endure; and one that is not for the sake of Heaven is not destined to endure. Which is a dispute that is for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shamai. Which is a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his assembly."

Several questions arise from this Mishna:

Why would we ever want a machloket "to endure"? Do we not prefer peace?

How can the Mishna state that Hillel and Shamai's machloket "is destined to endure"? After all, the Halacha famously follows Hillel's opinions, and thus, their machloket did not endure. Instead, only Hillel's side of the dispute remained.

Why does the Mishna refer to it as "the dispute of Korach and his assembly"? We are familiar with the machloket between Korach and Moshe, but when did Korach argue with "his assembly"? The Sochatchover Rebbe explains an important principle, and I will try to paraphrase his holy words.

Picture the period of Korach's

machloket in the midbar: The newspapers are filled with every minor detail and provide full-color commentary about the events as well as political analysis about the leadership crisis. "Inside sources" suggest that some members of Korach's assembly have begun to argue among themselves, and the newscasts carry hourly updates about the latest developments. (Space considerations prevent an extensive discussion of the topic, but we can see that the psukim clearly demonstrate that Korach does not want the same things as Datan and Aviram do. In other words, there are certainly disputes within Korach's assembly.)

Meanwhile, on the paper's back page - the one that no one reads, because it does not have any interesting pictures - a small item on the very bottom briefly notes that two "elders" sat in the Beit Midrash yesterday and argued about the size of leavening on Pesach. Only someone who was really, really bored would even notice the tiny article...

Many years have elapsed since then. The fish which were wrapped in the newspapers with Korach's picture have long disappeared, and the huge uproar has faded away. Today, no one knows what Korach and his assembly argued about. Indeed, even the nature of Korach's dispute with Moshe Rabbenu is subject to many different interpre-



tations.

And, yet, amazingly, that tiny item which no one bothered to read at the time... is still featured prominently in the headlines of every single yeshiva! Two thousand years after Hillel and Shamai's machloket, Torah scholars continue to engage in lively debate and to bring proofs in favor of both sides of the argument.

This is the eternal Torah. This is a machloket which is destined to endure. We do not fear - chalila - this type of dispute. On the contrary, in fact. Both sides are God's living words. This type of machloket enriches us and opens new horizons for us. But only on one condition: that it is for the sake of Heaven.

We frequently convince ourselves that the disputes which divide us are for the sake of Heaven. Unfortunately, however, this is not always the case. Yet, as long as our goal is to magnify HaKadosh Baruch Hu's imprint on this world and to add light and holiness, our machlokot are infused with beauty and glory.

This idea is reflected in the famous Gemara (Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 30b) which offers a homiletic exposition for the pasuk:

ET VAHEIV B'SUFA ("That which He gave on the [Sea of] Reeds" - Bamidbar 21:14)

The Gemara teaches that when students, who are learning Torah together, argue with each other and

appear to be enemies, they inevitably end up: "Becoming loving friends."

When love reigns between society's various sectors, machlokot are a welcome blessing. However, when hatred and quarrels are added to the mix, machlokot are not destined to endure. ♪

