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כָּל מַחְלָקֶת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם – סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. וְשֵׁאִינָה
 לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם – אֵין סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. אִיזוֹ הִיא מַחְלָקֶת
 שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם? זֶה מַחְלָקֶת שְׂמִי וְהַלֵּל. וְשֵׁאִינָה
 לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם? זֶה מַחְלָקֶת קִרַח עֲדָתוֹ.

Any dispute that is for the sake of heaven will endure; but one that is not for the sake of heaven will not endure. What sort of dispute was for the sake of heaven? The dispute between Shammai and Hillel. And which was not for the sake of heaven? The dispute of Korach and his company.

IT IS EASY to fall into the trap of arguing in order to be right and inflate one's ego, but such a pattern will detract from intellectual nourishment. Every argument will become an opportunity for arrogance, rather than to understand another's ideas. This was the downfall of Korach, the most significant figure to challenge the leadership of Moses during the wanderings in the wilderness. Korach thought that if he fomented argument within leadership, he could topple Moses and himself lead the Hebrews to the Holy Land. Korach paid dearly for this mistake (see Numbers 16:31–32). The Rabbis teach that respectful argument must be attached to proper motives and righteous integrity. Arguing “for the sake of heaven” means that the argument is beyond one's own ego; the argument is to perpetuate good.

Developing skills requires that we learn to adapt. Remain ideologically isolated, and one's ideas will never be challenged and one will never learn to argue. Remain intellectually engaged, and one's thinking will adapt and one's skills in argument improve as new information emerges. Why does Noah send the dove to find dry land, and why does the Torah devote multiple verses to this incident (Genesis 8:6–12)? Noah must wait until the ark reaches dry land, regardless of what the dove finds. But it is human nature to seek knowledge, even if one cannot change the course of affairs.

At the heart of the Talmudic process, and of all pedagogy in Judaism, is *machloket*, “dispute”—the term that is featured in our mishnah. What it refers to is not merely intellectual exercise, but a reminder of the importance of multiple opinions in determining truth. One should remain humble, even uncertain, about one’s own position, learn to engage respectfully with others, and maintain a dialectical approach that embraces nuance and complexity.

Rabbi Abba stated in the name of Sh’muel: For three years, there was a dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, the former asserting, “The halachah is in agreement with our views,” and the latter contending, “The halachah is in agreement with our views.” Then a *bat kol* [voice of God] issued, announcing, “[The utterances of] both are the words of the living God; but the halachah is in agreement with the rulings of Beit Hillel.” Since, however, both are the words of the living God, what was it that entitled Beit Hillel to have the halachah fixed in agreement with their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of Beit Shammai, and were even so [humble] as to mention the actions of Beit Shammai before theirs. (BT *Eiruvin* 13b)

Without humility, one risks standing on the wrong side of history, which is filled with examples of both leaders who humbly adapted and of those whose villainy was in intransigence. When Joseph warned that Pharaoh’s dreams foretold famine following abundance, surplus grain was stored for the lean years (Genesis 41:25–31). Joseph could have become complacent, because Egypt was used to plenty, but instead he anticipated scarcity and adapted. In contrast, the last king of Babylon, Belshazzar, ignored the “writing on the wall” (Daniel 5:25–28). In his ignorance and intransigence, Belshazzar celebrated what he thought would be a long, secure reign, even while battalions of Persians and foreign invaders were at the gate, eager to overthrow him and conquer Babylon.

We dare not retreat in fear when we encounter challenges; and when we argue for what is right, we should do so knowing that our words are heard by the divine ear. While knowing that the world is not just black-and-white, and we must weather the storm of opposition if our

ideals are to remain holy. Considering the contrary argument, one gains knowledge, but one finds opportunity for dissent when dissent is just. According to Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman, “When we listen to Torah, we are listening to God’s voice. But this is not necessarily what God speaks; it reflects what we hear. Dialogue between two people grows not from what is said but from what is heard.”³⁹²

To prepare for changed reality (personally and collectively), we should look outside of the “ark” to embrace the eventualities of the new world. It is our spiritual vocation. How will contemporary leadership answer the challenge of climate change, for example? The response of some is that we must simply stop talking about it, as if the immediate and growing calamity will therefore just disappear.

But who will win the argument—the Josephs and Daniels of our age? Or the Belshazzars and Pharaohs? The choice is ours.