

Machlokes - Avoiding Strife & Pursuing Peace:

The Mitzvah:

1. The Torah prohibits us from engaging in *machlokes*, quarrelling, as it says, "He shall not be like Korach and his congregation."
2. Anyone who supports a *machlokes* also violates this Mitzva, whether he instigates a fight between two people or furthers the conflict.
3. *Machlokes* can be defined, and can include disagreement, dissension, dispute, argument, argumentativeness, divisiveness, strife, fighting, feud, conflict, contentiousness, insurgency, rebellion, and open warfare.
4. *Machlokes* is one of the most destructive forces that exist in social relationships.
5. The punishment for *Machlokes* can effect even nursing infants.
6. This Mitzvah applies to men and women, in all places, and at all times.
7. Children should be taught from a young age to steer clear of fights and should be guided to avoid associating with argumentative people who regularly feud with others.
8. Certainly, parents should never involve their children in their own *machlokes* or command their children to support them against an "enemy."
9. If a parent does, the child should not obey him in this matter. Children should do everything they can to put an end to the *machlokes* which the parent is involved with.
10. When two people have a disagreement, their goal should be to resolve their differences. Unfortunately, the method they most commonly use to achieve that goal - fighting it out - will virtually never result in a peaceful solution.
11. As soon as two individuals see that they are unable to reach an understanding and accommodate each other on their own, they should go to a third party, someone who is acceptable to both of them, to help them negotiate a compromise. The third party might be a Rav, a mutual friend, or a fellow businessman.
12. If the option is not available, or if their efforts are unsuccessful, their next step should be to go to a Din Torah.
13. The Torah warns us, "Do not follow the many to do evil." This means that we are warned not to support or encourage sinners, nor to join with those who approve of their wrongdoings. The Torah advises us not to associate with resha'im in worldly matters - not even for the purpose of doing a Mitzvah; how much more should we take precautions not to get involved with their *machlokes*.
14. We should show our disapproval of *machlokes* is by withholding official honors from people who are involved in *machlokes*.
15. We are even allowed to speak Loshon Hora about argumentative people who regularly feud with others, (when those conditions allowing it have been met) if this will be effective in defusing a fight. However, we must be sure that these methods will not lead to the opposite of our desired goal, by intensifying the quarrel instead of defusing it.
16. We are allowed to engage actively in *machlokes* when dealing with wicked people. but even then, we should be careful not to employ brazen arrogance. The goal should be to stop their wickedness and to prevent others from being drawn after them. However, we can not go as far as to prosecute them, since there is principle that Hashem favours the one who is persecuted - even if the persecutor is a Tzaddik and the victim is a Rasha.
17. Even a highly esteemed person should forego his honor if this will help defuse a *machlokes*.
18. More refined people will even forfeit a mitzvah in order to avoid *machlokes*.
19. We are even permitted to bend the truth when necessary for the sake of peace.
20. "The entire world exists only in the merit of the person who restrains his words at the time of a quarrel."

Different Types of *Machlokes*:

1. We are permitted to engage in a *Machlokes* that is *Lesheim Shomayim* - for the sake of Heaven. This type of *Machlokes* is for the purpose of reaching the truth and for everyone's benefit.
2. Care should be exercised that the *machlokes* does not merely masquerade as *Lesheim Shomayim*, when in fact they are not. The benchmark is whether the *machlokes* limits itself to the specific issue on which the sides disagree, while on a personal level the two sides remain loving friends.
3. Hashem gets pleasure when seeing a heated battle between two people in the course of Torah study. We are even allowed to question our rebbe's words, when they are done in respectful way.
4. Occasionally, we may catch a rebbe or parent making a mistake. In such a case, we must carefully choose our words to preserve their respect, making the point in a gentle way, such as, "What does the Torah mean when it says...?" We should never contradict them outright. Even when we agree with them, we should not be so presumptuous as to express our approval openly, such as by saying, "I agree with the rebbe / father."
5. Each of us has his own opinions and outlooks on life. Nevertheless, we can allow people their differences and still maintain a respectful and loving relationship, steering clear from *machlokes*.

Practical Tips to Avoid *Machlokes*:

1. If you are involved in an unpleasant situation with your friend, try not to discuss it with your spouse.
2. Be prepared to swallow your pride and give in, even when you know you are right.
3. Stay away from bad company - specifically people who like to get together and poke fun of others.
4. Avoid speaking, hearing, and believing any form of Lashon Hora or rechilus.
5. Never shame people, in public or in private, or hurt them with your words, even "as a joke."
6. Make a point of always showing others respect - no matter how they speak to you.
7. To avoid confrontations. keep your distance from people who do not like you, no matter what their reasons.
8. Don't be overly exacting, even in matters of Torah and Mitzvos - and certainly in other areas - it is likely to make you tense, melancholy, and irritable.
9. Avoid falling prey to jealousy, anger, and irritability; this enables you to remain rational and not overcome by your emotions when things don't go your way.
10. Foster the *mida* of *vatranus* - yielding. Remember that giving in is not a sign of weakness.
11. Do not make the mistake of thinking that once a *machlokes* is under way, there is no way to stop it.
12. Find a Rav who understands and cares about you, who can give you truly objective advice that you will listen to.
13. **Rambam Letter to his son:** "I have seen children blackened, families cut off, villages crumbled...respected ones degraded - all because of *machlokes*. Prophets prophesied and Chachomim philosophized and will continue to speak of the evils of *machlokes*, and yet will never finish saying all there is to say...Keep away from it and from all who support it, lest you be decimated in their sin."

Sources for Shalom:

1. Bamidbar 6:26: "Hashem should bestow peace on us."
2. The priestly blessing has 3 blessings, 15 words, and 60 letters.
3. Siddur: "Hashem makes peace in the upper worlds."
4. Talmud Uktzin 3,12: The only vessel Hashem could find that could contain bracha for Yisrael was Shalom, as it says, " Hashem will give strength to His people, Hashem will bless His nation with peace" (Tehilim 29, 11).
5. "The name of Hashem is Shalom."
6. Many elements in creation are formed from contradictory components, and what allows them to work together is the power of shalom.
7. Psalms 104, 26: "How amazing is Your handiwork, they were all made with Chochma."
8. מה כח = חכמה The dialectic between recognizing one's power & realizing that it is not coming from you; rather it is on loan from Hashem.
9. *Shalom* is referring to Hashem; Hashem makes everything function together in an integrated fashion. Even though many creations seem conflicting, Hashem gives them the ability to work together.
10. The angels represent many different forces; some chesed, some din, and others characterize additional midos and missions. To have all these diverse forces work in tandem with one another, which is essential for the continuity of the world, shalom enters the picture.
11. שמים = אש + מים
12. Hashem created this world with the letter 'Heh' and the world to come with the letter 'Yud.'
13. The only letter in the Hebrew alphabet that has no separation is the letter 'Samech.'
14. The ability for one to live in peace with others depends on our ability have this "Chochma."
15. One must self everything one has in order to purchases 4 cups of wine and chanuka candles, yet Shabbos candles take precedence over them because they provide "Shalom Bayis."