

The Slifkin Affair Revisited

Part 3: The Nature of *Machloket*

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The final paragraph of Part 2 contained the following words: “What is really underlying all the variant conclusions and seeming points of conflicts are visions of Torah, disagreeing visions of Torah. To understand what is truly at issue, we must articulate these competing visions of Torah which include competing visions of the mechanics of Torah decision-making.” It was further identified that the most significant question in the process of meeting this goal may be: how does one know truth? Therein lies the key to all knowledge and thus all disagreement. So our view of a disagreement is built upon our vision of Torah which is built upon our understanding of the basis of knowledge. To comprehend and define a disagreement thus demands a perception of the divergent visions and, if the disagreement is more fundamental, the divergent understandings of knowledge. Strangely, though, the process of uncovering these visions and understandings may lie in the disagreement itself, specifically through the investigation of the response to an opposing view and the ensuing definition of the *machloket*. To understand any *machloket* demands a perception of the underlying Torah visions and structures of knowledge. The process of uncovering these perceptions, though, is actually through the study of the dynamic of the *machloket*.

Ramban, Vayikra 19:17, amongst other commentaries, notes the dynamic nature of the *mitzvah*, commandment, of *tochacha*, giving rebuke. If one is angry with another and does not voice it, the status quo remains. If one confronts the other and expresses his/her anger or displeasure, a dynamic is initiated with the potential for the status quo to change and a new level of understanding and comradeship to be achieved. The expression of rebuke can yield different positive possibilities. The one rebuked can possibly learn of a wrong he/she committed and can now do *teshuvah* and apologize, if necessary. The one rebuked can now possibly explain his/her behaviour and show that it really was proper.

The one giving rebuke can also now possibly learn that he/she was wrong in making this negative assumption about the other and, in turn, apologize. In the *mitzvah* of *tochacha*, the Torah ultimately commands communication because it is only through communication that many problems can ever be resolved. Rebuke is not a one way street. It initiates a continuous flow from one to the other and back to the one. At least, that is what it is supposed to do.

Malbim writes that one of the conditions necessary in order to give rebuke is the ability, in turn, to receive rebuke. Only one who is able to take rebuke is permitted to give it. Only one able to continue the dialogue, allow for the necessary flow of ideas between the participants, is able to initiate the dialogue. Every action creates a reaction which in turn creates another reaction. So it is with any statement that is uttered. The commandment to rebuke does not just command us to rebuke but calls upon us to initiate this chain of reactions and, I would add, monitor this chain so that it reaches the necessary positive conclusion. We cannot solve the ills that we face by simply remaining silent. We must speak. But, in turn, we also cannot solve these ills by then not listening. We must speak, knowing full well that this speech will bring forth a response to which we may also have to respond. This is true not only in the realm of rebuke but in regard to all presentations of ideas. The **Ntziv** writes that the *sinat chinum*, the free hatred that eventually led to the destruction of the Second Temple, emerged from individuals who referred to anyone with whom they disagreed as *apikorsim*, heretics – but that is not what directly caused the *churban*, the Temple's destruction. *Sinat chinum* led to great evils which then culminated in the destruction. Events lead to events that lead to other events. We must not only contemplate our actions wisely – and speak properly – but we must also consider our reactions wisely – and listen and respond properly. The challenge is not solely in the weighing of an original statement. There is the challenge in how we respond to a statement.

It is, in some ways, for this reason that my focus in the present discussion has been more on the reaction to the ban placed on Rabbi Slifkin's works than on the actual ban. It is from an originating focus on this reaction that I believe we can gain a better understanding of the whole Slifkin Affair (notwithstanding the fact that the actual ban itself can be seen as a reaction to the original publication of Rabbi Slifkin's books). Just as in the case of *tochecha*, where the initial response to the rebuke colours the entire process

of communication that is to flow from this action, the response to the ban coloured the entire chain of events and possibilities that would ensue. In the case of *tochecha*, the point of response opens a fork that will take these originating words down different paths. Will the responder simply accept the rebuke, do *teshuva*, and apologize? Will the responder explain his/her actions to show why they were indeed correct and thus initiate a new period of contemplation by the one who gave the *tochecha*? Or will the responder challenge the original *tochecha*, declare it inappropriate, thereby, in turn rebuking the one who gave the initial rebuke and initiating a new process of response? And what if the responder chooses to act in a different manner than these three *halachically* accepted alternatives? The fork in the path initiated by *tochecha* is created at the response. Similarly, the fork in the path that would develop in the Slifkin Affair was created with the question of how to respond to the ban. The question was not just whether to agree or disagree. The pivotal issue centres on how to disagree.

As I mentioned in Part 2, **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:25** describes two different types of *machloket*, disagreement. Rav Moshe writes that in the realm of the physical, there really should not be any disagreements. Any *machloket* in this realm, Rav Moshe contends, emerges from a human failing, specifically flowing from a lack of faith or trust in God. It would seem that Rav Moshe is asserting that a true, honest, objective analysis of an issue in the realm of the physical necessarily will yield one correct conclusion that would be agreed upon by all men of good will. Disagreement in this realm thus only emerges because of human passion; proponents of every view except the one right view are not only wrong but they are wrong as a result of their own human failing. This can be seen as one type of *machloket*. Within this category of disagreement, there is one right answer; why do we not, though, follow or even see this one right answer? The problem is us. All do not accept the right answer, and thus disagreements emerge, because we surrender to our faults.

In the realm of Torah, though, Rav Moshe contends that disagreements are actually not only to be expected but are almost an inherent part of the very nature of Torah. The true, honest, objective investigation of an issue within Torah undertaken by different individuals, it would seem according to Rav Moshe, will not necessarily yield only one correct conclusion but will more than often yield disagreements. This would seem to be because Torah reflects the Divine wisdom that is beyond full human comprehension,

both collectively and, even more so, individually. As such, every individual striving mightily to gain truth and an understanding of God's Will can only achieve what is possible within the parameters of his/her own individual being. Since the fullness of Torah extends beyond the comprehension of any one individual, *machloket* must necessarily ensue. It is not simply that *machloket* emerges because of the inherent limitations of the human condition. It is only through the enunciation of *machloket* that human beings effectively are able to express the fullness and truth of the Divine wisdom of Torah. This can be seen as a second type of *machloket*. Within this category of disagreement, the existence of differing views is not a problem. It is actually positive. It is the natural consequence of a limited humanity trying to encounter the unlimited nature of God and Torah. The problem may still be us, the limitation of the human being, but disagreements in Torah actually emerge because of our very striving to reach beyond this limitation.

Extending Rav Moshe's words beyond the distinction of a disagreement in the physical realm and a disagreement in the realm of Torah, it is to these two different theoretical bases *machloket* that **Avot 5:17** may be referring in describing a difference between a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*, a disagreement for the sake of Heaven, and a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*, a disagreement not for the sake of Heaven. The language of the *mishna* is most interesting, calling upon many commentators, including such commentators as **Rabbeinu Yonah** and **Maharal**, to explain its words. The *mishna* declares that the result of the disagreement for the sake of Heaven is that the disagreement will continue into the future. How is the continuation of a disagreement positive? Is this what we are to wish for, that a *machloket* should continue on? Do we not wish for a *machloket* to be resolved? The answer is that a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* is not the result of human failing but is rather the ultimate expression of the Divine Wisdom given the parameters of the human condition. The language of *machloket* is the only language available to us, albeit limited, to express the true nature of the Divine Wisdom. As such we continue to learn both the words of *Beit Shammai* and the words of *Beit Hillel* for it is only thereby, through the expression of both views, that we gain a more complete understanding of Torah. Both are not only *divrei Elokim chayim*, the words of the living God, but also the necessary words of the living God. The *machloket* thus must continue.

The *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*, though, is the result of human failing, of

individuals allowing their human passions to overtake truth, (in the words of Rav Moshe, of not being motivated by the attempt to serve God) – and so there is no ultimate value in all the variant disagreeing statements. Only one is correct; the continued existence of the other statements serve no purpose, in fact only indicate a negative. It is most interesting that the *mishna* presents Korach and his congregation as the example of this type of *machloket*. Unlike the example of *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai* given for the *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*, this example of Korach only includes one side in its description, not both disputants. This may be because the *machloket* is not inherent to an understanding of the matter at hand but rather a reflection of the personal desires of one of the combatants. The example of this *machloket* is Korach and his congregation because this *machloket* is a direct result of these individuals, of their human failings, and not a result of the complexity and panoply of the Divine reality that necessitates statements of divergent views. Reality in this case does not demand an expression of *machloket* which is the case in the *machloket* between *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel*. The *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* emerges because of a human desire, in fact, to reject the demands of reality, of the Divine Wisdom. Thus the *mishna* entitles the example not after the differing sides in the disagreement but solely after the side that is the actual cause of this inappropriate disagreement. It is a *machloket* that emerges from the fault of one of the protagonists such as the case of the disagreement initiated by Korach and his congregation. Is it not proper for such disagreements eventually to cease which the *mishna* states is the end result of such a *machloket*?

It is within this realm of definition that we encounter, perhaps, the most important decision that one faces upon confronting a *machloket*. Which type of *machloket* is it? How one answers this question will, in fact, colour one's entire approach and objective in responding to a disagreement and, more on point, to a statement with which one disagrees. As stated, in the response to the ban, we encountered a fork in the road. That fork represents the different possible understandings, not of the ban *per se* but, of the most far reaching result of the ban. The ban would initiate a *machloket*; that is clear and that is what did ensue with ever-growing intensity. The fork presents the different possible paths to be followed in dealing with the *machloket*. Each path is dependant upon how one understands the nature of the *machloket* created in the aftermath of the response (by the response). Responders to the ban thus inherently faced an enormous challenge: one's

words in responding to the ban would not only present his/her view of the ban but would also inherently define the nature of the ensuing *machloket*. Whether individuals recognized this or not, how they responded to the ban would, effectively, present their understanding of those who declared the ban, the motivation for the ban, the nature of the subsequent *machloket* and, by extension, the attitude each side would subsequently have toward the other. In how one responds in disagreement to another statement, one is not only responding to the substantive issue at hand. One is also defining the nature of the subsequent ensuing *machloket* with all the consequences of such definition. One is declaring the reason and motivation for the *machloket* and thereby giving insight into one's understanding of knowledge and thought and one's vision of Torah.

While we have presented two different types of *machloket*, there are actually three broad choices that stand before an individual when faced with the need to define the nature of a disagreement. We confront this challenge when we face an existent *machloket* and must determine its nature. We also confront this challenge when faced with having to respond, in disagreement, to an existent statement – and thereby create a *machloket*. The broad three choices are:

- a) a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* (as presented above);
- b) a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* but with the caveat of *tinok she'nishba*;
- c) a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* (with the corollary demand to apply the rules of *Eilu v'Eilu*).

How one defines a *machloket* will colour this individual's entire approach to the issue even as it unfolds. More significantly, though, the reverse may express the greater truth. How one responds in disagreement to a statement inherently indicates, be it consciously or unconsciously, one's understanding of the nature of the ensuing *machloket* and, most importantly, one's perception of the underlying motivations of the protagonists of the *machloket*. I stated a need to articulate "visions of Torah," overall perspectives on our understanding of Torah in its broadest sense. This demands more than the articulation of one's *derech*, personal way, in Torah, i.e. one's personal definition of the *hashkafa*, philosophy, of Torah, but demands a statement in regard to the overall parameters of Torah. Our vision of Torah will clearly affect our choice in determining the definition of a *machloket*. Often, more significantly, how one defines a *machloket* is perhaps the single most significant yardstick we can find to outline one's vision of Torah. And, perhaps the

single most important factor in making that determination is how we view the motivation of the protagonists. It is in how we see the other that we uncover our understanding of a disagreement. It is in how we see the other that we uncover our view of knowledge and our vision of Torah.

(We should perhaps mention that, while our analysis continues based upon an assumption that the differing definitions of a *machloket* represent hard and concrete distinctions, it must be recognized that, in reality, there is much overlap. If one considers such views as that of Rav Kuk and Rav Tzadok HaKohain, that there must be some truth and essence of the Divine in everything, even the variant sides in a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* must have elements of truth in their errant positions. If one considers the story of Yosef and his brothers, one further recognizes the difficulty in defining the nature of a *machloket* in hard terms. If this episode is defined purely as a pure *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*, why does Yehuda feel a need to do *teshuva*? If otherwise, how does one understand Yosef's waiving of culpability? What follows are black-and-white definitions necessary to explain the concepts presented; reality rarely mirrors these concrete definitions. Yet, an understanding of such structure is necessary in gaining any grasp on reality. As such, while real disagreements may not be so easily defined in a black-and-white manner, the constructs necessary in gaining an understanding of the nature of a *machloket* flow from this concrete structure.)

Machloket She'eino L'Shem Shamayim

The essential factor in determining the nature of a *machloket* is one's perception of the reason for disagreement which is tied to one's perception of the motivation, of the protagonists, for disagreeing. In defining a disagreement as a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*, the result is two-fold. First, one will not give any validity to the position with which he/she disagrees. The position is simply deemed wrong. Actual focus on the substantive issue may therefore be minimal. Second, and perhaps more significant in that it also explains the reason for the first result, the opposing position is perceived to be a result of human failing. The result is a perception that the real issue is not the substantive issue itself but the nature of the opposing person. This person is simply deemed to maintain the position that he/she advocates not because of any worthwhile argument or idea but rather because of his/her failing. The direction in arguing against this position is,

thus, not by focusing on the substantive issue itself but, rather, by focusing on the person and his/her failing which needs to be corrected. The result is that, in actual debate with the protagonist, attempts will be made to focus on the human failing of the protagonist, not the issue at hand. The response will be more in the nature of rebuke rather than substantive rebuttal; initiating the potential for a chain of rebuke. The further result will be that in attempting to influence others in regard to making a decision on the issue in dispute, the focus will be again on demonstrating the human failing in the protagonist, not on the presentation of the merits of the arguments in the substantive issue itself. Of course, there will still be some addressing of the substantive issues, but if one believes an argument to be a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*, one will see the real problem to be the nature of the opposing protagonist – and will conclude that it is this negative nature that, more than anything, must be exposed and challenged.

In the classic case of a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*, this human weakness will be seen as more than just the result of and motivated by negative impulses. As in the case of Korach and his congregation, opposition will be defined as the result of *rishut*, evil. Is it little wonder that even more so, in such cases, there will be limited debate or discussion on the substantive issue itself? If the true motivation for disagreement is personal inappropriate desire and not real intellectual dispute, a discussion or debate on the substantive merits of the divergent opinions will be seen as not really having purpose or value. Why bother? The real goal is not *emet* anyway. The opposing argument is seen only as camouflage for the realization of the desired, negative passion that is the real motivation for this position.

Beyond rebuke, what will often occur are attacks that are against the person. There are many reasons for *ad hominem* attacks, attacks against the person. A strong theoretical reason is the belief that the opposing view is motivated solely by flawed human desire not a thoughtful substantive argument. When such attacks are found in debates that touch upon Torah, the protagonist using *ad hominem* attacks is essentially defining the disagreement as a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*. In many ways, there is no greater indication that one believes a disagreement to be a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* than the prevalence of *ad hominem* attacks in the subsequent debate and discussion. The reason is that the opposing view is deemed not to have any substantive value as a description of Torah reality in any event. The result is that the opposing view must be the result of fault,

even evil, in the being of the opponent. The *ad hominem* attack is even deemed most proper for should we not attack *rishayim*, evil doers who adopt non-Torah positions for their own benefit and attempt to corrupt the essence of Torah. Indeed, such a decision can only be rendered through the eyes of one's vision of Torah.

Machloket She'eino L'Shem Shamayim with the Caveat of Tinok She'nishba

In describing a disagreement as a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* but with the application of the *caveat* of *tinok she'nishba*, one offers a similar understanding of the nature of the disagreement but removes culpability for the human failing of the protagonist seen as being in the wrong. Simply, the *machloket* is still perceived as emanating from fault in the person, from flawed human drives, but the person is not seen as culpable for this fault. The classic presentation of this concept, as presented by **Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 3:3**, is the case of one who is raised in an environment devoid of Torah values. This individual is deemed to have developed an incorrect philosophical perspective and an improper personality and value structure, but is still not deemed to be responsible for these failings as they were the natural development of exposure to such faulty instruction. This perspective can be extended to other possible scenarios as well. In any case whereby one defines the other position as absolutely wrong and actually based on a human fault, but is not willing to describe the other as evil or as responsible for this failing, we have the basis for this definition of a *machloket*. One may think in terms of a mistake or cognitive error. One may think of cases where the other is seen as being overtaken by a good motive but still allowing this emotion to pervert the truth. The reason is still the person, not the substantive issue, but the person is not deemed at fault for his/her shortcomings.

Fundamentally, this definition presents the same substantive view of the opposing position as exists in the classic case of *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*; it is clearly wrong. The result is still a perception of a lack of need to give any validity to the opposing view and to truly consider the substance of the variant view or views. The disagreement is still not deemed to be based on real intellectual considerations but rather misplaced human emotions. The proponent of this erroneous view is still seen as lacking and demonstrating human failings. The difference is that the person is not deemed culpable for these mistakes and, as such, need not be characterized as evil. The result is that there

will be a refrain from personal attacks or the personal attacks will be qualitatively different. The personal attacks may be presented in a more understanding tone and include an explanation for the mistake. Harsh rebuke will be muted or not existent. The goal, though, is still to awake *teshuva* in this mistaken protagonist, albeit through a more positive approach.

In the classic case of *tinok she'nishba*, the understated tone is one of sympathy; what else can be expected given the background of the individual? Other reasons for adopting this understanding approach toward the individual in the wrong are possible; each yielding, at times, different tones of expression in this regard. Still, in that the disagreement is nonetheless perceived to be a result of a human failing, the goal in any subsequent debate or discussion – even as the substantive issues may be discussed – will be to correct the human failing, not really to contemplate and consider the substantive issue. The essence of this type of *machloket* emerges in the tone and focus of any subsequent debate and discussion. The opposing proponent is not deemed to be evil but rather misled; thus the potential for *ad hominem* attack is tempered. Yet the focus is still the individual. The opposing position is deemed to be clearly wrong; there is no possibility of validity in it. It's simply a mistake. This type of conclusion, still, can only be reached with a contemplation of one's vision of Torah.

Machloket L'Shem Shamayim

The *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*, however, is not deemed to be a result of human failing, of incorrect human desire. The desires of the variant proponents are actually deemed to be of the highest order – to know truth and the Will of God. The weakness does not lie in the person; the challenge lies in reality itself. Yet even as Torah commands us to meet this challenge, truth and reality are ultimately beyond human comprehension thus humanity must accept the reality of the language of debate. In such debate, the focus is the substantive issue itself; the goal is to know truth and only through continuous further clarification of the idea are we able to move forward in this objective. This type of *machloket* is thus marked by substantive debate. Disagreement does not emerge from the attempt to distort truth, motivated by human passions, as is the case in both forms of the *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*. Disagreement is seen as emerging from the very drive for truth.

A full discussion of the nature of this *machloket* and the limitation of humanity in knowing truth will entail an investigation beyond the parameters of this essay. One significant question in this regard, though, that should be presented is: whether *kalpei Shemaya*, from the perspective of Heaven, one view may really be correct or not? How one answers this question will affect whether one considers any position in a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* as ultimately able to be labeled incorrect. Effectively the question would be: are all positions in the disagreement theoretically, equally part of truth and a decision rendered between the opposing views solely because of practical necessity? Or is there a truly correct position – albeit only able to be ascertained by Heaven – but we still accept all positions as part of Torah, albeit some are mistaken, as they all are equally the best that humanity can achieve and the mistakes only arise from the actual limitation of the human being? There are, furthermore, sources that seem to point to both possibilities being true in different situations and circumstances. According to this view, sometimes a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* paradoxically consists of differing positions of equal truth and validity and sometimes it encompasses mistaken positions that are deemed part of Torah because they emerged from a Torah dedicated process. Regarding this idea of, what I have termed, a Torah dedicated process, see, **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim, Introduction**. Knowledge of this distinction is helpful in giving a broader, theoretical perspective on this topic. Nonetheless, given either approach, while human limitation is recognized, the results of human failing are totally discarded. The focus is thus on the substantive positions themselves, not the person. The goal to know truth is still presented in the *shakla v'tarya*, the give and take of the debate. It is not passive acceptance but rather active acceptance of variance even as substantive debate between the variant opposing opinions continues. While the intensity of debate may be perceived as potentially more intense given the perspective that mistakes may still be found within the *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*, this intensity is always most significant for there is always the demand to limit human limitations and ensure the lack of human failing in this realm. Thus this *machloket* has a broad realm of tolerance while still maintaining – as powerfully demanded by the very system of Torah – extreme intensity in debate.

The result is the application of the principle of *Eilu v'Eilu*, the acceptance, even as disagreement continues, of both positions as part of the realm of Torah. The cognitive dissonance that we have described as inherent to the very idea of *Eilu v'Eilu* now becomes

apparent. When faced with a disagreement between Torah giants which appears to be incomprehensible, the choice is formidable. If I declare one wrong, clearly and absolutely, I have to put the disagreement into the category of *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*. It is only thereby that I do not have to accept the opposing view within the confines of *Eilu v'Eilu*. Am I willing, though, to assume the associated attack against the person that is intrinsic to such a definition? Perhaps, the broad caveat of category 2 allows for a more acceptable alternative; is this not essentially an approach taken by some in regard to the views of Rav Kuk? Still, notwithstanding an acceptance of general human fallibility, am I willing to diagnose and to declare a specific fault in a Torah giant? If not, I must accept a truth in the substantive argument as I basically declare the disagreement a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*. Would anyone be willing to do otherwise and declare a disagreement involving someone like the Chazon Ish anything but a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*? The result is necessarily *Eilu v'Eilu*. The extended result is cognitive dissonance in the face of the breadth and awe of the Divine Wisdom and the call to accept what seems to be unacceptable.

The underlying structure of disagreements now becomes clear. If one cannot accept a truth in an opposing position, if one is incapable of applying *Eilu v'Eilu* to a specific disagreement, the result must be that the disagreement is based on human fault by, at least, one of the protagonists. The focus in debate will be personal; the exchange will be *ad hominem* volleys. If one, though, cannot accept such a conclusion about the opponent, one must accept some truth in the opposing statement and apply *Eilu v'Eilu*. The result may be bewilderment and cognitive dissonance. The result may be, and this is often the case, silence. Therein, though, lies the choice. The *ad hominem* attack reveals much. The refrain from such attack reveals much. The language of the disagreement is most significant. It indicates one's understanding, not only of the protagonists but, of the nature of the *machloket*. And, again, such a determination as to whether a position falls within the pale and indicates a true striving for truth, or is otherwise and is a result of personal desire, can only be reached in consideration of one's vision of Torah.

And it is one's understanding of the very foundation of knowledge that may be the key to deciphering one's vision of Torah – and/or developing a greater and more substantial vision. An interesting paradox emerges from these variant understandings of *machloket*. Doubt is often perceived to be an indication of a lack of faith in God. Absolute

faith is often perceived to be an indication of commitment to God. In the words of Rav Moshe, faith actually can play a strange role in our relationship with truth. In the case of the *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*, weakness in faith is deemed to create *machloket*. In the case, though, of *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*, strength in faith is that which is deemed to create *machloket*. It is because we can accept God that we can accept our limitations in knowledge that yield a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*.

The only way to understand this is by recognizing that doubt is not really a statement regarding the Divine but really a statement regarding oneself. The less that one doubts his/her ability to know God, even to believe in God, the more one believes in his/her ability to know the truth, the whole, clear, absolute truth. The more one is sure of his/her knowledge of God, the more one is sure of oneself and one's knowledge. What is perceived to be an absolute faith in God is, thus, actually a faith in self, in the ability to know. The result is surety of one's position based on surety in one's ability to know truth. Herein lies part of this great paradox of human knowledge. The result of such surety in one's ability to know yields the potential for the self to take an overextended command of thought and for the development of a false opinion, as is the case in a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*. The more difficult it is for one to contemplate the nature of a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* which is built upon a recognition that one cannot know the ultimate truth of the Divine Wisdom, the more reserved one is in declaring the surety of an idea. The *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* is built upon a recognition of the reality of the inherent weakness in the human ability to know. The human failing that can be at the root of the *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim*, and this it could be contended was the very weakness of Korach and his congregation, is the very perception that human beings can have surety in knowledge.

The result is that the more that one doubts his/her ability to know God, the less one believes in his/her ability to know the truth. **What is perceived to be doubt in God is actually doubt in self.** The result is openness to other opinions and a recognition that the full picture of truth is beyond the strictures of one's solitary mind. The result is the ability to accept the reality of a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* even as it taxes the parameters of one's mind and understanding. Does this mean that a description of a disagreement as a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* and the application of *Eilu v'Eilu* is always the best approach? The answer is no. The human being is still called upon to think and this call must include

some ability to discern between what is correct and what is incorrect. To state that all opinions are correct is also a form of evasion from our task. In addition, the reality of human failing does deem a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* a possibility to be considered. Yet this recognition does demand of us to truly consider the complexity of the issue and the question of how we do render decisions including the most fundamental decision that we make: how we know and determine truth.

One's vision of Torah affects one's understanding of which positions one will accept within the parameters of Torah and which positions one will not accept. This, in turn, leads one to decide whether a *machloket* is the result of human failing or the depth of reality, which in turn colours one's response and voice in the subsequent discussion/debate. The corollary is that one's position in a *machloket* will lead us back to one's vision of Torah. We can thus understand the mechanics of *Eilu v'Eilu* and the cognitive dissonance that it must create. To vehemently declare a position wrong is to declare human failing to be at the root of this position. To feel reluctant in declaring the cause of the disagreement human failing is to declare the opposing position a part of the realm of *Eilu v'Eilu* and a part of the realm of Torah. That is essentially what is occurring today as the rift in Orthodoxy widens. To reject *Eilu v'Eilu*, by definition, means the other side is being motivated by human failing, leading to *ad hominem* attacks. To avoid a charge of human failing, means to accept the opposing position as part of *Eilu v'Eilu* – but what is one to do when everything within his/her knowledge of Torah yields a conclusion that it is not. To accept otherwise would be to attack one's vision of Torah, one's understanding of knowledge and essentially to shatter one's ability to live for how can one live without some faith in oneself and his/her ability to know and decide. Even as reality must charge us to have humility in our ability to know and to maintain an aspect of doubt in ourselves, some faith in self and the resultant faith in God is still necessary. This is really the dilemma of the Slifkin Affair. This is where we find the motivation for rift. This is also where we find the justification for rift. The real question is whether there is any alternative.

In my own personal life, when I encountered the so-called *hesped*, eulogy, of the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in the Jewish Observer, I was thrown into the essence of this problem. To declare this *hesped* simply wrong – which I did and I do still opine – would seem to yield a definition of the disagreement which unfolded, in regard to the *hesped*, as a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* and thus the members of the *Mo'etzet Gedolei*

Torah at that time, the ones I perceived to be the opponents of my position, as motivated by human failing. This, to me, was also unacceptable, yet I also could not accept my perceived view of the opposing position that supported this *hesped* as part of *Eilu v'Eilu*. The only alternative was to attempt to find another view of the *machloket*, a different understanding of what occurred. In the end, I uncovered a more complete clarification of the facts that would thereby allow me to explain the actions of the *Mo'etzet* in a manner in which, while I still respectfully disagreed, I could consider within the parameters of a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim*. This is a further challenge we all face in situations of disagreement. We render many judgements in our response to an opposing view and in our description of the nature of a disagreement. This must be done with great consideration for it is not only one's statement or one's response that is at issue. The entire nature of the subsequent chain is at issue. Sometimes this does not only demand of us to define the nature of the *machloket*, but calls upon us to uncover what the argument is really about.

One's vision of Torah is tied to one's perception of, not only an opposing view but, of an opponent. It is upon this plane that one's view of a *machloket* is determined. To declare the *Mashichists* outside the pale of Torah is to declare, whether with culpability or without, that this position emerges from human failing. Can the ban be understood as a similar statement against Rabbi Slifkin? (Can the declaration that the books were *apikorsus* but Rabbi Slifkin is not an *apikorus* be a way of placing him and the debate in the category of a *machloket she'eino l'Shem Shamayim* but with a *caveat*?) Indeed responses in defense of Rabbi Slifkin raised similar issues in regard to their view of the proponents of the ban. Can we simply say that this action by these individuals is simply a result of human failing? *Ad hominem* responses, by some defenders of Rabbi Slifkin, against proponents of the ban, would seem to indicate that, for some, the sad answer is yes (although, I should mention, that my perception of Rabbi Slifkin's own response reflected the cognitive dissonance what I also share). Others, including myself, cannot accept such an alternative (even as we recognize a reality of fallibility). Nevertheless, can one simply define a disagreement as a *machloket l'Shem Shamayim* simply because one does not wish to face the consequences of the alternative? It is perhaps time to try and figure out what this *machloket* in the Slifkin Affair is really all about. And, by extension, we may also gain insight into the debate

regarding the *Mashichists*.

This must now be our starting point for Part 4. How we define a *machloket* is tied to how we see and describe the other which is tied to our vision of Torah which is tied to ourselves and our relationship with truth. It, thus, all comes down to the challenge of knowledge; how does one know truth? How does one, more significantly, approach truth. The options are, basically, faith and reason. The paradox is that the more we are sure of ourselves, the more we are sure of our conclusion to accept the reality of God and Torah – but the more we are sure of ourselves, the less we are able to stand in awe and humility in the face of God, Torah and the Divine Wisdom ultimately beyond our comprehension. This is really the issue in regard to the theology of the *Mashichists*. It is clearly the real issue in the Slifkin Affair.

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