

# אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה  
מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר  
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*Shmuessen from  
Harav Moshe  
Rabinowitz Zt"l*

## פרשת קרח

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## פרשת קרח

כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים ושאינה לשם שמים אין סופה להתקיים, איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים זו מחלוקת שמאי והלל ושאינה לשם שמים זו מחלוקת קרח וכל עדתו (אבות ה: יז)

*Any machlokes which is l'shem Shamayim will produce lasting results, and if it is not l'shem Shamayim it will not produce lasting results. Which is a Machlokes that is l'shem Shamayim? This is the machlokes Shammai and Hillel. And that which is not l'shem Shamayim is the machlokes of Korach and his group.*

In this week's Parshah we have the *machlokes* of Korach, which is the quintessential *machlokes* that is not *l'shem Shamayim*. This brought his demise, as the *Mishnah* teaches; a *machlokes* not *l'shem Shamayim* does not produce lasting results. R' Chaim Shmulevitz pointed out that in our Parshah we also have an example of a *machlokes* which was *l'shem Shamayim*.

### The Machlokes Between Moshe and the Malachim

The *possuk* says: ויאמר משה אל אהרן קח את המחתה ותן עליה אש מעל המזבח *And* ושים קטרת והולך מהרה אל העדה וכפר עליהם כי יצא הקצף מלפני ה' החל הנגף (יז: יא) *Moshe said to Aharon "Take the pan and put on it fire from the Mizbeich and place Ketores. Bring it quickly to the nation and atone for them, for the fury has gone out from before Hashem – the plague has begun.*

There was a plague which was spreading in the *yiddishe* camp, and Moshe Rabeinu told Aharon to quickly take *Ketores* to provide a *kapparah*, and to stop the plague. Where did Moshe learn this from? Rashi brings a Gemara in *Shabbos* (פח:) which tells the story:

*When Moshe went to Shamayim to receive the Torah the Malachim did not want to let him. They said to Hashem "It is not proper to give the Torah to mankind" Hashem then said to Moshe: "Give them an answer." Moshe said: "I am afraid I will get burned by the heat of their mouths!" To this Hashem responded, "Grab onto my Kisei HaKavod and answer them."*

*Moshe did so, and he then proceeded to prove to the Malachim that Torah belongs on earth. He said: "Did you go down to Mitzrayim and serve Paraoh? Do you live amongst other nations and thus have a Yetzer Hara for Avodah Zarah? Do you do any work which you can rest from on Shabbos?" Moshe brought many such proofs that the ideas in the Torah only apply to humans, and it was therefore clear that the Torah belongs on earth. Upon hearing this the Malachim agreed with Moshe, and they all gave him gifts.*

*Even the Malach HaMaves gave Moshe a gift. He taught Moshe that Ketores can be used to stop a plague.*

R' Chaim Shmulevitz explained that the reason why the *Malachim* gave Moshe these gifts is because they owed him *hakaras hatov*. They were having an argument as to where the Torah belongs, and Moshe had taught them the truth. Because Moshe had brought them to the *emes* they were so indebted to him that they felt compelled to give him gifts.

This is a demonstration of a *machloket l'shem Shamayim*. The *Malachim* were arguing with Moshe because they felt that the *kavod* of the Torah does not allow for it to be lowered down to the earth. Their intent was purely *l'shem Shamayim*; there were no ulterior motives. Therefore, when they arrived at the truth, that Hashem intended for the Torah to be on earth, they were grateful to Moshe for teaching them; so grateful that they felt compelled to give him gifts to repay him. They were not put down because they had lost the argument.

This is a model of a *machlokes l'shem Shamayim*. It is a *machlokes* in which both parties are in search for truth. Such a *machlokes* leads to the truth, and once they arrive at the truth the *machlokes* dissipates instantly.

### **A Machlokes L'shem Shamayim Leads to Mutual Respect and Even Love**

The same applies to *machlokes Shammai v'Hillel*. They argued only in order to arrive at the truth of what is the *ratzon Hashem*. There were no personal motives in their arguments. This kind of *machlokes* is beloved to Hashem, and on this the Mishnah says "כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים" "סופו להתקיים" The end result of this sort of *machlokes* is *לזה* *נעשו אוהבים זה לזה*, *they come to love one another*.

### **The Machlokes of Korach**

The opposite is true regarding the *machlokes* of Korach. In this *machlokes* the motive was not to find the truth, but rather Korach was interested in personal gain.

We can bring out this point with the following *vort* from the Siatener Rebbe zt"l.

Rashi (פרק טז, פסוק ז) asks the following question: וקרח שפקח היה מה, *Korach who was a smart man, what caused him to act with such foolishness? The answer is: His eye caused him to blunder. He saw a chain of greatness coming from his progeny; Shmuel was his descendant, and there were twenty four mishmaros which came from his grandchildren. He thought he would be saved in their merit.*

The Siatener Rebbe asked: Why does Rashi say עינו הטעתו, his eye caused him to blunder, in the singular form? It should say his eyes, in the plural.

He answered by asking another question: Why did Hashem give us two eyes? Would it not suffice with one? To this he answered that we have one eye to see the greatness of Hashem, and another to see our own personal insignificance.

Based on this idea he explained that only one of Korach's eyes caused him to blunder. Korach used one eye to recognize Hashem's greatness, and he even excelled in that area. Where he failed was in the use of his other eye. He did not recognize his personal insignificance, but rather he saw himself as a great man due to the fact that his descendants would be great. This caused him to valiantly pursue his personal agenda.

### **Machlokes Leaves Only Devastation in its Wake**

The result of focusing on personal gain is the *machlokes* of Korach. Such a *machlokes* cannot produce anything good because the motive is by definition not to determine what the *ratzon Hashem* is. Someone who is focused on his own personal gain has little interest in whether or not he is on the right side of the truth. He will fight until the end to further his agenda even when it becomes glaringly obvious that he is wrong.

*I know of a very wealthy man who, before he died, spent a very large sum of money to ensure that his assets would be distributed equally between his children, and there would be no machlokes. Unfortunately, his efforts did not bear fruit, and after his death his family was torn apart due to machlokes about who would inherit*

*what. For many years after his death, this man's assets were completely untouched, as the dispute was still unresolved.*

This is the sad result of *machlokes* which is not *l'shem Shamayim*. When each side is caught up in their own personal agendas, the result is that nobody wins. All they are left with is quarrel, and heartache.

### **Shalom is the Ultimate Ratzon Hashem**

On the other hand, one whose focus is solely on fulfilling the *ratzon Hashem* will sometimes concede loss even if he is on the right side of the truth. This is because he recognizes that the greatest ideal in the eyes of Hashem is *Shalom*. Additionally, he understands that by doing so he is really saving himself from the much greater loss of *machlokes*.

*Rav Herschel Zaks zt"l had spent five years building a yeshiva after the war. After all the work that he put into it, a contender came, claiming that the yeshiva really belonged to him. Rav Herschel did not wish to be involved in such a machlokes. He just picked himself up and moved to Eretz Yisrael.*

*I used to visit his home in Eretz Yisrael, and every so often his rebbitzen would let out a krechtz/sigh about how the yeshiva was unjustly taken from them. She would express a thought that perhaps they should have tried to fight back to try to keep the yeshiva. However, she would always immediately stop herself with a smile.*

*"We surely did the right thing," she would say. "We could both have a machlokes and end up with nothing, or we could take the 'nothing' without the machlokes! Why should we opt for machlokes when it would gain nothing for us anyway?!"*

*In truth, they did not end up with nothing. They had a beautiful life in Eretz Yisrael with many talmidim. Had they been machzik b'machlokes, they would have been exchanging so much for what was indeed nothing.*

*I myself am personally aware of other such stories as well. There was indeed unfair treatment, and the wronged party had the right to complain and cause machlokes over what was done to him. However, because the path of shalom was chosen, the individual ended up gaining what he would never have gotten had he pursued machlokes.*

**Shalom is the Only Receptacle for Brachah**

These are the words of the final mishnah in Shas: לא מצא הקדוש ברוך הוא כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום (עוקצין ג' י"ב) *HaKadosh Boruch did not find a receptacle which will contain brachah for Yisrael other than peace.*

We can illustrate this with the following *machal*:

*Shloimy's mother asks him to go borrow some oil from the neighbor, Mrs. Greenstein. Shloimy takes a plastic shopping bag and knocks on Mrs. Greenstein's door.*

*She hears his request, and she scolds him. "How do you expect to bring oil home in this bag? Bring a bottle that can hold oil!"*

*The next week, Shloimy's mother sends him back to Mrs. Greenstein, this time to borrow potatoes. Not wishing to repeat his previous mistake, Shloimy brings a bottle with him.*

*Mrs. Greenstein sees the bottle, and she scolds him again, (this time a bit harder). "How are you going to take home potatoes in a bottle?! They will not fit inside! Bring a box!"*

*In order to hold an item, one must have the proper container. What, then, is the proper container for brachah?*

*Imagine that Chaim is promised by a navi that Hashem will grant him brachah; but that he just needs to bring a container to take the brachah home.*

*Which container should Chaim get? A bag? A box? Perhaps a pickup truck?*

*Chazal reveal to us in this mishnah that there is only one effective container for bracha: Shalom, peace. If a person thinks that he can receive brachah otherwise, he is a טועה בדבר משנה, erring about that which is an explicit mishnah!*

*Chaim can try davening hard, learning well, doing chessed, fasting – or all of the above.*

*He thinks to himself, 'Now, I will surely merit to receive brachah!'*

*Unfortunately though, he is mistaken. He may receive immense reward for all of those mitzvos, but they will not bring brachah. Only shalom can accomplish this.*

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**וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אֲבָחַר בּוֹ מִטֶּהוּ יִפְרָח וְהִשְׁפַּתִּי מִעָלַי אֶת  
תִּלְנוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (יז: כ)**

*And it will be that the man whom I choose – his staff will blossom. And I will thus remove from myself the complaints of Bnei Yisrael, which they complain against you.*

We find in this Parshah many *nissim* which took place as a result of Korach's complaints against Moshe and Aharon.

- The earth swallowed Korach, Dasan and Aviram, including their families and all of their possessions. This caused all those who witnessed it to flee for fear of getting swallowed in with them.

*The Ohr Hachaim writes that like the trunk of an elephant, a pipe came out of the ground and scooped in anything that belonged to Korach and his family. If he had lent someone something, or if he left something somewhere, the pipe slithered around and sucked those things in.*

- The two hundred and fifty men who formed Korach's group were burned by a fire which Hashem sent on them.
- There was a plague which killed an additional fourteen thousand seven hundred people.

**An Additional Test Was Necessary**

All of these *nissim* demonstrated Hashem's displeasure with the *machlokes* against Moshe and Aharon. However, even after all of these *nissim*, we find that Hashem commanded Aharon and the other *Nesi'im* to perform another test which would prove that Aharon was chosen by Hashem. The Ohr Hachaim explains that even after all of these *nissim*, there was still room for doubt. It was definitely clear that Hashem was displeased with Korach for rebelling and causing a *machlokes*, and Korach was clearly not meant to be the *Kohen Gadol*. However, just because it was definitely not Korach, this does not demonstrate with foolproof clarity that the *Kohen Gadol* was Aharon. It could be that both Korach and Aharon were not meant to be the *Kohen Gadol*. Therefore, in order to remove any doubt, Hashem commanded them to perform another test

which would prove beyond doubt that it was Aharon who was the chosen *Kohen Gadol*.

### **The Test of the Almond Branch**

What was this new test which they performed? All of the *Nesi'im* of each *shevet*, including Aharon, took a branch of an almond tree and they cut it into twelve different sticks. Then, each of them wrote their names on one of the sticks, and they put them in the *Mishkan*. The next day, they came into the *Mishkan* and they saw that Aharon's stick had blossomed, and grew almonds, and the others remained the same as before. It was now clear without a doubt that Aharon was chosen by Hashem.

Why is this *nes* so astounding as to remove any possible doubt? After all, it was just an almond branch which grew almonds. That would seem like a natural occurrence. Although it is true that normally a branch doesn't blossom overnight, it still is not a total deviation from nature.

*It was not an apple or an orange branch which grew almonds, it was an almond branch which grew almonds!*

Why was this test, which did nothing more than accelerate the laws of nature, the one which was chosen to demonstrate that Aharon was the chosen *Kohen Gadol*?

### **Natural Growth Needs a Natural Habitat**

We can answer this question based on the fact<sup>1</sup> that in order for something to grow properly, it is important that it should be in its proper habitat.

*If one tries to grow an orange in Toronto, he is doomed to failure. It could be that he will be able to produce an orange, but it will be sour and distasteful. If one wants to grow sweet, juicy oranges, he needs to go to a warm, sunny place, like California or Florida.*

*To grow an apple, one needs a bit of a colder climate. Washington State is a better option than Florida for apples.*

*If one wants maple syrup, then he should go to Toronto because the cold climate of Toronto is perfect for maple syrup. (The way this syrup grows is that in the winter the tree freezes. This causes*

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<sup>1</sup> Rav Rabinowitz said that he believes he heard this *vort* from R' Yisrael Belsky zt"l.



*a sap to form in between the bark and the tree, and when this melts, it turns into syrup.)*

We see that everything needs to grow in the proper climate, with the right soil, etc. Based on this concept, we can understand why the fact that Aharon's branch blossomed proved that he was the chosen *Kohen Gadol*. The idea of the test was to see for whom the *Mishkan* was his 'natural habitat', and for whom it was unnatural. There were many people who could have been considered as candidates for the *Kehuna Gedolah*, but there was only one person who was the chosen one. By testing whose branch would blossom, it would be proven that for him alone the *Mishkan* was a 'natural habitat', and that is why his branch grew so well. The fact that Aharon's branch blossomed so beautifully in the *Mishkan*, whereas those of the other *Nesi'im* did not blossom at all, demonstrated that he alone fit naturally in the *Mishkan*. The branches of the other *Nesi'im* did not blossom at all, and this showed that the *Mishkan* was not their 'natural habitat'. To have one of them serve as *Kohen Gadol* would be like an orange that was grown in Toronto.

### **Creating a Natural Habitat for Kedusha**

We can learn a very important lesson from this. We see that not only does *gashmiyus* need to grow in its natural habitat, but the same is true regarding *ruchniyus*. It is therefore imperative that we create for ourselves a natural habitat for *ruchniyus*. If our growth in Torah and Avodas Hashem is in an unnatural habitat, we will not grow properly. We must therefore make our homes into places where *kedusha* and *ruchniyus* can blossom naturally.

*In the early days of the Bronx Zoo, they had simple, square cages for the animals. However, the animals did not appreciate their surroundings. Because of their unnatural way of life, they became depressed, and their health deteriorated. The zoo therefore added features for each animal which brought them into their natural habitat.*

*For the flamingo they built an aquatic birdhouse, which made them feel right at home. The features included the sands of the beaches, the trees that are found near the water, and they even added sound effects of the ocean. Upon doing so, the flamingos returned to their natural way of life. They lived longer, and acted as they naturally should, etc.*

*They did similar things for each animal, creating an artificial natural habitat for each one of them, bringing them all the features of their natural homes, and this greatly improved the quality of life for each animal in the zoo.*

We should do the same in our homes. We must create in our homes a natural place for Hashem to reside, and we must therefore build an environment of *kedusha*. The atmosphere of our homes should be one which lends itself to natural growth in Torah and Avodah. The natural sounds should be the sounds of Torah and Yiras Shamayim, and there should be nothing in our homes which could cause someone to fall in his *ruchniyus*. By doing so, we will create a 'natural habitat' for *ruchniyus* and *kedusha*, and we and our children will be able to enjoy natural growth in *Deveikus* and *Avodas Hashem*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rav Rabinowitz went on to say that the city in which one lives also contributes in the creation of a natural habitat for Torah and Mitzvos. He mentioned Lakewood specifically as being a place where it is 'natural' to grow in *Avodas Hashem*, and he demonstrated with the following story which was witnessed by one of his children:

*There was a grocery store in Lakewood which only accepted debit cards, but not credit cards. There was a yungerman who did not know this, and after doing a full week's shopping he rang up his purchases which came to about one hundred dollars. He took out his credit card to pay, only to be told by the cashier that this was not a valid method of payment. However, this yungerman did not have anything else with which to pay. Frustrated about how he had just spent all that time shopping for nothing, he turned to leave the store empty handed.*

*As he was about to go, another yungerman, who was behind him in line, offered to pay with his debit card. However, this did not work because that yungerman did not have sufficient funds on his card. Upon noticing this, another yungerman who was third in line took out his debit card and offered to pay.*

*The first yungerman was quite thankful. He exchanged names, phone numbers and addresses with the one who had paid for him, and he said he would repay him as soon as possible.*

*There were non-Jewish workers in the store who were flabbergasted upon seeing this. That people who did not know each other at all were so willing and easy-going about lending a sum of one hundred dollars to each other, was simply astounding to them.*

Let us learn the lessons of this Parshah, and constantly remind ourselves of the powers of the *Yetzer Hara*. Let us learn to avoid engaging with the *Yetzer Hara* by staying away from *nisayon* at all costs. This is the only way that we can be sure that our vision is clear and is not skewed by the agendas of the *Yetzer Hara*.

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Rav Rabinowitz said that such actions were the product of an environment of chessed and Ahavas Yisrael. Living in a society in which Torah and Avodah are the primary goals, and in which honesty and integrity are a given, causes people to become naturally focused on respecting and helping one another. Therefore, it was only natural that these other *yungerleit* should come forward to lend the other *yungerman* money in his time of need.

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