

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Korach





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Torah Wellsprings - Korach

Korach

At the beginning of *parashas Korach*, Rashi writes, "פרשה זו יפה נדרשת במדרש רבי תנחומא, 'This *parashah* is taught beautifully in the Midrash Tanchuma."

Rashi rarely tells us where to look things up. What is Rashi implying here?

The Pri Megadim (ת"ת ד"ה קהלת) writes, "אומרים הלצה, people explain this Rashi in a light way by connecting it to what the possuk states in *Mishlei* 15:23). 'ודבר בעתו מה טוב, 'When something takes place in its right time, how good it is.' Alternatively, when it doesn't take place at its right time, how not good is it. For example, when we arrive to the yom tov of Pesach, it isn't the right time to discuss *hilchos Succos* or *hilchos Yom Kippur*, and so on. Rashi writes, פרשה זו יפה נדרשת, it is always the right time to speak about *parashas Korach*. This is because there are always *machlokes*, and thus, it is always the right time."

Before we discuss Korach's *machlokes*, let us understand who Korach was.

The Arizal teaches us that in the future, Korach will be the *kohen gadol*. This is implied in the words (92:13), צדיק כתמר יפרח, "A tzaddik will blossom like a palm tree..." The final letters of those words spell קר"ח.

Korach carried the *aron* in the desert, an honor reserved for the greatest tzaddikim.

Korach was from the greatest tzaddikim of our nation. He made a grave error and was punished severely, but let us understand that he was an outstanding tzaddik.

Therefore, when we study the *machlokes* that Korach instigated, we aren't judging Korach in any way. It is beyond us to do so.

We seek out the lessons that the Torah wants us to know, so we can be *b'shalom* with our fellow man and overcome the tendency of instigating and perpetuating *machlokes*.

Focus on the Good

Someone told the Sfas Emes *zt'l* that he has a lot of debt. The Sfas Emes told him, "Pay your debts to Hashem, and you will be able to pay back your debts to your fellow man."

"Are you implying that I have to do *teshuvah* and pay back my debts to Hashem?" the man asked.

The Sfas Emes replied, "I was referring to the *חובות*, debts that are stated in the tefillah, שכן חובת כל היצורים להודות להלל ולשבח, 'For that is the debt of all creation: to praise and to thank Hashem...' for all the kindness He performs for us. Thank Hashem for everything you have, and you will have your salvation, and you will be able to pay back your debts."

As the Tiferes Shlomo (*Vayeira*) explains the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 107:1), הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם, חסדו, if you praise Hashem for His kindness, His kindness will endure forever, and you will continue receiving Hashem's kindness.

Similarly, it states (*ibid.* 107:8), יודו לה' חסדו, ונפלאותיו לבני אדם, "Thank Hashem for His kindness, and for the wonders He does for people." חסדו implies that Hashem did one *chesed* for him. נפלאותיו is in plural form, which means that Hashem did a lot of kindness to him. The Shlah (מס' פסחים מצה) and the Chida (*Devarim Achadim*, 32:2) explain, יודו לה' חסדו, if you thank Hashem for one *chesed* that He did for you, ונפלאותיו לבני אדם, Hashem will do many more.¹

1. Chasidim have a custom to say this chapter (תהילים ק"ז) on *erev Shabbos* before Minchah. The *minhag* was

The Veitzener Rav *zt'l* explained the words (from the *brachah* before *Shemonah Esrei*) ונתנו ידידים ומירות שירות ותשבחות, "The beloved ones give song and praise to Hashem." The word ונתנו can be read backward and forwards (see *Baal HaTurim Shemos* 30:12). This hints that if we praise Hashem, Hashem will praise us.

We can also explain that if we praise Hashem for all the good things Hashem gives us, Hashem will provide us with more. ונתנו, it will come back to us even more.

Korach was from the most respected people in the nation. He was a Levi, and he carried the *aron*. But he focused on what he didn't have. If he had recognized Hashem's kindness and praised Hashem, Hashem would bestow even more kindness on him. But he focused on what he lacked, and that was the root of his *machlokes*.²

The Severity of *Machlokes*

The Shlah Hakadosh writes, "We do not need to discuss the severity of *machlokes*, because there are many *sefarim* that discuss

it at length. But take this rule with you: The sin of *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*..."

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

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 218) states: "[Nearly] everyone in Achav's generation was an idol worshiper, yet they won all their wars. This is because they didn't speak *lashon hara*. While, in David HaMelech's generation, even young children knew Torah...but they went to war and lost because there was *lashon hara*." The Shlah (*ibid.*) quotes this Midrash as a source that *machlokes* and *lashon hara* are worse than *avodah zarah*.³

The *Afrakasta d'Anyah* (165) tells that the community of Kempna hired Shimon to be their *chazan*. Reb Yosef Shmuel *zt'l*, the Rav of Kempna, vehemently opposed this choice. He shouted, "How can Shimon be our *chazan*? He is a *baal aveirah*!"

initiated by the Baal Shem Tov as a preparation for Shabbos (see *Meor Einayim*, end of *Beshalach*). There are different customs regarding Shabbos *chol hamoed*. Some communities say הודו on *erev Shabbos* and some don't.

Once, *erev Shabbos chol hamoed*, someone asked the Lev Simchah of Gur *zt'l* whether he should say הודו. The Lev Simchah didn't reply. So, the man asked a second and then a third time, but the Lev Simchah remained silent. Someone said to the man, "Why are you asking? The custom in Gur is that they don't say הודו on this Shabbos, but the Rebbe doesn't want to say explicitly that Yidden shouldn't say הודו." הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו.

2. Chazal say, איזהו שומא המאבד את מה שנותנים לו, "Who is a fool? It's someone who loses what is given to him."

The Ruzhiner *zt'l* (see *Imrei Pinchas* ח"ב שער עבודת ה' ס"ב) translates the Gemara as follows: "Who is a fool? It's the person המאבד, who loses recognition, את מה שנותנים לו, that everything he has was given to him from Heaven. It didn't happen by chance.

3. Everyone is shocked when they read that Aharon made the *egel* (see *Shemos* 32:35). The Chasam Sofer *zy'a* explains that Aharon made the *egel* because he knew that if he didn't, a great *machlokes* would break out between those who want the *egel* and those who don't. Aharon chose *avodah zarah* rather than *machlokes*, because *machlokes* is worse.

The first day the Mishkan stood, Aharon was instructed to sacrifice *korbanos* to bring down the *Shechinah* into the Mishkan. But because he made the *egel*, Aharon felt he wasn't fitting to do this service. Moshe told him (*Rashi, Vayikra* 9:7), למה אתה בוש לכך נבחרת, "Why are you ashamed? You were chosen for this." The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* explains, "You were chosen to do this service specifically because you made the *egel*, and thereby, you protected the Jewish nation from *machlokes*."

Some sided with the Rav, while others wanted to hire Shimon. The Kempa community was split into two.

Reb Yosef Shmuel sent a letter to Reb Yosef of Posen, seeking his counsel. The rav of Posen wrote back, "A *tzelem* [cross] in the Beis HaMikdosh is preferred over a *machlokes* in *klal Yisrael*." We are surprised when we read that *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*. What could be worse than *avodah zarah*? We need to recognize the severity of *machlokes*.

Also, in this world, there is nothing worse than *machlokes*. The Rambam wrote the following letter to his son:

"Don't contaminate your soul with *machlokes*, which destroys body, soul, and money. I saw families perish, cities destroyed, communities disintegrate, and respected people disgraced, all because of *machlokes*. The *nevi'im* discuss how bad *machlokes* is, and the *chachamim* added more ideas, and they haven't yet reached its ultimate evil. Therefore, hate *machlokes*; run away from it; and keep away from all its friends, lest you perish."

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 their money, *rachmanah litzlan*. Someone who has wisdom will think about this and be *mevater*..."

Korach's Punishment

Korach and his followers were punished in a tragedy that never happened before, nor did it happen ever again. As Moshe said (*Bamidbar* 16:30), ואם בריאה י'רא ה' ופצתה האדמה את

פיה ובלעה אתם, "If Hashem will create a new creation, and the earth will open its mouth and swallow them and everything they have..." The Ibn Ezra asks that things like this do happen, because there are earthquakes, and people sometimes fall inside. But the Ramban clarifies that this was different.

The Ramban writes, "That the earth should open its mouth and *swallow*, that is new. This never happened before. Because when the earth opens up – as it happens many times in an earthquake – the earth remains open. Sometimes, it will become filled with water and become a pond. But that the earth should open and immediately close, like someone who opens his mouth to eat, that was made new on that day, and it is like a new creation."

Why was it necessary that Korach and his followers die in an unusual way? It is because Hashem wanted this story to be remembered. If they died a natural death, people would forget, and the gravity of *machlokes* wouldn't be known to us. Their unusual end helps us remember the severity of *machlokes*.

Yaakov Avinu knew with *ruach hakodesh* that Korach would lead a *machlokes*, and he pleaded that his name shouldn't be mentioned or associated with it. As he said (*Bereishis* 49:6) בקהלם אל תחד כבודי, "When they gather [for a *machlokes*] don't mention my honor [my name]."

As Rashi (beginning of the *parashah*) writes, "Yaakov Avinu prayed that his name shouldn't be mentioned..." Therefore, the *parashah* states ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי, but it doesn't go back one more generation and state בן יעקב. Tzaddikim don't want to have any association with *machlokes*.⁴

4. About fifty years ago, a renowned rav and *talmid chacham* was *niftar* and his children were fighting between themselves regarding who gets what from the large inheritance. The *niftar* came in a dream to a rav and said, "They are mentioning my name repeatedly in this *din Torah*, and whenever they say my name, I don't have peace in Gan Eden. Please, tell my children that they shouldn't mention my name at the *din Torah*..." This is similar to Yaakov Avinu requested, בקהלם אל תחד כבודי, "When they gather [for *machlokes*] don't mention my honor [my name]."

Rashi (16:27) writes, "Come and see how severe *machlokes* is: The *beis din* below doesn't punish before one [reaches *bar/bas mitzvah*]. The *beis din* of heaven doesn't punish before twenty. But at the *machlokes* of Korach, even nursing babies perished."

Why is *machlokes* so severe? Why are even children punished?

The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh* 16) answers, "It isn't that Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings punishment to children. Rather, wherever there is a *machlokes*, Gehinom is there. *Machlokes* and Gehinom were both created on the second day of Creation, meaning they are synonymous. This is the reason young children die. *Machlokes* is united with punishment." When one makes a *machlokes*, he brings Gehinom to himself, and therefore punishment is with him and his family *r'l*.

Stories

We will now tell some true stories, which remind us that *machlokes* doesn't pay. One only loses by joining a *machlokes*:

A young couple bore their very first child. There was a *bris*, a *pidyon haben*, and everything was good for the first few months. But when the child was about five months old, a terrible stench emanated from him that reminded people of a corpse, *r'l*. The parents brought the child to many doctors, but they said that they never saw anything like it before, and they couldn't find the source of this terrible odor.

The child's grandfather was a student of Reb Shmuel Vosner *zt'l*, and he thought that a *brachah* from this great tzaddik could help. So, he, together with the father, flew to Eretz Yisrael and went from the airport straight to Reb Vosner's home. They wanted to receive his blessings and counsel and then immediately return home.

Reb Shmuel Vosner greeted them joyously, and after hearing the problem, he asked "Who is the child named after?"

The grandfather said, "The child is named after my father."

Reb Vosner asked, "But why? The first child is generally named after the wife's family."

The grandfather replied, "My son's father-in-law is a very difficult person. I didn't get along with him from the very beginning. I don't even speak to him anymore. That's why I chose the name myself, and I didn't consider asking him what name he wanted."

The child's father also explained that he didn't want to speak with his father-in-law about the name because he wants to keep his distance from him.

Reb Vosner replied, "Now everything is understood. This is how it appears when *mechutanim* fight, especially when they fight over a name."

Reb Vosner said to the father, "You must ask your father-in-law forgiveness, and you must add a name after your father-in-law's family."

The father said, "Please don't ask me to make up with my father-in-law. That is asking too much from me."

Reb Vosner told him, "Did you travel all this distance to do differently than the *psak* I give you? Go to the next room and call your father-in-law right now."

The father and grandfather followed Reb Vosner's counsel.

When they landed at Kennedy airport, they heard the good news that the child was healed. He was cured nine hours earlier. He didn't have the terrible odor anymore.

The Skulener Rebbe *zt'l* told the following story, which he heard from reliable sources:

A chassid was traveling by train to the Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l*. On board that train, there was also a paralyzed woman. Her family was bringing her to the Sar Shalom for a *refuah* and *yeshuah*. Her mind was

functioning properly, so she could speak, but the rest of her body was paralyzed.

The chassid wanted to see what would happen when this woman is brought to the Sar Shalom and whether she will receive her salvation. When they arrived in Belz, he dropped off his packages and quickly went to the Sar Shalom. The paralyzed woman was already there, but it was three o'clock Friday afternoon, and the Rebbe wasn't receiving visitors at that time. Nevertheless, out of pity for the woman, the *gabaim* told the Sar Shalom that a paralyzed woman was outside, and she needs a *refuah*. The Sar Shalom replied, "Let her come here at *leicht tzinden*, because when we light the Shabbos candles it is an *eis ratzon*. *Be'ezras Hashem* we will try to help her."

The Sar Shalom used to light some of the Shabbos *leicht* himself. After he lit the candles, he asked the woman, "Do you know why you are suffering?"

"No. I don't."

"Try to find an explanation."

She said that she no idea.

The Sar Shalom asked her a third time. "No one is perfect. Think, perhaps you can understand why this happened to you."

She thought, but she said that she still doesn't know.

The Sar Shalom told her, "I will tell you why you are suffering. You have a poor Jewish maid, and you are very strict and demanding of her. You think that because you are wealthy, you don't have to respect a poor maid. The maid is very hurt. You are suffering because of this *aveirah*."

The Sar Shalom asked, "Do you accept on yourself never to harm her again with your unkind words?"

She said she was. The Sar shalom took a handkerchief, went around the bed with it, and she sat up, totally healed.

Advice on Preventing *Machlokes*

In this section, we will provide some tips on preventing *machlokes*:

Push off the Machlokes for Later

The Rebbes of Lelov *zt'l* say that when you are tempted to become angry and to make a *machlokes*, put water in your mouth and don't swallow it. This is a *segulah* to prevent *machlokes*. Obviously, one reason this helps is that it will push off the *machlokes* for a few moments. As long as you can, push off creating a *machlokes*.

When Korach and his congregation argued with Moshe, Moshe said (16:5), *בקר ידע*, "Tomorrow morning Hashem will reveal who He chooses [to be the *kohen gadol*]." Rashi writes that he pushed the *machlokes* off for the next day because "maybe [by then] they will change their minds."

This is a very important antidote against *machlokes*. Wait. Don't act immediately. Think it over. Maybe by tomorrow, you will decide that you don't want to start a *machlokes*, after all. And maybe by tomorrow, you will realize that you misunderstood what happened, and there isn't anything to fight over. Wait, push it off, and it will be better for everyone.

Getting Your Priorities Right

The Mishnah (*Gitten* 59.) states, "The *Kohen* receives the first *aliyah*, a *Levi* gets the second, and then comes the *Yisrael* [for the third *aliyah*, etc.]. This was established [by Chazal] for the sake of peace."

Rashi explains, "The *chachamim* established this order to prevent fights. Now a person [a *Yisrael* or a *Levi*] can't say, 'I want the first *aliyah*!'" The *kohen* gets the first *aliyah*; there is nothing to debate.

Chazal established a hierarchy, so there should be peace in the *beis medresh*.

Another factor that at times can cause a dispute in a beis midrash is *nusach*. People want to daven the *nusach* they are used to, the *nusach* of their tradition. What do you do when some community members wish to daven *nusach Ashkenaz*, and some wish to daven *nusach Sefard*? There is only one beis midrash. How do you keep the peace?

Reb Yosef Shaul Natenson *zt'l* (the Shoel u'Meishiv) was the Rav of Lemberg, and in his beis midrash, they davened *nusach Ashkanaz*. In the summer, the Lemberger Rav would go with his community to the Carpathian mountains to spend the summer in Skolia.

In Skolia, the *nusach* was *Sefard*, as the residents of Skolia were chassidim.

One Friday night, the *chazan* was a chassid from Skolia. He davened *nusach Sefard*, and the Lemberg summer guests complained.

The first uproar was when the *chazan* said ויצמה פורקניה in *kaddish*. The congregants of Lemberg heckled and protested. Reb Yosef Shaul Natenson raised his hand, signaling that they should remain silent.

The *tefillah* continued, and it was peaceful until they reached the end of *Kabalas Shabbos*. At this point, chassidim say כגוונא, and the Ashkenazic custom is to say במה מדליקין. The *chazan* began כגוונא, and the summer guests from Lemberg protested.

The people of Skolia replied, "This is our beis midrash. Every week we say כגוונא. Why shouldn't we this week?"

The Lemberg community responded, "In the summer, we are the majority. There are more people from Lemberg here than Skolia. Furthermore, your *parnassah* comes from us, because we rent your summer homes. And don't forget that we donated a lot of money to build this beis midrash. What you do the entire year is your business, but in the summer, it should be Ashkenaz."

Reb Yosef Shaul silenced the community once again. He said, תדיר ושאינו תדיר קודם, the more common custom prevails.

Throughout the year, this beis midrash davened *nusach Sefard*, so that is how they should daven in the summer, too.

After the *tefillah*, Reb Yosef Shaul spoke to the community to teach them the *halachos* of these matters and to teach them the *hashkafah*, the correct outlook.

He said, "A beis midrash is a place where we gather to give honor to Hashem. The *yetzer hara* tries to instigate a *machlokes* to ruin this holy atmosphere. He tells the Lemberg community to demand that the shul say במה מדליקין. Thereby, he is מדליק, he turns on the flames of *machlokes* in the beis midrash. The community of Skolia responds in the same bickering way, because the *yetzer hara* incites them to insist that we say כגוונא. (The translation of כגוונא is "in the same way," and the people of Skolia answered back in the same bickering tone as the Lemberger guests.) But you can be sure, my brothers, that this wasn't the intention of the early *chachamim* who established these tefillos. The goal is and should always be peace, not *machlokes*.

"But what can we do? We are in *galus* for such a long time, and disputes like these happen. We should daven for Moshiach, because when Moshiach comes, we won't say ויצמה פורקניה anymore. And Moshiach will tell us whether we should say כגוונא or במה מדליקין. If he tells us to say כגוונא, it will be as we say in this prayer: כגוונא דיליה למהויה אחד באחד that there will be complete unity among Yidden. And if Moshiach will tell us to say במה מדליקין, we will be מדליק, light the fire of *hislahavus* and the fire of love, and not the fire of *machlokes*."

Reb Yosef Shaul concluded, "We are in Skolia, a chassidishe city, so I said a chassidic *vort*. But now I will approach the matter from a halachic perspective: When someone from Skolia comes to Lemberg, he should say כגוונא silently to himself, as he is accustomed to saying at home. And when the people of Lemberg visit Skolia for the summer, they should say במה מדליקין silently to themselves. That's what I do. When I'm in Skolia, I say במה מדליקין silently. And if

someone from Skolia is in Lemberg and he wants to say *במה מדליקין* together with the congregation, he can do so. And if someone from Lemberg wants to say *בגוונא* together with the congregation of Skolia, he can do so. I accept "these sins" on my shoulders. The main thing, dear brothers, is that there be peace among you. If there will be peace, the *nusach* isn't so important, and the Satan (the *yetzer hara*) will be silenced."

Some years later, in 1908, a similar *machlokes* broke out in Hamburg, Germany. For many years, the Hamburg *beis midrash* davened *nusach Ashkenaz*, but as the demographic of the city changed due to the migration of many Polish Yidden, the community consisted primarily of *chasidim*, and they wanted to change the *nusach hatefillah* to *Sefard*.

The question was, should the *beis midrash* continue in *nusach Ashkenaz*, as this was how it was established, and there were still members of the *beis midrash* who preferred *nusach Ashkenaz*, or should they adjust to the new reality, and since the majority wanted to daven *Sefard*, they should change the *nusach* to *Sefard*.

The *gabaim*, representatives of both sides of the debate, came to the Berzhaner Rav *zt'l* (the Maharasham) and asked him to rule on this matter.

The Berzhaner Rav told them the story of the Lemberger Rav (stated above), and that the emphasis must be on peace because that is more important than the *nusach*.

And then the Berzhaner Rav helped them reach a compromise that satisfied both sides. The *gaba'im* performed a *kinyan*, expressing a promise that they accept the conditions of the settlement. This is how the Berzhaner Rav made peace for the Hamburg *kehillah*.

Nip it in the Bud

More advice regarding avoiding *machlokes* is to nip it in the bud, which means to amend the *machlokes* when it is still tiny.

Machlokes is compared to fire. When a fire is small, it isn't so hard to put it out. But when the fire grows, you have to call the fire department. You can't put it out on your own.

Never leave a small *machlokes* unresolved. Ask forgiveness, amend the hard feelings. If you don't fix it immediately, the small *machlokes* will grow, and then it is harder to put out the fire.

The Shlah HaKadosh says that the word *מחלוקת* hints to this lesson. The first letter is *מ*, and it has a small opening on the bottom. This alludes to a minor breach of peace. You can quickly fix the problem and end the *machlokes*. But if you don't fix the tiny *machlokes*, it will grow. This brings us to the following letter – the letter *ח*. The *ח* is open wide on the bottom, signifying that the *machlokes* has widened. The following letters are *ל* *ק*. The *ל* rises above all the letters, the *ק* descends below. They imply that the flames of the *machlokes* are now blazing in all directions. Finally, we reach the letter *ת*, which stands securely on its two feet. The dispute is firmly established, and it is now very difficult to amend.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 7.) says that this lesson is alluded to in the *pasuk* (*Mishlei* 17:14), *פוטח מים ראשית מדון*, "Like water that begins to overflow, so is the beginning of a dispute." There are boundaries at the edge of a river that prevent the water from overflowing. But if water begins to trickle through a tiny opening in the boundary, the gap will widen until the water gushes through. The same is with the onset of a *machlokes* (*ראשית מדון*). It starts small; but unattended, it will become worse until it can become unbearable and uncontrollable.

Consequently, one should keep his radar up to perceive the slightest breach in peace. Ask forgiveness, and amend it right away. Because if you leave that minor breach unfixed, the fissure can become greater and wider.

Vitur

It states (*Koheles* 4:9), טובים השנים מן האחד. The Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* explains that if you see two people getting along, know that it is מן האחד, because of one of them. The one who is *mevater* and lets the other one have his way, he is the one who brings peace into the relationship.

Indeed, *vitur* is a wonderful key to peace. The problem is that each person wants the other one to be *mevater*.

A *gadol* was speaking with a person who didn't have *shalom bayis*. The *gadol* told him, "You have to be *mevater*! That's the only way."

The man replied, "I know. I tell that to my wife all the time, but she doesn't get it."

The Rambam (*Hilchos Deios* 7:7) writes, "It is proper that a person should be מעביר על מדותיו (to be *mevater*). Because for the wise, they understand that ultimately everything in this world is foolishness, and not worth fighting over."

Speak Softly

It states (*Mishlei* 15:1), מענה רך ישיב חמה, "Soft-spoken words remove anger." If someone is angry with you, and you answer back in soft tones, it can dissolve the *machlokes*.

The Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* said that this is hinted at in the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 120:7), אני שלום וכי, לדבר המה למלחמה. The Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* explained, אני שלום I am a man of peace, because כי, I know how to speak. Chazal say that כי has four meanings (בי משמש) (בארבע לשונות) and its meanings change according to the context. To be a man of peace, כי, you have to know how to

speak in each situation. You have to know when to speak softly, kindly, etc.

The final words of the *pasuk* are, המה למלחמה. The letters of המה can be read forwards and backward.⁵ This is hinting to the unwise people who respond to harsh words with harsh words of their own. המה למלחמה, if you do so, you are creating war and dispute.

Avoid Machlokes

The wisest counsel for *machlokes* is to avoid them, entirely.

The Imrei Noam told the following *mashal*:

A lion asked a sheep to smell his breath and to tell him how it smells. The sheep did and said, "Your breath smells terrible."

The lion said, "Where is your respect for the king of all animals?" and the lion ate the sheep.

Then the lion asked the wolf for his opinion. The wolf saw what happened to the sheep, so the wolf said, "My master, your breath smells lovely."

"You are lying. How dare you lie to me," and the lion devoured the wolf as well.

Then the king went to the fox and said, "Smell my breath and tell me how it is."

The fox pointed to his nose and said, "My nose is stuffed. I can't smell anything."

The Imrei Noam says that this is what one should do when a *machlokes* is raging. Just keep away from it because getting involved will only bring you trouble.

5. The Beis Yisrael was once sitting in the back seat of a car, and the driver and the Rebbe's *shamash* were in the front seats. The *shamash* felt that it was improper that his back was to the Rebbe, so he turned around and faced the Rebbe. The driver did the same. He turned around and faced the Rebbe. The Beis Yisrael said, "When a שמש is turned around (and read backwards) it remains שמש. However, when a מנהיג (driver, leader) turns around it reads גיהנם."

The Chofetz Chaim once left Radin to avoid being drawn into a *machlokes*. Often, the best solution for *machlokes* is to run away from it.

A small town had one horse and buggy driver, who served as the town's taxi. Whenever someone had to go somewhere or make a delivery, this wagon driver was hired for the job.

When the wagon driver was old, and he wasn't keeping up with people's requests, the townspeople appointed a young wagon driver to take his place.

The old wagon driver was insulted. He said, "I will test this new driver. If he knows how to drive a horse and buggy, I will let him take me over. But if he fails my test, then you shouldn't fire me and hire him."

The townspeople didn't want to hurt the feelings of the old wagon driver who worked for them for so many years, so they agreed that he test the new driver.

The old wagon driver asked his young competition, "What will you do if your horse and buggy get caught in the mud, and the horse can't pull it out?"

"I will tell everyone to get off the wagon so that the load will be lighter, and then the horse will be able to pull them out."

"And if that doesn't work, what will you do?"

"I will take off all the bundles and packages too so that the horse can pull out of the mud."

"And if that doesn't work, what will you do?"

The young wagon driver didn't know. He failed the test. The old wagon driver declared that he would continue on the job because they didn't find a suitable replacement.

The young wagon driver said to the old, experienced wagon driver, "Please tell me,

what does an expert wagon driver do if the horses are caught in the mud?"

The old wagon driver looked the young man in his eyes and said, "An experienced wagon driver doesn't let his horses get stuck in the mud in the first place."

The lesson regarding *machlokes* is to avoid falling into muddy situations. After one falls into the quagmire, there are tips on how to get out. But why did you end up there in the first place? Prevention is the best cure.

The Gemara (*Chulin* 58:) discusses the prohibition of eating worms and insects, and the conversation leads to the *baka* bug, which the Gemara says lives no longer than one day.

The Gemara asks that the lifespan isn't consistent with a story people say about the *baka* bug:

"People say a female *baka* separated from her husband for seven years. She said, 'You found a fat person in Mechuzah, who just came out of the river and was wrapped in sheets. You landed on him, sucked his blood, and you didn't tell me!' This saying implies that a *baka* can live much longer than a day. A *baka* couple separated for seven years, due to a dispute.

The Gemara replies, בשני דידהו, "in their years." The *baka* only lives for a day, however, the ratio of the *baka* bug's short lifespan in comparison to a human's lifespan, the separation was equivalent to seven years.

When one sees *baka* bugs fighting, one thinks, "It's a pity that they're fighting. They live for such a short time. Shouldn't they make the most out of their short life?"

Life is longer for human beings, but relatively speaking, it's also quite short. Does it make sense to fill the short time with quarrels?

There were two *shochtim* in Shechetz, Poland, and the question arose as to who was the primary *shochet*. This resulted in a *machlokes*. The Piltzer Rav zt'l (Sifsei Tzaddik)

wrote to one of the *shochtim*, "Machlokes is fire, and one runs away from fire. Pick up your feet and leave Shechetz right away."

(Unfortunately, the *shochet* didn't receive the letter and was *niftar* shortly afterward. The fire of the *machlokes* burned him. The family never forgave the person who didn't deliver the letter because he wanted this *shochet* to remain in Shechetz.)

Erev Shabbos

Another way to avoid *machlokes* is to realize that there are times that are prone for *machlokes*, and when they occur, no one is really at fault, other than the *yetzer hara* who provoked it.

The Chida writes, "Erev Shabbos afternoon is a perilous time for *machlokes* between a husband and wife... The *sitra achara* strives with all its might to initiate a dispute between them..."⁶

Reb Chaim Palagi *zt'l* (*Kaf HaChaim* 27:35) writes, "I affirm that every household in which a *machlokes* takes place on Friday afternoon or Friday night, it is certain, proven, and true that something bad will happen to them during the following week. Check it out, and you will see that it is so."

The Ben Ish Chai writes, "Know that if one fights with his wife, children, or maid, he thinks that he is right... However, if he were wise, he would understand that if a mistake happened at home, it wasn't their fault — it happened because the Satan seeks to instigate disputes at that time. Therefore, if some task wasn't completed properly, don't blame your wife or your maids. Understand the defense we are stating here — because it is the truth. And then you will not be angry with them and it will be good for you in this world and the next world."

The Chasam Sofer (*Likutim Vayakhel*) explains the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 35:2-3), ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה, וביום השביעי יהיה לכם, "Six days do your work and the seventh day will be for you." The Chasam Sofer explains, "This means your success during the six weekdays is derived from the seventh day — Shabbos. Therefore, לא תבערו אש ביום השבת, don't ignite the fire of *machlokes* on Shabbos, so you will have a vessel to hold the *brachos*."

"They Fell on their Faces"

The Tur (*Orach Chaim* 131) writes, "We daven in many positions: sitting, standing, and fallen on the face. Moshe Rabbeinu did that, as it states (*Devarim* 9:9), ואשב בהר, 'I sat on the mountain,' and it states (*ibid.* 10:10), ואנכי עמדתי בהר, 'I stood on the mountain,' and it states (*ibid.* 9:25), ואתנפל לפני ה', 'I fell before Hashem.'"

The Bach explains that first, we daven sitting down [when we say *Shema* with its *brachos*], then we stand up for *Shemonah Esrei*, and then we fall on our faces for *tachanun*, because we want to daven in these three ways. Afterward we say, ואנחנו לא נדע מה נעשה, which means we don't know of any other form of *tefillah*. If we did, we would daven in those ways too, as we seek to pray and beseech Hashem in every possible way.

In this week's *parashah*, Moshe and Aharon fell on their faces and prayed.

Because of the *machlokes* that Korach created, Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon (16:21-22), "Leave the nation, and I will destroy them all in a moment." ויפלו על פניהם ויאמרו... "Moshe and Aharon fell on their faces and said... 'If one person sins, will You be angry at the entire community?'"

Hashem accepted their *tefillah*, which they said in this unique way, by falling on their faces.

6. The Gemara (*Gittin* 52.) relates a story of a couple who would fight every Friday evening. Reb Meir, wanting to help them, came to their house on Friday, for three weeks, and in his presence they wouldn't fight. By the third week Reb Meir heard the Satan say, "Woe, Reb Meir drove me out of this house!"

נפילת אפיים, to daven fallen on the face, is considered a very special tefillah and is *mesugal* for the tefillos to be answered.

Rabbeinu b'Chaya (16:22) explains:

"Moshe and Aharon prayed fallen on their faces, and this is the source to נפילת אפיים (*tachanun*) when people fall on their faces to pray."

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya says that praying while fallen on the face expresses (a) *yiras Shamayim*, that he is afraid to look at Hashem who is before him. (b) It expresses distress and agony because when a person is sad, he will often fall on his face. We pray in this way to show that we are so upset with our *aveiros*, and we can't even raise our faces. (c) Fallen on the face demonstrates that we are entirely dependent on Hashem's aid. We can't sit up straight, we can't move, and we can't do anything without Hashem helping us. We are entirely dependent on Him.

After writing the three reasons for נפילת אפיים, Rabbeinu b'Chaya lists them again, with elaboration.

As we wrote above, falling on the face shows:

(a) *Yiras Shamayim*, that he is afraid to look at Hashem who is before him.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya explains:

"When one davens, the *Shechinah* is before him...therefore, a method of tefillah is to cover the face. As it states about Moshe (*Shemos* 3), [when he saw the *Shechinah* in the burning bush, ויסתר משה פניו כי ירא מהביט אל, האלקים, "Moshe concealed his face because he was afraid to look at Hashem."

The second reason for נפילת אפיים was:

(b) It expresses distress and agony because when a person is sad, he will often fall on his face. We pray in this way to show that we are so upset with our *aveiros*, and we can't even raise our faces.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya elaborates:

"This expression of humility [demonstrating that he is upset with his *aveiros*] is a foundation of tefillah. In its merit, his tefillos will be answered because Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees his distress and will fulfill his requests. As Chazal (*Taanis* 24) say about a tzaddik that [was davening for rain, but his tefillos weren't answered]. חלש דעתיה ואתא מטרא, he felt bad [because he saw that he wasn't worthy for his tefillos to be answered], and it began to rain. And there was another scholar איכסף ואתא מטרא, who was embarrassed [that he couldn't bring rain with his tefillos], and it began to rain." Hashem doesn't want the tzaddik to be distressed, and therefore, He answers his tefillos. This is the power of davening while fallen on the face, which demonstrates how brokenhearted we feel, and Hashem wants to answer our tefillos just to relieve us from our distress.

Rabbeinu b'Chaya adds that we see the power of נפילת אפיים from the following Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59:).

Reb Eliezer and Raban Gamliel were brothers-in-law, as Reb Eliezer's wife was Raban Gamliel's sister. The Gemara states that after a particularly heated halachic dispute, Raban Gamliel placed Reb Eliezer in *cherem*, excommunication.

Reb Eliezer was naturally very distressed and broken.

From that time on, Reb Eliezer's wife prevented her husband from reciting *tachanun*. She feared that if he falls on his face to say *tachanun*, and in this fallen state, he expresses his agony on being in *cherem*, Hashem will answer his tefillos and punish Raban Gamliel for placing him in *cherem*. Therefore, every day, she was present when her husband davened, and when it came to *tachanun*, she prevented him from saying it.

One day, she mistakenly thought it was *rosh chodesh*, a day we don't say *tachanun*, but *rosh chodesh* was a day later. That day she didn't stand guard to prevent her husband from saying *tachanun*.

(Another opinion in the Gemara is that she went to bring bread to a poor person, and therefore she wasn't present when Reb Eliezer said *tachanun*.)

When she came to the room where her husband was davening, and saw her husband saying *tachanun*, she said, "You can get up. My brother just died."

Soon afterward a shofar was blown in Raban Gamliel's home, announcing the *levayah*.

Reb Eliezer asked his wife how she knew that Raban Gamliel was *niftar*. She replied, כך מקובלני מבית אבי אבא כל השערים ננעלים חוץ משערי אונוה, "I have a tradition from my grandfather's home: All heavenly gates are closed, except before someone who was insulted."

The explanation is that when Reb Eliezer prayed with distress and agony, his head fallen, that roused Hashem's compassion to answer his tefillos, to relieve him from his distress.

As Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "She wasn't afraid that Reb Eliezer's regular tefillos would punish her brother, but she was afraid of the tefillos he said fallen on his face... This is because due to his distress, with his tefillos, he could punish Raban Gamliel who placed him in *cherem*."

(c) Falling on the face demonstrates that we are entirely dependent on Hashem's aid. We can't sit up straight, we can't move, and we can't do anything without Hashem helping us. We are entirely dependent on Him.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya elaborates:

"When one falls on his face, closing his eyes and mouth, this demonstrates that he is unable to see what can help him or what will harm him. He doesn't know how to take care of himself. He is helpless without Hakadosh Baruch Hu's aid. It is like his senses are tied, his eyes and mouth closed, and he can't see or speak unless it is Hashem's will.

"This is also the reason we pray with our feet together, as though they are tied. This shows that a person can't obtain his needs on his own. The gentile nations do something similar because they put their hands together when they pray. They don't know why they pray that way.⁷ But this is the reason. It demonstrates that they don't have any strength. It is like their hands are tied, and they are giving themselves over to the One they are praying to. To receive one's needs and to be protected from harm, feet play a greater role than hands do; therefore we put our feet together, and not the hands."

Tachanun

Tachanun begins with *viduy* (אשמונו בגדנו). The Baal Shem Tov zt'l teaches, (*Bereishis* 22:24), ודוי אחר תפילה מגיע ואת מעכה, *roshei teivos*: עד כסא הכבוד, "Viduy after *Shemonah Esrei* reaches Hashem's throne."

Reb Yeruchem was one of the primary *chazanim* in the beis medresh of the Beis Aharon zt'l of Stolin.

7. Since we mentioned the prayers of goyim, we bring here a *teshuvah* from Reb Moshe Feinstein zt'l (*Igros Moshe*, *Orach Chaim* vol.2, 25) on this subject.

He writes, "Goyim aren't obligated to pray. The proof is that prayer isn't counted among the seven mitzvos Bnei Noach. However, when goyim pray, it seems that they have a mitzvah.... And when they have a specific need, like when there's someone ill or when they need *parnassah*, I think that at these times they are *obligated* to pray. Don't ask, if so, why isn't prayer among the seven mitzvos of Bnei Noach? It is because *emunah* means to believe that only Hashem gives *parnassah*, heals the ill, etc. When one doesn't turn to Hashem with *bitachon* and with prayer, this means he doesn't believe in Hashem, and that he believes in other powers. Even gentiles are obligated to believe in Hashem... Therefore, obviously, they are also obligated to turn to Hashem for *parnassah*, *refuah* and for all their needs."

Another chassid desired to be the *chazan*, too, so he said to the Beis Aharon, "Just because my name isn't *ירוחם*, I can't daven before the *amud*?"

The Beis Aharon replied, "If you will say *viduy*, admit your sins, and leave them, then you will also be *ירוחם*. As it states (*Mishlei* 25:13), *מכסה פשעיו לא יצליח ומודה ועוזב ירוחם*, 'If a person conceals his sins, he won't succeed. But if one says *viduy* and abandons his *aveiros*, *ירוחם*, he receives Hashem's compassion.'"

A chassid told the Rebbe of Radshitz *zt'l* that he lost most of his money. The Radshitzer asked, "Do you say *tachanun*?"

Ashamed, he admitted that he hadn't said *tachanun* in many years.

"How many *tachanuns* are you missing?"

Together, they calculated, and they realized that he was missing thousands of *tachanuns*. The Rebbe told him, "From now on, you must be cautious and say *tachanun*. Additionally, you must say all those *tachanuns* that you missed. If you do that, your good mazal will return. But if you miss even just one *tachanun* that you owe, you won't receive your *yeshuah*."

The man followed the Rebbe's counsel. It took a few weeks, but he said all the *tachanuns* he owed and was careful to say *tachanun* in the tefillos.

His mazal improved. He became wealthy. He came several times to Radshitz, and gave generously to the Rebbe's household.

The Radshitzer Rebbe's son, Reb Hillel, repeated this story and added that his father's counsel was very logical. Because the Mishnah (*Kiddushin* 82:) states that people don't have *parnassah* due to *aveiros*. As it states, "Reb Shimon ben Elazar said, 'Did you ever see animals or birds with a profession? Yet they have *parnassah* easily, without any hardship. Now, animals were created to serve man, and man was created to serve Hashem. Shouldn't I, too, have *parnassah* without hardship? The answer is, I committed bad deeds and, therefore, lost my *parnassah*.'"

Aveiros make *parnassah* hard to attain; therefore, saying *viduy* helps bring it back.⁸

The Arizal instituted saying (*Tehillim* chapter 86) *תפילה לדוד* on weekdays, before the *שיר של יום*, and he urges us to say it with much *kavanah*.

Someone told the Shinover Rav about his financial problems. The Rebbe asked him whether he says *תפילה לדוד* every morning. The man replied that he doesn't. The Shinover Rav told him to say that chapter the number of times he skipped it, and then he will have *parnassah*. And that is what happened.⁹

8. Rava said to his students (*Brachos* 35:), "Please, don't come to me [to learn Torah] during the months Nisan and Tishrei, so you won't be busy with your *parnassah* the entire year."

According to its simple meaning, Tishrei and Nisan are the primary months to work the field. He told them that they should work in their fields those months, so they will have the entire year free to study Torah.

According to our discussion we can explain *בדרך צחות* that Rava was telling them: *Parnassah* comes from *tachanun* and *viduy*. In the months of Tishrei and Nisan we don't say *tachanun*. Rava told his students that on those days, the only way to get *parnassah* is to work – literally. But the rest of the year, they can earn their *parnassah* by saying *tachanun*.

9. Each morning, Reb Issar Zalman Meltzer *zt'l* studied Torah with his nephew in a chassidic *shtibel*. They were learning *masechta Brachos* with *rishonim*, and they came across the Rambam's ruling that saying Shema after the *netz hachamah* is *bedieved*. (In other words, it isn't only a praiseworthy to daven by the *netz hachamah*. According to the Rambam, davening after the *netz* turns the Shema into a *bedieved*, a mitzvah performed in a poor way). Reb Issar Zalman

There was a *mageifah* (epidemic) in a town near Stolin, and many young people were dying, *r'l*. The Beis Aharon knew that this community was lax with saying *tachanun*. The Beis Aharon sent them a telegram stating they should accept on themselves to be cautious with *tachanun*. They did so, and the plague ended.

Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiller *zt'l* told the renowned Karliner chassid Reb Yehoshua Hershel Halutovsky, "I saw the Beis Aharon *zt'l* in a dream, and he asked me why people are lenient with *tachanun* and skip it."

Reb Yehoshua Hershel asked him, "How do you know it was the Beis Aharon?"

Rebbe Shlomo replied, "I saw the Beis Aharon when I was three years old."

Saying *והוא רחום*, the longer *tachanun*, on Mondays and Thursdays, is particularly important.

The Yaavatz teaches, *דבר מנוסה בדוק ומקובל ביד*, "It is tested and proven, and it is known to the elders of the generation, that saying *והוא רחום* [Mondays and Thursdays] with a minyan annuls bad decrees."

Students of the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* said, "The *hisorerus*, tears, and *teshuvah* that can be witnessed on great *rabbanim* at the high moments of the *yomim nora'im* (such as *tekiyas shofar* and by *kol nidrei*) was seen every Monday and Thursday when the Chasam Sofer said *tachanun*."

In a village near Belz, there was a Yid who ran a bar (a *krechmer*). His routine was to close the store at one o'clock a.m. One night, at one a.m., he told everyone to leave, which they did, except for one person who was drunk like Lot. The tavern owner went over to him and instructed him to leave. The drunk got up, stumbled towards the door, but tripped over a table leg, hit his head on the floor, and died.

The tavern owner was terrified. If people find out that a goy died in his bar, he would be held responsible. His life was in danger.

He quickly left his shop, locked it from the outside, and rushed to Belz to speak to Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l*. The Belzer Rebbe told him, "Go next to the corpse and say the *והוא רחום* (the long *tachanun* said on Mondays and Thursdays)."

He said *והוא רחום* tearfully and with immense *kavanah*. When he finished, the goy stood up and left the store. He went to the place where he worked and lived. As soon as he entered his workshop, he fell to the ground, dead.

The tavern owner returned to Belz to thank the Rebbe. He asked, "If *tachanun* is so precious and powerful, why are Yidden lenient with it? Why do they seek opportunities to avoid saying it?"

The Rebbe replied, "Do you want all goyim to come back to life?"¹⁰

said to his nephew, "From now on, we will daven in the Brody shul, where there is a minyan at the *netz* so we can say the Shema at the ideal time."

This arrangement lasted one day only. On the next day, the nephew didn't come to the Brody shul for *Shacharis*. Reb Issar Zalman asked him about that, and he replied that he can't forgo *תפילה לדוד* that is said in the chassidic *shtibel*.

10. Although we aren't on the level to be *מחיה מתים* with this *tefillah*, we can certainly *מחיה חיים*, "to give life to the living" when we say this *tachanun*.