

## So Moshe stood up and went to Dassan and Aviram. (16:25)

Why did Moshe *Rabbeinu* denigrate himself to go to such miscreants as Dassan and Aviram? He was the quintessential leader of *Klal Yisrael*, the *Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael*, the nation's *Rebbe*. They were nothing. Yet, he went to them. Why? *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 110a) derive from here that one does not sustain a dispute. If he can diffuse a controversy from growing, spreading, he should do everything possible to extinguish the flames of discord. Furthermore, one who supports a *machlokes*, controversy, transgresses the prohibition' of *V'lo yiheyeh k'Korach v'chaadaso*, "that he not be like Korach and his assembly" (*Bamidbar* 17:5). Simply speaking, the Torah is admonishing us to distance ourselves from a *machlokes*. There are those, however, who interpret this *pasuk* not as a prohibition, but rather, as a promise that there will never again be such a controversy within the Jewish People. What a wonderful guarantee, but is it realistic? Can we say that we are no longer plagued by discord, that dispute and controversy are relics of the past? Apparently not. What then is the meaning of the words, "that he not be like Korach and his assembly"?

*Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, explains that the Korach controversy was unique. It was a singular form of dispute which no longer exists. The Korach dispute had one side that was *kulo emes*, absolute truth. The level of veracity exhibited by Moshe and Aharon, the intensity of their Divine mission, was at every juncture and every phase one hundred percent true and just. The other side, represented by the demagogue Korach and his henchmen, was completely false. There was no shred of truth either in anything they said, nor in anything they stood for. We will never again experience this form of *machlokes* in which both sides are absolute – truth versus falsehood. Today there is a shred of truth in every controversy. It may be miniscule; it may be self-serving, but there will always be some level of veracity.

Sadly, the need for some people to take sides – to look for every opportunity to debate, dispute, argue about anything and everything – is a disease that continues to wreak havoc on Jewish communities, organizations and families throughout the world. No area or venue is free of this malignancy that ferments and metastasizes, victimizing innocent people who either get in the way or are influenced to the point of joining in the fray. In any event, at the end of the day they are no longer the same. The relationships they once had are now history. The disputants who initiated the dispute have long ago made peace and moved on, while the fools that joined the debacle are left to pick up the pieces. Their lives and friendships might not be shattered, but they are certainly no longer the same.

When confronting an incendiary situation, one that quickly conflagrates into a full-scale *machlokes*, walking away is probably the only option. It is not a sign of weakness; rather, it is an indicator of self-respect and self-confidence. It shows that one knows better than to involve himself in something from which he will not emerge unscathed. It is often difficult to step back and disengage, but it saves us and our families from so much trauma.

Anger precipitates conflict. Someone hurts us, and we respond in turn. If we would use the energy we expend for disagreement and revenge to acquiesce and move on, we would be much happier people. It is easy to seek avenues for responding to those who annoy us, but it takes maturity and reason to overcome our *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, to “get him back.” Alas, these are rare characteristics. For the most part, those who cause us pain are themselves hurting, and this is how they soothe their own self-loathing: by taking it out on others.

So much can be achieved by swallowing our anger and pain, putting on a smile, or at least ignoring the hurt and moving on. The following inspirational story (related by *Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*) was related years ago in these pages. It is well worth repeating.

It was a warm *Shabbos* afternoon, and a secular Israeli whose only understanding of *Shabbos* consisted of an awareness that on *Shabbos* there was much less traffic, allowing for a day of hassle-free driving, was taking a drive through a religious neighborhood. Even the most careful driver must exert extra vigilance when driving through an area where there are children. Being that there was no traffic to speak of, this man was less than vigilant. Therefore, when a young child ran out in the street which usually served on *Shabbos* as a large playground, the driver saw the child too late, and the child sustained serious injuries upon impact. The child was transported to the hospital, where the prognosis was hopeful, but guarded. It would be some time before the child would be running around again, but, *Baruch Hashem*, he would one day be whole.

The driver was not cited, since it had been an accident. He was, however, filled with guilt and remorse. Finally, he gathered enough courage to go to the home of the child to speak with the parents. He fully expected to be greeted with a hailstorm of anger, accusations and blame; thus, he was very surprised when the mother opened the door with a smile on her face. He was welcomed into their home and invited to sit at the table. He began with a sincere apology, knowing full well that apologies would not ameliorate the situation. He was shocked when the father said that, as faithful Jews, they believed that everything that occurs is by Divine decree. They believed that their child was to be a victim, and he, the driver, was Hashem’s agent.

The driver could not believe what he was hearing. The parents were not holding him responsible. He still felt that he must do something as an act of penance. “Is there anything I can do for you? I feel miserable. This has never happened to me. I cannot get the image and sound of the impact out of my mind. Please, let me do something,” the driver pleaded with the parents, almost hoping that if he would have the door slammed in his face, be screamed at and have epitaphs hurled at him – he would feel better.

“Yes, there is something that we would appreciate that you would do,” the mother began. “Sure, sure anything,” the driver said. “We would like you to become *Shabbos* observant. The accident happened as a result of *chillul Shabbos*. It would be a great *z’chus*, merit, for our child’s recovery if you would undertake to alter your secular lifestyle and begin to observe *Shabbos*.” The man agreed, knowing that while it would not be easy, he was still getting off with a very light “sentence.”

One thing leads to another when *Shabbos* leads the way. Soon his family became *Shabbos* observant, with *kashrus* and total observance following. Today, they are a fully Torah observant family with the father a changed person, all because the child's parents, who had every right to be angry, understood that acrimony would not heal their child. Instead of controversy and vitriol, they reached out with love and friendship, thus helping not only their child, but also playing a critical role in bringing a Jewish family back to religious observance.