

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Korach





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Torah Wellsprings

Korach

“They Fell on their Faces”

It states in this week's *parashah* (16:20-21), וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר הבדלו מתוך העדה הזאת ואכלה אתם כרגע, "Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon, Separate yourselves from this assembly, and I will destroy them in a moment."

Moshe and Aharon prayed. As it states (16:22), ויפלו על פניהם ויאמרו א"ל אלקי הרוחות לכל בשר האיש אחת יחטא ועל כל העדה, תקצף [Moshe and Aharon] fell on their faces and said, 'G-d, Who knows all the thoughts of mankind; if one person sins will you become angry with the entire public?'"

Rashi explains, "You, Hashem don't act in the ways of human beings. When people rebel against a king, the king can't know who they are, so he will punish everyone when he becomes angry. But You

know man's thoughts, and You know who sinned..."

Hashem replied, "You said well. I will reveal who sinned and who didn't sin."

When Moshe and Aharon prayed for the nation this time, "they fell on their faces." As it states, ויפלו על פניהם. The Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, מכאן לנפילה אפים בתפילה, "This is the source for *tachanun* in the *tefillah* (which is said when one lowers his face to his arm)."

There are several forms of *tefillah*, and this is one of them. As the Tur (*Orach Chaim* 131) writes, "...we daven in any way we can: sitting, standing, and falling on our face. Moshe Rabbeinu did that, as it states (*Devarim* 9:9), ואשב בהר, 'I sat on the mountain,' and it states (*ibid.* 10:10), ויאנכי עמדתי בהר, 'I stood on the mountain,' and it states

(ibid. 9:28), 'ואתנפל לפני ה', 'I fell before Hashem.'"

The Bach explains that we first daven sitting down [for Shema and its *brachos*], then we stand up for *Shemonah Esrei*, and then we fall on our faces for *tachanun*, to fulfill davening in these three ways. Then 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 are seeking to pray and to beseech Hashem in every way we can.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya explains the concept of davening with a fallen face, and he writes that such a prayer demonstrates three things: "(1) It shows that one is afraid of the *Shechinah*. (2) It demonstrates distress and humility. (3) It expresses, 'אסירת חושיו ובמול הרגשותיו, that all one's strengths are bound and tied, and that he is helpless without Hashem's help."

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya elaborates on these three intentions of prayer, implied when one falls on his face for *tachanun*.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "Covering the face expresses *tznius* and *bushah* (shame and fear of Heaven). Because, when one prays, he must imagine that the *Shechinah* is before him. As it states (*Tehillim* 16:8), 'שויית ה', 'לנגדי תמיד, 'I place Hashem before me, always.' Covering the face demonstrates that one is embarrassed before Hashem's honor. As it states about Moshe (3:6), 'ויסתר משה פניו כי ירא מהביט אל האלוקים, 'Moshe hid his face because he was afraid to look at Hashem.'

As the Rabbeinu b'Chaya wrote, a second reason for falling on one's face is to show *צער והכנעה* distress and humility. When one expresses his pain and agony as he prays fallen on his face, his *tefillah* is very powerful. The Rabbeinu b'Chaya quotes

the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59:) that tells the story of הנוור של עכנאי. This is a specific type of oven –made from earthenware and clay – which Reb Eliezer and the *chachamim* debated whether it could become *tamei* or not. Reb Eliezer was insistent that it couldn't become *tamei* because it was made from clay. The *chachamim* disagreed. Reb Eliezer kept bringing proofs that the oven is tahor, and he was very persistent, until the *chachamim*, led by Raban Gamliel, put Reb Eliezer into *cherem*. Raban Gamliel said, "Ribono shel Olam, You know that I didn't do this for my honor or the honor of my family. I did it for Your honor that there shouldn't be *machlokes* in Bnei Yisrael."

Rashi explains, שלא ירגיל, "It shouldn't become the style that an individual disagrees with the majority." If every individual has the liberty to argue with the majority,

there would be chaos in the halachic system. Therefore, Reb Eliezer, who insisted his halachic ruling was correct, was dealt with in this very severe manner.

Reb Eliezer was married to Raban Gamliel's sister (אימה שלום). Ever since Raban Gamliel placed Reb Eliezer in *cherem*, she made sure that Reb Eliezer never said *tachanun*. She feared that her husband's prayers, praying while fallen on his face, would be very powerful, and it would harm her brother, Raban Gamliel.

Once, she miscalculated. She thought it was *rosh chodesh*, but really *rosh chodesh* would be a day later. She was sure her husband wouldn't be saying *tachanun* (because she thought it was *rosh chodesh*) so she didn't think it was necessary to stop him from saying *tachanun*. (According to another opinion, stated in the Gemara, she went to bring bread to a pauper and therefore she wasn't present when Reb Eliezer

said *tachanun*.) When, at last, she came to the room where her husband was davening, she saw her husband saying *tachanun*. She said, "You can get up. My brother just died." Indeed, 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 מביית אבי אבא כל השערים ננעלים חוץ משערי אונאה*, "I received a tradition from my grandfather's home: All gates are closed, except before someone who was insulted."

Rashi explains, *לפי שזעור הלב היא וקרוב להוריד דמעות* "because the heart feels the distress, and he is likely to drop tears."

This Gemara shows us the power of *tefillah* said with a fallen face. As the Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "This woman wasn't afraid that Reb Eliezer's *tefillos* would punish her brother,

but she was afraid of his *tefillos* that he said fallen on his face." This shows us the strength of such *tefillos*, said amidst distress.

The third benefit (that the Rabbeinu b'Chaya wrote) for a *tefillah* said fallen on the face is that it shows that one doesn't have any strength on his own, and he is dependent on Hashem's mercy to save him.

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya elaborates, "When one falls on his face and closes his eyes and mouth, this demonstrates that he isn't able to see what can help him or to view the matters that will harm him. He doesn't know how to take care of any of his needs. He can't help himself unless Hakadosh Baruch Hu agrees to it... It is like his senses are annulled, tied, his eyes and mouth closed, and he can't see or speak, unless it is Hashem's will.

"For this reason, we pray with our feet placed

together, as though they are tied up. This shows that a person can't go out and take care of his needs [on his own]. The gentile nations do this, as well, because they put their hands together when they pray. They don't know why they pray that way.¹ But the reason is to show 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 help them]. To receive one's needs and to be protected from harm, the feet play a greater role than the hands do. Therefore we

put our feet together and not our hands."

Tachanun

Now that we've seen the special tefillah, said while fallen on the face, we will elaborate on the holy prayer of *tachanun* - the prayer we say with a fallen face.

Tachanun begins with *viduy* (אשמונו בגדנו).

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* teaches, (*Bereishis* 22:24) ואתה ודוי is *roshei teivos* for: ודוי אחר תפילה מגיע עד כסא הכבוד, "*Viduy* after *Shemonah Esrei* reaches Hashem's throne."

1. Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* (*Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim* vol.2, 25) discusses whether non-Jews have a mitzvah of *tefillah*. He writes, "When they have a need, like when someone is ill or when they need *parnassah*, I think 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 matters. Even gentiles are obligated to believe in Hashem... Therefore, they obviously must also...turn to Him for *parnassah*, *refuah* and for all their needs."

There was once a Stoliner chassid who wanted to be the *chazan*, so he asked the Beis Aharon, "Just because my name isn't **ירוחם** (who was the main *chazan* of their beis medresh) I can't daven at the *amud*?"

The Beis Aharon replied, "If you will be **מודה ועוֹבֵב**, which means if you will say *viduy*, do *teshuvah*, and leave your sins you will also be **ירוחם**. As it states (*Mishlei* 25:13), **מכסה פשעיו לא יצליח ומודה ועוֹבֵב ירוחם**, 'If a person conceals his sins, he won't succeed. But if one admits and abandons his sins, he receives Hashem's compassion.'"

A Kotzker chassid once came to the Rebbe of Radoshitz *zt'l* and told him that his mazal fell, and he didn't have *parnassah* anymore.

The Radoshitzer asked, "Do you say *tachanun*?"

Ashamed, he admitted that for many years he didn't say *tachanun*.

"How many *tachanuns* are you missing? When did you begin skipping *tachanun*."

The man replied that he was still a young *bachur* when he began being lenient with *tachanun*. They made a calculation and realized that he was missing thousands of *tachanuns*. The Rebbe told him, "From now on, be cautious to say *tachanun*. Additionally, you must say all those *tachanuns* that you missed. If you will do so, your mazal will come back. But if you miss even just one *tachanun* that you owe, you won't get your *veshuah*."

The man followed the Rebbe's advice. It took a few weeks, but he said all the *tachanuns* that he "owed," and he was careful to say *tachanun* in the tefillos. His mazal improved, and he became wealthy. He returned several times to Radoshitz, and he gave generously to the Rebbe's household.

The Radoshitzer Rebbe's son, Reb Hillel, repeated this story and added that his father's counsel was very logical. Because the Mishnah (*Kiddushin* 82:) states: "Reb Shimon ben Elazar said, 'Did you ever see animals or birds with professions? Yet they have *parnassah* without distress. Behold, they were created to serve me, and I was created to serve my master. Shouldn't I have *parnassah* without hardships? Rather, my deeds were bad, and I lost my *parnassah*.'"

So, the reason people have a hard time earning

parnassah is because of their evil deeds. Therefore, saying *viduy* will bring their *parnassah* back.²

Once someone who had lost all his wealth came to the Shinover Rav and told him about his financial problems. The Rebbe asked him if he says תפילה לדוד (which is said before the שר של יום). The Arizal instituted saying this chapter, and he said that one should say it with a broken heart and with *kavanah*). The man said that he doesn't say it. The Shinover Rav told him that he should say that chapter the number of times that he skipped it,

2. Rava said to his students (*Brachos* 35:): "Please, during Nisan and Tishrei don't come to me [to learn Torah], so you won't be busy with your *parnassah* the entire year." According to its simple meaning, Tishrei and Nisan are the primary months that people work the field. He told them to work those months, and they shouldn't come to him, because then they will have the entire year free to study Torah.

According to our discussion we can explain that Rava was telling them: *Parnassah* comes from *tachanun* (as the story of the Radishitzer implies). 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* via saying *tachanun*.

and then he will have *parnassah*. And that's what happened.³

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

Reb Yehoshua Hershel asked him how he knows that it was the Beis Aharon who appeared in his dream. Rebbe Shlmoke replied, "I saw the Beis Aharon when I was three years old."

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

Saying **והוא רחום**, the longer *tachanun*, on Mondays and Thursdays, has particular importance.

The Yaavatz teaches, **דבר מנוסה בדוק ומקובל ביד זקני הדור שקרייהא**

3. Reb Issar Zalman Meltzer *zt'l* learned Torah with his nephew in a Chasidic *shtibel*, each morning. They were learning *masechta Brachos* with *rishonim*, and they came across the Rambam that says that to say Shema after the *netz hachamah* is *bedieved*. (In other words, it isn't only a recommendation 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 said to his nephew, "From now on, we are going to daven in the Brody shul, where there is a minyan for 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 the **תפילה לדר** that is said in the chassidic *shtibel*.

והוא רחום בציבור שמבטל גזירות "It is tested and proven, and it is accepted by 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 *teshuva* that is seen by the great *rabbanim* during the high moments of the *yomim nora'im* (like by *tekiyas shofar* and *kol nidrei*) was seen every Monday and Thursday by the Chasam Sofer's *tachanun*."

There was once a Yid who owned a bar (a *krechmer*) in a village near Belz. His routine was to close the store at one o'clock a.m. One night, at one o'clock a.m., he told everyone to leave, which they did, except for one very drunk person. The Yid went over to him and told him to leave. The drunk got up, stumbled towards the door, but tripped over a table leg. He fell, hit his head on the floor, and died.

The tavern owner was terrified, because if it became known that a goy died in his shop, his life would be in danger. He quickly left his shop, locked it from the outside, and rushed over 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 did that. He said the והוא רחום with tears and with immense *kavanah*. When he finished, the goy stood up! The goy left his store and went to his workshop, where he worked as well as lived. As soon as he entered his workshop, he fell to the ground, dead.

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

The Rebbe replied, "Do you want all the goyim to come back to life?"⁴

Avoiding *Machlokes*

This week's parashah teaches us the evils of machlokes and encourages us to live in peace and harmony with our fellow men. We will start this discussion with advice that people can use to save themselves from disputes:

1908/ תרס"ח, a Jewish, religious journalist was in Berzhan, by the Berzhaner Rav (the Maharasham *zt'l*), and this is the story he witnessed and reported:

The journalist wasn't the only visitor at the time. A delegation of *gaba'im* and community leaders from Hamburg came to speak with Berzhaner Rav *zt'l*, hoping that he would

direct them and save them from a communal conflict. Ashkenazic Yidden initially established the community of Hamburg, and for many decades, the *nusach* of the beis medresh was *nusach Ashkenaz*. As the years passed, the majority of the religious population of Hamberg were from Poland and Hungary, coming from chassidic backgrounds. They wanted to change the *nusach* of the beis medresh to *nusach Sefard*, the *nusach* that chassidim use. The Ashkenazic community said that the beis medresh has its *nusach*, and it shouldn't be changed. The *gaba'im* of both sides came to the Berzhaner Rav, asking him for guidance.

The Brezhaner Rav told them a story of a similar situation that came before Reb Yosef Shaul Notenzhan

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

zt'l, the Shoel u'Meishiv, of Levov (Lemberg):

Most people in Levov davened *nusach Ashkenaz*. Summertime, they would go to Skolia, in the Carpathian Mountains, to vacation. Reb Yosef Shaul, the Rav of Levov, would also go there.

Skolia was a chassidic town. Throughout the year, the beis medresh davened *nusach Sefard*. The debate arose during the summer months because the guests from Levov wanted to daven *nusach Ashkenaz*.

One Friday night, the *chazan* was from the Skolia, chassidic community. He said ויצימה פורקניה in *kaddish*, and the congregants from Levov heckled in protest. Reb Yosef Shaul Notenzhan raised his hand, signaling that the protesters remain silent and that they shouldn't make a *machlokes*.

The *tefillah* continued, and it was peaceful until they reached the end of

Kabalas Shabbos. At this point, chassidim say בנוניא, while the Ashkenazic custom is to say במה מדליקין. The *chazan* began בנוניא and the Levov guests protested once again. This time, many people got involved in the dispute. The people of Skolia were saying, "This is our beis medresh, and we have our customs. You are just guests here."

The people of Levov responded, "In the summertime, we are the majority. Additionally, your *parnassah* comes from us, and we donate a lot of money for this beis medresh. In the summertime, we should decide what *nusach* we should use."

Reb Yosef Shaul silenced the community and said, תדיר ושאינו תדיר תדיר קודם, which means that since, throughout the year, this beis medresh davens in *nusach sefard*, that is how they should daven in the summer, too.

After the *tefillah*, Reb Yosef Shaul spoke to the congregants, teaching them a lesson in shalom. "When we gather to daven, we bring honor to Hashem Yisborach. The Satan doesn't want to let that happen, so he ruins the holy atmosphere by inciting *machlokes*. He tells the people of Levov to say במה מדליקין. Thereby, he is מדליק; he turns on the flames of *machlokes* in the beis medresh. The people of Skolia reply בגוונא, "in the same way." They follow you, and respond in the same way, and there's a *machlokes*. But you can be sure, my brothers, that this wasn't the intention of the early *chachamim* who established these *tefillos*. The goal is peace, not *machlokes*. But what can we do? We are in *galus* for a long, long time, and disputes, like these, happen. We should daven for Moshiach, because when Moshiach comes, we won't say ויצמה פורקניה anymore.

Furthermore, Moshiach will tell us whether we should say בגוונא or במה מדליקין. If he will tell us to say בגוונא, it will be as we say in this prayer: בגוונא דיליה למהויא אחד באחד that there will be complete unity among Yidden. And if Moshiach will tell us to say במה מדליקין, we will light the fire of *hislahaovus* and the fire of love, and not the fire of *machlokes*."

Reb Yosef Shaul concluded, "We are in Skolia, a chassidische city, so I said a chassidic *vort*. But now I will approach the matter from a halachic perspective: When someone from Skolia comes to Levov, he should say בגוונא, silently to himself, as he is accustomed to saying at home. And when the people of Levov visit Skolia, they should say במה מדליקין silently to themselves. (That is what I do. I say במה מדליקין silently, when I'm in Skolia.) And if someone from Skolia is in Levov and he wants to say במה מדליקין together with

the congregation, he can do so. And if someone from Levov wants to say בגווניא, together with the congregation of Skolia, he can. I take responsibility for these "sins." The main thing, dear brothers, is that there should be peace among you. If there will be peace, the *nusach* isn't that important (הנוסח גפיל), and the Satan will be silenced."

The Berzhaner Rav told this story to the *gaba'im* of Hamburg to impress upon them the importance of peace, and then he helped them reach a compromise that satisfied both sides. The *gaba'im* made a *kinyan* as a promise to accept the compromise. This is how the Berzhaner Rav made peace for the Hamburg *kehillah*.

Another piece of advice to avoid disputes is to recognize that life is short, and each argument hurts so much. Sometimes the scar of a conflict can last for a long time. It is simply not worth it.

The Gemara (*Chulin* 58:) discusses a *baka*, a fly that only lives for one day, and stings like a hornet. The Gemara asks, "People say that a female *baka* separated from her husband for seven years. She told him, 'You found a fat person in Mechuzah who had just come out of the river and was wrapped in sheets. You landed on him, sucked his blood, and you didn't tell me!'" The Gemara says that we see from this that a *baka* lives for more than a day. So why does it say previously that it only lives for one day?

The Gemara replies that people say that a *baka's* wife separated for seven years, that is according to בשני ידדו, "their years." The *baka* only lives for a day, however, according to the ratio of the *baka* bug's short lifespan, the separation was equivalent to a separation of seven human years.

The *baalei mussar* say that this Gemara helps us

understand that we should avoid disputes. When one sees *baka* bugs fighting, one thinks, "Isn't it 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, it's also very short. Does it make sense to fill this short period of time with disputes and quarrels? When we think about these matters, we will avoid disputes.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 7) states that a primary cure for *machlokes* is to stop it in its very early stages. As it states (*Mishlei* 17:14), פוטר מים, ראשית מדין, "The beginning of a dispute is like water streaming through a crack." When water pushes through an opening, it begins as a small trickle, but then it widens until the water gushes through the breach. Disputes are similar. They start small, but if one doesn't stop a disagreement at the onset,

it can become unbearable and overwhelming.

Consequently, one should be vigilant in perceiving the smallest breach in peace, because if you leave that minor breach unfixed, the argument can grow bigger and become overwhelming, *chas veshalom*.

The Shlah HaKadosh says that this counsel is found in the letters of מחלקת. The מ has a small opening on the bottom, hinting to a minor breach in the peace. If the problem is resolved immediately, everything will be fine. However, when the fissure isn't corrected, it will become wider. This brings us to the next letter, the letter ה, which is open widely at its bottom. This signifies that the *machlokes* has taken root, and the tiny gap has widened. Afterward comes the ו and ק. These letters go above (the *lamed*), and below (the *kuf*) other letters. This implies the flames of their dissent is blazing

in all directions. Finally, we reach the letter ה', which stands securely upon its two feet, suggesting that the fight is firmly established, and now very difficult to amend. This can all be avoided if the *machlokes* is amended while still small.

It states (*Koheles* 4:9), טובים מן האחד השנים מן האחד. The Ahavas Shalom *zt'l* explains, 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 for peace. The problem is that each side wants the other one to be *mevater*. A *gadol* was once speaking to a person who didn't have *shalom bayis*. The *gadol* told him, "You have to be *mevater*! You must be *mevater*!" The man replied, "I know. I tell that to my wife all the time, but she doesn't get it.

Maybe I can bring her here, so you can tell her to be *mevater*?"

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 who understand, everything in this world is ultimately foolishness, and not worth fighting over."

It is also important to know how to speak properly.

It states (*Tehillim* 120:7), אני שלום כי אדבר המה למלחמה, the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* explained, אני שלום I am a man of peace because of כי אדבר. Chazal say that כי has four meanings (כי משמש בארבע לשונות) and its meaning changes according to the context. This *pasuk* is saying that I am a person of peace כי אדבר, because I speak four different ways. I understand the situation, and I know how to talk at each time. המה, these letters are read the same way forwards and backwards. This implies to when

someone speaks harshly to you, and you answer back in the same harsh tones. (המה is read backward and forwards the same way, and similarly, he responds in the same way that people speak to him.)⁵ The *pasuk* says המה למלחמה, that this way of speaking leads to war and fights. Rather כן אדבר change your words and express yourself in a way that is appropriate for each situation.

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

The Imrei Noam told the following *mashal*:

A lion asked a sheep, "Smell my breath, and tell me how it is?"

The sheep did so and said, "Your breath smells terrible."

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

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 is read גיהנום."

The fox pointed to his nose and said, "My master, my nose is stuffed. I can't smell anything." This wise response saved him.

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

The town of Shechetz, Poland, had two *shochtim*. Both *shochtim* were *yirei Shamayim*, and there were no *machlokes* between them. However, they were supported by two different communities in Shechetz, and each community wanted their *shochet* to be the primary *shochet*. This situation caused a *machlokes*.

One of the *shochtim* was a student of the Sifsei Tzaddik, *zy'a*, the Piltzer Rav, so he wrote a letter to his Rebbe, telling him of the dispute that arose.

The Sifsei Tzaddik wrote back, "*Machlokes* is fire, and one has to run

away from fire. Pick up your feet and leave Shechetz right away." (Unfortunately, the *shochet* didn't receive the letter, and he was *niftar* shortly afterward. The fire of the *machlokes* burned him.) Similarly, the Chofetz Chaim once left Radin to avoid being drawn into a *machlokes*, because sometimes, the best solution for *machlokes* is to run away from it.

Erev Shabbos

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

The Gemara (*Gittin* 52.) tells a story of a couple who would fight every Friday. Reb Meir came to their house on Fridays, 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!"

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

The Ben Ish Chai adds that if someone in your home does something wrong on Friday regarding Shabbos preparations and the like, don't be angry with them, because it isn't their fault. The Satan caused them to make that error, to provoke a *machlokes*. He writes, "Know if one fights with his wife, children, or maid, he thinks that he is right for saying those sharp words because of their error. However, if he were wise, he would understand that if a mistake happened in his home, it wasn't their fault — it happened

because of the Satan, who seeks to instill disputes at that time... Therefore, if some chore at home wasn't completed properly, don't blame your wife or your maids. Understand what is being stated 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*) writes, "Six days of the week receive their blessings from Shabbos. A vessel is needed to contain those *brachos*, and that vessel is peace (see *Uktzin* 3:2). The *yetzer hara*, therefore, tries hard to create a dispute on Shabbos, the day that *brachos* abound so that we won't have a vessel to receive those blessings, thereby ruining the entire upcoming week. With these ideas I explain the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 35:2-3), ששה ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם, 'Six days do your work and the seventh day will be for you.' This means

your success in the six weekdays comes from the seventh day – the Shabbos. Therefore, **לֹא תִבְעֵרוּ אֵשׁ בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת**, don't ignite the fire of *machlokes* on Shabbos, so that you will have a vessel to hold the *brachos*."

The Punishment for *Machlokes*

The Rambam wrote his son the following letter: "Don't contaminate your soul with *machlokes*, which destroys body, soul, and money. I saw...families perish, cities destroyed, communities disintegrate... the respected disgraced, all because of *machlokes*. The *nevi'im* discuss how bad *machlokes* is and the *chachamim* added on more to this, and they haven't yet reached its ultimate

evil. Therefore, hate it; run away from it; and keep away from all its friends, lest you perish..."⁶

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

Similarly, the Shlah HaKadosh (*Korach*) writes, "From Korach's *machlokes* we acquire awareness of the severity of *machlokes*. Consider the great punishment that was meted out to Korach... He was a great person, a prince in Yisrael. He carried the *aron*

6. No one ever gained from *machlokes*. Rashi (*Bereishis* 28:11) tells that the stones were fighting, as each stone wanted Yaakov to place his head on them. A miracle occurred, and all stones became one. We can ask, if a miracle took place, why couldn't the stones turn into a comfortable, soft cushion? The answer is, softness never emerges from a *machlokes* ...

[and nevertheless he was punished due to the *machlokes*]. Dasan and Aviram and all their children perished. Although the *beis din* of heaven doesn't punish those younger than twenty years old, this time, even children died. Because *machlokes* is very severe, as Chazal tell us, everyone should take *mussar* from this and increase peace."

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 with their money, *rachmanah litzlan*. Someone who has wisdom will think about this and be *mevater*...and he will see that for whatever he loses; he will earn reward in this world and the next world..."

The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh* 16) asks: Why is the sin of *machlokes* more severe than

all other sins, that even young children are punished? He answers, "It isn't that Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings punishment on children, rather, wherever there is a *machlokes*, Gehinom is there. *Machlokes* and Gehinom were both created on the second day of creation, which means they are synonymous. [Wherever there are *machlokes*, Gehinom and punishment are there]. Therefore, even young children die... because the *machlokes* is united with the punishment."

Korach and his group were punished in an unusual way, a catastrophe that never happened before, nor again, in the history of the world. As Moshe said (*Bamidbar* 16:30), *ואם בריאה יברא ה' ופצתה האדמה אתם* 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 questions this and asks that

things like this do happen, because there are earthquakes, and people sometimes fall inside. But the Ramban clarifies that this catastrophe was different.

As 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 for Korach and his followers to die in such an unprecedented way? Perhaps it is because Hashem wanted this story to be remembered. If they died a natural death, people would eventually forget,

and the gravity of *machlokes* wouldn't be known to us as it is now. Their unusual end helps us remember the severity of *machlokes*.

Stories

We will now tell true stories, which will remind us that *machlokes* doesn't pay. One only loses by entering 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, he developed a terrible stench that reminded people of a corpse, *r'l*, and it wasn't going away. The parents brought the child to many doctors, but they never saw anything like this before, and they couldn't find the source of this terrible odor.

The grandfather of this child davened in the beis medresh of Reb Yosef Tzvi Wosner *shlita* (son of Reb Shmuel Wosner *zt'l*). Reb

Yosef Tzvi Wosner said to the grandfather, "You are a student of my father. You learned in his yeshiva and attended his *shiurim*. Go to Eretz Yisrael to discuss the situation with him. My father is a *gadol b'Yisrael*, perhaps he can help you."

So, the grandfather (who was then fifty years old), together with the father (who was twenty), booked a flight to Eretz Yisrael. They wanted to speak with Reb Wosner, receive his blessings and counsel, and immediately return home. So they booked a return ticket dated soon after their arrival.

Reb Shmuel Wosner greeted them with a happy countenance, and he asked, "Who is the child named after?"

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

Reb Wosner 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 challenging 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 father also said that he didn't want to speak to his father-in-law about the name because he wanted to keep his distance from him.

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

Reb Wosner 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. He is such a difficult person..."

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

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 a terrible odor anymore.

The Skulener Rebbe *zt'l* told the following story. He heard it from a friend,

who heard it from his father, who saw this story happen by the Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l*.⁷

This father was traveling by train to the Sar Shalom of Belz, and there was also a paralyzed woman on board. Her family was bringing her to the Sar Shalom for a *refuah* and *yeshuah*. Her mind was functioning fine, and she was able to speak, but the rest of her body was paralyzed.

The other passenger (the father who told the story) was intrigued; he wanted to know what would happen by the Sar Shalom, and whether the woman would

7. People may find it surprising that the Skulener Rebbe could hear a story that his friend's father witnessed by the Sar Shalom of Belz. The Sar Shalom was *niftar* 164 years ago, year 1854/תרט"ו. It seems very far away. But let us remember that the Skulener Rebbe was close to a hundred when he was *niftar*. The Skulener Rebbe may have heard this story in his younger years, and his friend, who told it to him, might have been much older than him. Furthermore, the friend's father could have been much older than his son. Taking all these variables into account, we understand that it is possible.

have her salvation. So, when they arrived in Belz, he dropped off his packages and quickly went to the Sar Shalom's home. 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 *lecht 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 candles in his home himself. After he lit the candles, he asked the woman, "Do you know why you are suffering?"

"No. I don't know." She answered

"Try to think of an explanation."

She said that she didn't have any ideas.

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. There's a poor, Jewish maid that works for you. You were very strict and demanding of her. You felt that you were wealthy and that you didn't have to respect the poor maid. The maid was very hurt; you are suffering the consequence of your deeds."

The Sar Shalom asked, "Do you accept on yourself never to cause her anguish again?"

She said that she did. The Sar shalom took a handkerchief, went around the bed with it, and then she sat up, completely

healed. After Shabbos, she traveled home.

In contrast, shalom brings salvations. Consider the following story:

Reb Meir, son of Reb Shneur Kotler's *zt'l*, *rosh yeshiva* of Lakewood, was engaged to the daughter of Reb Leibel Bakst, *rav* in Detroit. A week before the *chasunah*, doctors found the *machlah*, the dreaded disease, in Reb Meir.

Reb Shneur told Reb Leibel that he has something urgent to discuss with him, and he wants to speak with him in person. As they lived very far from each other (Reb Leibel was in Detroit, and Reb Shneur was in Lakewood, New Jersey), Reb Shneur requested that they meet in a city, somewhere in between. Reb Bakst agreed.

Reb Shneur told Reb Bakst about his son's illness and said, "If you want, you can call off the *shidduch*."

Reb Bakst replied, "Chas v'Shalom, I chose Reb Meir as my *chasan*, and now he is like my son. I wouldn't turn down my son, and I don't want to call off the *shidduch*."

Reb Shneur told him, "You can't decide on your own. It is up to your daughter. She is the one who has to decide."

He asked his daughter, and she said, "I want offspring. If Reb Moshe Feinstein will tell us that we will have children, I don't mind going on with the *chasunah*."

Reb Moshe blessed them with children. They got married. A year later, they had a daughter. When their daughter was a year and a half, Reb Meir was *niftar*.

Reb Bakst suffered another tragedy at that time when one of his daughters - a mother of three - died. So now Reb Bakst had a daughter, a

widow, and a son-in-law, a widower. They married each other. She helped him raise his three children, and he helped her raise her only child.

Often, in marriages such as this one, the children are called mine, yours, and ours, because each spouse came into the marriage with their own children, and together they have more children. But this time, there was only "mine and yours." There wasn't "ours" because she never had more children. Doctors said that she couldn't bear more children, and it was a miracle that she had even one.

It seems that because of their *mesirus nefesh* for *chessed* (when she agreed to marry Reb Meir, even when he was ill, and also her father, Reb Bakst didn't want to turn down the shidduch) she was rewarded with a child. *Machlokes* causes distress and agony, and *mesirus nefesh* for *chessed* and for

shalom brings forth the greatest blessings.

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*, as this was seen from Achav..."

The Shlah is referring to the following Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 218): "[Almost] everyone in Achav's generation was an idol worshiper, yet they won all their wars. This is because none of them spoke *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*." This tells us that *machlokes* and *lashon hara* are worse than *avodah zarah*.

The Chasam Sofer *zy'a* teaches that Aharon agreed

to make the *egel* because he realized that if he stands up against the entire generation, a great *machlokes* will break out. He chose *avodah zarah* over *machlokes*, because *machlokes* is worse. He said, let them make the *egel*, and afterward they will do *teshuvah*. But if there is a division in Klal Yisrael, who knows where it will end?

Aharon was very embarrassed that he sinned, and he didn't feel fitting to be the *cohen gadol*. 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, Moshe told him, "You were chosen to be *cohen gadol* because you made the *egel*, for this protected the Jewish nation from *machlokes*," which is even worse.

The Shevet Mussar (37:22) states that the *manna* fell almost every day in the desert. It even fell on the day they made the *egel*. But

the *manna* didn't fall on the day Korach made a *machlokes*. Because *machlokes* is worse than *avodah zarah*.

The *Afrakasta d'Anyah* (165) writes the following story: The community of Kempna was looking for a *chazan*, and they chose someone called Shimon. Although Shimon had a beautiful voice, he wasn't G-d fearing. The Rav of Kempna, Reb Yosef Shmuel *zt'l*, shouted, "How can we take Shimon? How can we have a *chazan* a *baal aveirah*?"

The Kempna community was divided into two. Some sided with the Rav, and others wanted to hire Shimon.

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*."

Teshuvah

Moshe said (16:5) וידבר אל קרח ואל כל עדתו לאמר בוקר וידע ה' את אשר לו ואת הקדוש והקריב אליו, "Moshe said to Korach and his entire community: 'Tomorrow morning Hashem will reveal the one [whom Hashem chose to be the *cohen gadol*].'" Tomorrow, the 250 heads of Sanhedrin who joined with Korach would bring *ketores*, and only the one whom Hashem chose to be the *cohen gadol* will live. The rest will die.

Why did Moshe push off the test for the next day?

Rashi writes, והוא היה מתכוין לדחותם שמא יהוורו בהם, "Moshe was pushing them off in the hope that they would do *teshuvah*."

The Arugas HaBosem zt'l explains that every night, before going to sleep, one should review the deeds that he performed that day, to see what needs to be improved and

corrected, and what good should continue to be practiced. Moshe was confident that the 250 heads of Sanhedrin (who joined up with Korach) would review their deeds before going to sleep, and they would realize that they had erred when they joined up with Korach. Moshe wanted them to have this opportunity to do *teshuvah*.

The Arugas HaBosem writes that this indeed happened. Before going to sleep, they thought over the day, they recognized their error, and they regretted the *machlokes*. But by the next morning, they brought the *ketores*, anyway. Why?

It is because they were so embarrassed by their sin, they preferred to die. As it states (17:3) את מחותת האלה בנפשותם, "the firepans of these sinners who sinned with their own souls." The *pasuk* is saying that they were responsible for their own deaths. They simply couldn't face

Hashem after their severe sins.

Their error, writes the Arugas HaBosem, is that it is never too late to do teshuvah. No matter what happens, Hashem wants us back and waits for our teshuvah. And when we repent, we become like a newborn child, like someone who never sinned before.

We will express this lesson with a *mashal*:

There was once a *yungerman* in Yerushalayim who had a good custom. He sought every opportunity to say the *brachah shehechyanu*, so he could thank Hashem for his life and for the good opportunities that Hashem granted him.

Every day, he would go to a fruit store and ask the Arab storeowner whether a new fruit arrived. If it did, he would buy the fruit right away, and he would

say the *brachah Shehechyanu* with joy and *kavanah*.

One day, the Arab store owner told him, "I know that you aren't rich and that you are tight with money. Why do you buy the fruit the first day it comes to the store? Wait a week or two, and the prices will go down."

The *yungerman* explained to the Arab about the special *brachah shehichyanu*, and that he doesn't want to push off the opportunity to praise Hashem. Still, the Arab didn't understand what he was saying.

One day, the *yungerman* came into the store and, like every day, asked the Arab merchant, "Any new fruits today?"

"Yes! Today mangos came in."

The *yungerman* replied, "Please, give me a mango or two. I'll pay whatever it costs."

The Arab brought him to the back of his store, lifted a few large stones, and showed him a treasure hidden in the ground. The money was stacked orderly; it was his savings from years running this store. The Arab told him, "You see, I have a lot of money, but even so, I don't eat the new fruits when they first come into the store. I wait until the prices go down. You are poor, and you should certainly wait until the prices go down."

This time, the *Yerushalmi yungerman* didn't try to teach him about *shehechyanu*. He bought mango, brought it home, and said *shehichayanu* in a loud, happy voice.

One day, the Arab merchant died, and his family put up the store for sale. This *Yerushalmi yungerman* knew where the money was concealed, so he borrowed money and bought the store. The money was still hidden in the back of the store, as he

expected, and he became very wealthy.

This story is to teach us that when a person has a good custom, he will be rewarded in this world, too.

But there is another essential lesson here: Klal Yisrael are called ראשית, first. This is because the Jewish nation has the ability to serve Hashem as though it were the first time. Even if they have been performing a certain good deed for years, they can do it again, with immense enthusiasm and joy, as though it were the first time.

ראשית, first, also means that if they sin, they repent and become like a newborn child. They never feel that it is too late because they sinned too much. They are ראשית, and they become brand new after their *teshuvah*.

The Arab represents the *yetzer hara*. He says, "Why

are you so busy with *shehechyanu*, newness? If you serve Hashem by rote, it is also good enough."

And after one sins, the *yetzer hara* says that we can never turn over a fresh slate, and say *shehechyanu*. But it isn't so, because after teshuvah, we become brand new, and we aren't the same person who

committed the *aveirah*. We can always serve Hashem like it is the first time.

When one is cautious with *shehechyanu* - serving Hashem with renewed vigor, and with the belief that he can become like a brand new person - he will find the treasure, which is his personal, unique spiritual heights.