YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***Bein Adam Le-chavero:* Ethics of Interpersonal Conduct**

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**Dedicated in memory of   
Joseph Y. Nadler, z”l, Yosef ben Yechezkel Tzvi**

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**Shiur #17: The Causes and Effects of Hatred**

In last week's lesson we dealt with the scourge of *sinat chinnam,* baseless hatred, which led to the destruction of the Second Temple. We cited a number of opinions dealing with the nature of this hatred, the reasons behind it and why it is so destructive. Hatred, we saw, often leads to other sins and can fuel intense disputes with friends and family. The commentators explicate at length the root causes and horrifying effects of *sinat chinnam*.

As Rabbeinu Bachya points out (see our previous lesson) hatred is often rooted in one's feelings of superiority due to ego and arrogance. Hatred is merely the gross expression of a faulty character focused on oneself and one’s own greatness. This misguided approach leads to harsh feelings of loathing towards others who succeed or who seem to be slighting one’s honor. In fact, the Noam Elimelekh (*Or Elimelekh, Yekhahen Pe'er* Vol. II # 31) states that hatred rooted in arrogance was the cause of the destruction of the Second Temple. Interestingly, the Me’iri (*Chibbur Ha-teshuva,* p. 117) quotes authorities who state that the prohibition of hatred includes a proscription against arrogance, which lies at the root of hatred.

Along similar lines, the Orechot Tzaddikim, who seems to understand that *sinat chinnam* is literally hatred without any reason, notes that there are more destructive forms of hatred. He writes that hatred based on jealousy or a perceived slight is an even worse form of *sina*, because it is difficult to halt it in its tracks.

**Righteous Dispute?**

A recurring theme that the commentators utilize is the metastatic nature of hatred: an inability to disagree civilly flares up into radical disputes. In fact, according to the Netziv (*Hamek Davar, Bamidbar* 16:1), many start out motivated by a righteous cause, only to later be so overcome with emotion that they endorse ruthless hatred, distrust, and even murder.

The Netziv focuses less on the character roots of the hatred during the period of the Second Temple and turns his attention to the motives. Sometimes they were righteous, but at other times they were clothed in claims of righteousness which served to sanction hatred that grew to unstoppable proportions. The Netziv points out that many of these forms of hatred were in actuality expressions of loathing caused by a misconception of righteousness. The roots of destruction lie in the inability to accept alternative ways of serving God and the tendency to accuse others of throwing away their faith.

The Netziv instructs us to be cautious when assuming that we are about to embark on a holy war against others; our supposedly righteous motives may in fact be an expression of getting carried away with the differences between ourselves and others. Elsewhere (*Harchev Davar, Devarim* 4:14) the Netziv deals with the statement of the Tosefta (*Menachot* 13:22) that puts the love of money as a cause for the temple's destruction alongside hatred. He explains that it is often a love of money and competitiveness that lurks beneath the surface of rationalized hatred, a phenomenon which can even rip apart families. Though the hater may be convinced of the justness and holiness of the cause, love of money and other base desires may be pulling the strings. This unfortunate reality may explain the mindset of many political parties and organizations which launch attacks on their disputants in the name of righteous causes while concealing a desire for lucre or honor.

The way one deals with other in disagreements is an expression of one's character. Earlier (Lesson 12) we discussed the positive trait of forbearance, of one’s being *maavir al middotav*. However, though this trait requires that one be silent in the face of attack, not responding angrily or hastily, it doesn't mean that one must always acquiesce and forgo one's own opinion. The issue is not whether disagreement is permitted. It is not only allowed, but many times even welcome. In fact, the sources speak of the positive benefits of a pair of individuals battling to find out the proper approach to understand the Torah. Were disagreement per say always negative, this wouldn't be celebrated. Evidently, we must differentiate between different forms of dispute.

What are the parameters which determine whether a disagreement is proper and destined to bring out greater truth or negative and forbidden? Finding a biblical source for how to deal with disagreement will help us understand.

**“Like Korach and His Company”**

*Parashat Korach* tells of the revolt mounted by Korach and his followers to challenge the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The test chosen to determine who deserves the priesthood is the offering of incense. The incense offered by Korach’s two hundred and fifty men is rejected, and they are incinerated (*Bamidbar* 16:35). The verse tells us that afterwards God instructs Moshe to have the fire pans used by the rebels turned into a covering for the altar, serving as a warning to those who would consider launching a Korach-style revolt against authority. However, the language of the Torah is intriguing:

That no stranger, who is not of the seed of Aharon, come near to offer incense before God; that he be not like Korach and his company, as God said to him by the hand of Moshe. (*Bamidbar* 17:5)

The verse is a little unclear in its instruction that one must "be not like Korach and his company.” Which aspect of their personality should be shunned?

The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 110a) understands this verse to prohibit not only rebellions against religious authority or the priesthood, but also being *machazik be-machaloket* — literally, "holding on to controversy." We are admonished to refrain from creating friction and divisiveness, to avoid causing strife and contention, as Korach did.

**The Root of Division: The Second Day of Creation**

In fact, the concept of division altogether is often derided. The second day of creation is the only one for which the phrase "And God sawthat it was good" is omitted. Our Sages (*Bereishit Rabba* 4:6) understand that this is due in part to the creation of the second day, which sees the separation between the lower waters and the upper waters. Rabbeinu Bachya (*Kad Ha-kemach, Sinat Chinnam*) explains how this accounts for the second day as the source of division.

Unity is the essential cause of peace, while dissension and change are the roots of quarrel. Thus on the first day of creation, which alludes to God's Unity, you will find no discord, variance or dissension. However, on the second day, when the initiation of change is marked by the division “between the waters which were under the firmament and the waters which were above the firmament” (*Bereishit* 1:7) discord, contention, and change began. Accordingly, on that day, God did not see "that it was good;" the good was lacking because of the dissension. Such dissension manifested itself on the following days of Creation too, and on the sixth day, Adam and Chava sinned and were driven from the Garden of Eden. Thus, you see that division of hearts, which is the characteristic of baseless hatred, stems from the second day of Creation, which does not contain the expression "that it was good."

Any form of division, even one necessary for the creation of the world carries with it dangerous precedents for improper divisions. The Maharal (*Netivot Olam, Shalom*) points out that the Hebrew word for evil, *ra,* is often used interchangeably with the word *machaloket,* for *machaloket*, rooted in the division of the second day of Creation, is the source of most evil in the world.

By the same token, the Ari points out that the Hebrew word for a unit, that which is bound up and tied together, is *aguda*. This word contains five out of six of the first letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The only letter missing is *bet*, the second letter. Why is this? He explains that because the second day of creation is the source of all division, the second letter is not included in this term. Only by removing divisions can we bring about a unification of opposites.

**Positive Warfare?**

Let us examine this idea from another angle. Generally speaking, war has many negative connotations; even the victorious side suffers its own casualties. Nevertheless, the Sages speak of a positive form of warfare. When one battles for spiritual truth, then disagreement and dispute are merely tools for clarifying the proper approach. In one's search for spiritual truth, combat is not necessarily bad.

The Talmud (*Megilla* 15b, *Chagiga* 14a) expound a number of verses to indicate that those who toil in the give-and-take of “the war of Torah" are to be admired.

This concept of a positive form of warfare, dedicated to arriving at the spiritual truth, is one integral to Judaism. Yes, there may be a need to disagree with comrades in the process, but this difference of opinion is positive when it can be categorized as a *machaloket le-shem shamayim*, a dispute for the sake of Heaven. In fact, the hallowed study halls of Torah are characterized by study partners at loggerheads, toiling over the proper understanding of a Talmudic passage, often getting into heated arguments in an attempt to arrive at the truth. How does this jibe with the very understandable general prohibition of promoting disputes? This seems rather odd.

Indeed, one might think that if disagreement is forbidden, it should be categorically prohibited. However, the Mishna teaches that we must differentiate between two forms of disputes: some are *le-shem shamayim*, while others are not.

Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven is destined to endure; one that is not for the sake of Heaven is not destined to endure. Which is a dispute that is for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. Which is a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his company. (*Avot* 5:17)

**Deeds and Misdeeds for the Sake of Heaven**

The distinction of the Mishna would seem to indicate that the defining criterion for whether a debate is proper or not is to the intent of those who enter into the dispute: do they have positive intentions or not? By these standards, disputes are only to be viewed negatively if they are for selfish concerns, while a *machaloket le-shem shamayim*, a dispute for the sake of Heaven, is often a very positive thing.

In truth, though, this is far from simple. While a heavenly dispute may be proper, how is one to know whether the argument is truly *le-shem shamayim?* In fact, some of the most destructive acts in Jewish history have been the outgrowths of an approach that began with an effort to act on behalf of Heaven.

In fact, Rav Yonatan Eybeschütz (*Yarat Devash* #8) notes that it is virtually impossible to find a dispute where those involved do not honestly think that they are acting *le-shem shamayim*.

In *Agra De-khalla* (*Parashat Korach*), Rav Tzvi Elimelekh Shapiro provides a basic guideline to determine if one is truly acting for the sake of Heaven:

If you do not get excited about other commandments the same way you do about the subject of the disagreement, you can be sure that your excitement about it is not for the sake of Heaven.

After all, when one enters into a dispute, one often finds that his or her original righteous intentions have been discarded in the heat of the debate; the dispute often becomes rather personal. What is to prevent a dispute with noble beginnings from ending in disaster?

**The Talmud's Terminology**

In truth, a second look at the language of the Talmudic passage discussing the prohibition of *machaloket* may shed a little light on this prohibition. The language of the Talmud is not that it is prohibited to have a dispute; rather it mandates: *"Ein machazikin be-machaloket*,” “We do not hold on to controversy.” Though the simple meaning indicates that one should attempt to reach peaceful resolutions by being forbearing and understanding, there may be more to this term than meets the eye.

However, the Chatam Sofer (cited in R. Shemuel Alter’s *Likkutei Batar Likkutei, Bamidbar* 16:12) provides a different explanation, basing himself on a more literal understanding of “*machazikin*". The Chatam Sofer suggests that this term here refers to the halakhic principle of *chazaka*, established patterns. In several different areas in halakha, a mode of conduct that has repeated itself several (usually three) times is considered an established routine, which can be assumed to always continue. Perhaps the best-known example is the case of the goring ox. After three incidents, the ox is deemed aggressive, and its owner runs the risk of harsher punishment should the animal kill yet another person. Regarding quarrels, claims the Chatam Sofer, the Sages teach us that the principle of *chazaka* does not apply. No matter how long an argument has persisted, no matter how many times given individuals have proven their inability to resolve their differences and get along peacefully, one may never assume that an irreversible pattern has been established. When it comes to harmonious relationships among people, we must continue to work and seek resolution.

The Torah Temima (*Bamidbar* 17:5) points out that there are two ways to understand why *machaloket* might be forbidden:

If the verse in indeed understood as prohibiting *machaloket*, the question may be raised: what is the nature of the prohibition? One might view the prohibition as expressing an inherent flaw in any situation of *machaloket*, seeing it as a wholesale ban, without taking into account its ramifications. However, one may also understand that it is not inherently bad, but it is prohibited because of what it might lead to. After all, situations of dispute often bring out the worst in people, and at times they can develop into feuds that no longer resemble the original cause of dispute.

There are those who claim that religion is the source of all wars, noting the many different holy wars fought throughout the centuries. However Rabbi Dr. Michael Avraham, in his Hebrew book "God Plays Dice” (*Yedioth Ahronoth Publishing*, 2011), points out that this claim is an oversimplification if not an utter falsehood. While it is true that there exists ideological violence towards nonbelievers, this has nothing to do with religious belief. Some of the most dangerous men in history such as Hitler and Stalin were not religious men; nevertheless, they had deep convictions that lead them to the most deadly campaigns. Beliefs must be dealt with properly in order to have positive results out of strong convictions, not dangerous ones.

In fact, a more serious analysis of the Talmudic passage indicates that it is not only *machaloket* which is significant, but how it is waged.

**The Mishna's Distinction**

The Mishna’s distinction between a controversy conducted *le-shem* *shamayim* and one conducted not *le-shem shamayim* lends itself to a number of questions. Regarding the heavenly dispute, the Mishna speaks of both sides of the dispute, Hillel and Shammai, while regarding the unholy dispute it only mentions "Korach and his company.” Why not mention the other side, Moshe and Aharon?

The Malbim explains the distinction (*Bamidbar* 16:1):

Our Sages wished to point out that in a heavenly cause, both sides are, in fact, united by one purpose: to further unselfish, divine ends. However, in a controversy pursued for unholy ends, for personal advancement or the like, even those who have come together on one side are not really united. Each is governed by his own calculations of what he stands to gain and is ready to cut the other's throat if it will serve his interests.

He goes on to express that this is exactly the nature of the union of Korach and his comrades. Korach was fighting for the priesthood, the members of the tribe of Reuven were vying for the rights of the firstborn, and the two hundred fifty men were of the opinion that their individual prestige and distinction was reason enough to award them the priesthood despite their lack of hereditary claims to it.

The Noam Elimelekh (*Likkutei Shoshana*) adds that as a general rule, one of the ways to know if a dispute is *le-shem shamayim* is to identify if the individuals who are joined together for a common cause are in general agreement with each other or seem to be opportunists joining the same bandwagon of dispute in order to succeed in attacking a common enemy.

In our next lesson, we will delve into a deeper understanding of the prohibition of *machaloket* by furthering our analysis of the nature of Korach's dispute with Moshe and Aharon and the distinction provided by the Mishna between their dispute and that of Hillel and Shamai.