

Then you shall know that these men provoked Hashem. (16:30)

The best way to extricate oneself from *machlokes* is to circumvent it. When a person suffers an indignity, or when someone whom we respect and love suffers an indignity or is slandered, our knee-jerk reaction is to put the other fellow in his place. We want to teach him a lesson, so that he would never again be cavalier with another's emotions. That, in and of itself, is the beginning of *machlokes*. The best way to stop a *machlokes* is to prevent it from starting. The following two stories are about individuals, both holy, both whom I had the *z'chus* of knowing. Both of them did anything within their power to maintain peace and harmony, not only in their own community, but within all *Klal Yisrael*.

Shortly after the *Bobover Rebbe, Horav Shlomo, zl*, arrived in America, a local American rabbi slandered this wellspring of sensitivity and love for all Jews. It was the typical case in which one person thought that someone was infringing on his turf. What is a better way to deal with this issue than a preemptive slanderous strike against the incursor? It may be hard to believe that a Torah leader, a respected *Rav* and teacher, would stoop to such acrimonious, loathful activity, but that is the nature of fear generated by envy. This rabbi thought that he would lose everything that he had achieved. He thought slander was the effective way to combat this alleged threat. The fact that his slander consisted of conjecture and lies did not matter to this flawed person. He was not about to share his turf with anyone.

The *Rebbe* was an individual of impeccable character. His sterling *middos*, character traits, were among his greatest attributes. The rabbi's vilifying remark, however, became downright humiliating, to the point that the *Rebbe* could no longer ignore this man's diatribe. The *Rebbe* summoned all his *chassidim* to convene in the large *shul*. He was planning to address the entire assemblage. This was it. Finally, they would have the *Rebbe's* response to the unfounded insults that had been hurled at him. Everyone was in a fighting mood. They were in for a surprise.

The *Bobover Rebbe* entered the main sanctuary and ascended to the lectern that stood right in front of the *Aron HaKodesh* which housed the Torah scrolls. He scanned the assembly and began to speak, "I am declaring to everyone assembled in this *bais hamedrash*, as I stand in front of the holy Ark, that I absolutely forbid anyone from fighting on my behalf! My honor is my honor, and it will remain my honor, but only if everyone acts appropriately and does not take sides. Whoever does not obey me has no place in this *bais hamedrash*!"

The *Rebbe* had spoken for about fifteen seconds, but it was a speech that impacted everyone in that room and was remembered for generations. The night was not yet over. The *Rebbe* was not finished with his preemptive circumvention. He asked his *gabbai*, attendant, to take him to the home of the rabbi who had spread the rumors about him. He knocked on the door, and the rabbi greeted him. When he realized who stood before him, his face became ashen. The *Rebbe*

understood that words were not necessary. Indeed, they would have had a negative effect. It was action that was needed to dispel the *machlokes*. The *Bobover* embraced the rabbi and kissed him on the cheek!

He then spoke, "Dear rabbi, you may go to any one of my *chassidim*, and they will attest that I harbor no ill will against you. Just as we were once friends, we will continue to be so." End of story. It takes two people to create a *machlokes*. The *Bobover Rebbe* was not taking the bait. He would never be a party to *machlokes*.

The next story involves the *Bobover Rebbe's* son and successor, *Horav Naftali Tzvi, zl*. It was the night of *Pesach*, and the first *Seder* would soon begin. We take it for granted that every home is filled with joy and good cheer. Some are not, due to prevailing illness, family issues, financial problems, and – strife. When parents are constantly at one another's throats – they suffer, as do their children. *Pesach Seder* is an important family time. If the strife can be circumvented, it is quite possible for the family celebration of the *Seder* to minimize the discord fomenting between the parents. When people see how happy they could be, it often serves as a springboard for reconciliation and hope.

Rav Naftali was one of the last people to leave the *Bobover bais hamedrash*. He purposely left alone and waited for one of his close *talmidim*, students, to meet him a few blocks away. He was carrying a small package which he directed his student to drop off at a certain home, and give it to the father. The *bachur* was used to carrying out various "errands" for his *Rebbe*. He never asked – just did as he was told. This night, however, was different. The house that he went to was not one of *Bobover chassidim*, and he had never gone on a *shlichus*, errand, on *Pesach* night – specifically coordinated to arrive right before the *Seder*. He gathered up the courage to query the *Rebbe*. Why? What? Who? *Rav Naftali* explained that while they were not *Bobover chassidim*, he had heard from someone that marital bliss did not reign in their home. For whatever reason, the parents were always arguing with one another, and the innocent children suffered immeasurably. *Pesach* was a night especially dedicated to *chinuch*, educating children. If he could somehow quell whatever ill will existed between the parents, so that the *Seder* will be conducted as it should be, with both parents and children involved as a family – he will have resolved a significant problem. He had ordered a beautiful leather-bound *Haggadah* with the name of the wife engraved on it. The student was to give it to the husband as his gift to his wife. Why did *Rav Naftali* insist that it take place shortly before the *Seder* and not earlier? He feared that if too much time had elapsed, the gift would not be acknowledged. It had to be just right at the right time. It is not sufficient to simply perform a