



PLEASE HELP RELIEVE THE PAIN
HARAV Y. REUVEN RUBIN SHLITA

There is a moment in one's life when minor aches and pains take on a whole new complexion. Stairs become steeper, and seem to be growing as you try ascending them. You begin to learn how to grimace with a smile so as not to alarm others, and most of all you learn to pretend nothing is amiss. I am not talking about anything serious, just the day-to-day kvetching. Recently there was one expression that I have learned to accept from well-meaning doctors and health experts. 'Age related problems'. It sounds a bit glib and pedestrian but it can mean a whole ocean of pain. One particular age-related problem I personally suffer from is the pain I feel when I witness or experience the young generation making horrific decisions that run contrary to everything our tzadikim taught and lived by. I have had the merit to learn Torah from some of the giants that rebuilt the Torah world after the Churban, and can only sit with mouth agape at what is happening in some quarters.

Some years ago, I wrote about how The Bobover Rebbe, Rav Shlomo Zt"l used to sit at a tisch every Rosh Chodesh with all the boys in the Yeshivah aged twelve and higher. There may not be any pictures in existence of those gatherings, but for me they are vividly engraved in my memory. These were opportunities for the Rav to talk to us kids about what it meant to be a Chassid in post war America.

One shmooze stands out whenever we learn this week's parsha of Korach. The subject of machlokes (communal strife) was of very great consequence to the Rov's world view of Torah life. His horror of what machlokes could bring was palpable, and you could sense the Rov's fear of what such strife creates. During the Churban the Rav was heard to say that the catastrophic horrors the Yieden in Poland suffered



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were caused in no small way by the ferocious Machlokas that raged between different Heimisha factions. At the merest whiff of communal intrigue, the Rav would call in any participant and uncharacteristically leave them with no doubt that he would never allow his bochurim to be party to such actions, no matter who was right.

On this occasion the Rav was disquieted by something that had happened that week. There had been some murmuring amongst a small group of boys that were playing down other Chassidic Rebbe's efforts. The Rav cleared his voice and started setting forth with his warm sweet elegant fashion:

“We all want our teachers to be considered great. They bring us the most cherished gift, the Torah, and we feel indebted to them with all our hearts. Sometimes we believe we make them greater by talking down other leaders. This is foolish! If you feel your Rebbe is great, how do you make him greater by making others small? You should say that other leaders are great and unique, and your Rebbe is for you even greater.”

The Rav smiled and continued, “what good is it to say ‘Yenner is gornisht,’ that only makes your Rebbe a bit ‘besser vi gornisht’... Better you should say, Yenner is grois und dan Rebbe is nuch gresser.’ (what good does it do to say that another leader is nothing, that only makes your Rebbe a bit better than nothing.)

Machlokas is the feeding trough of the insecure and frightened. It gives a sense of strength when in fact it only underlines inadequacies. Creating strife is corrosive and scars all who are involved.

In Parshas Korach we find to what degree communal strife can reach. Open rebellion, the very earth opening up, total destruction.

The Amshinover Rebbe, Rebbe Yitzchok Zt”l brings a fascinating facet to this whole subject.

In Parshas Pinchas the daughters of Tzelafchad came to Moshe Rabbenu with a special request:

“Our father died in the desert. He was not among the members of Korach's party who protested against Hashem, but he died because of his own sin without leaving any sons.” (27:3)

With this preamble they asked to be given a portion of the land together with their father's brothers.

The Rebbe remarks that these words point out how horrendous the sin of Machlokes is. These daughters stand up and beg to be given in portion in the land of Yisroel. They offer a mitigating petition, yes, their father was a sinner (some explain that he was the Jew who had gathered wood on Shabbos) but he wasn't a ba'al machlokos, he didn't side with Korach and his evil party. This insight is amazing. Chillul Shabbos is no simple matter, in this particular situation it was punished with stoning. Yet, when weighed against machlokas, well, causing strife seems much worse.

As I mentioned, these meanderings were shared some years ago, I bring them once again out of a deep sense of dread and pain. We have all witnessed a pandemic of what must be seen as colossal proportions. So many have been taken from us, many at the peak of their contribution to the Klall. Then came Meron, followed by Karlin Stoln. Just writing the names brings a shudder to one's heart.

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Hashem is banging on our door of complacency, the heavens weep yet we don't seem to hear. Machlokas rages with fresh wildness, chairs are thrown, families ripped apart, have we not learnt anything? We see fighting amongst our ranks, with vicious slander, often driven by modern instantaneous communication. It makes no sense, and yet machlokes thrives and rips communities and families apart. Why? Because we don't see it for what it is. We know what chillul Shabbos is, what unkosher ingredients look like. We have chumres for everything, yet, the gaping hole that swallowed up Korach and co just doesn't seem to be anything we find concerning.

Ask yourself, what are your children thinking whilst you and your friends talk 'assur ledaber' on eirlicha Yieden?

Young souls are besmirched by loшон horah concerning matters that should not even be part of their life experience. Indeed, Sefer Bamidbar, of which Parshas Korach is the fifth parsha, seems to have the dubious honour of containing the lion's share of discord among the Five Books of the Torah. Here, we find the quarrel over entering Israel (chapters 13-14); the unhappiness of Israel with the Manna and their desire to eat meat (chapter 11); and their dissatisfaction over the lack of water (chapter 20). Yet amidst all this, the machlokes led by Korach takes center stage. This because they thought of themselves as standing up for 'a principle', that being their false perception that Moshe was acting as an autocrat and taking the power of leadership for his family.

This, says the Ozneyim La-Torah, is why the Mishnah singles out Korach and his group as the epitome of 'machlokes she-lo le-shem Shomayim': because his is the most dangerous form of machlokes of all. When arguments are petty, the thinking man will avoid them; he realises that to get involved in a skirmish over foolishness isn't worth the cost to his reputation and to his peace-of-mind. Yet when power-struggles and petty-wrangling become "a fight for principle," even the most sound-minded individual must struggle to keep his distance.

I was brought up by the generation of survivors of the worst tragedy ever visited upon our people. Their eyes dreamt of the splendour of a rebuilt Klall Yisroel. Yet, just now, at the cusp of the heights of their well-earned nachas, we find self-inflicted destruction, brought on by imagined 'Le Shem Shomayim' principles.

Yes, I suffer from 'age related' pain and hurt, the sight of all this chaos is hard to bear. Witnessing Torah strongholds being torn apart by our own brethren brings tears to one's eyes.

Let us turn towards Sholom, only in this way can we dissipate this current 'age related' illness and bring instead the illumination of the Moshiach.