

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Pinchas

THROUGH THE LOTTERY SHALL THE LAND BE DIVIDED..."
(BAMIDBAR 26:55)

Hashem avoided potential machlokes

WHY WAS A LOTTERY USED to divide up the Land of Israel amongst the Jews? The Ralbag (Toeles 4) explains that Hashem showed His wisdom by apportioning the land long before the Jews actually entered it, to avoid potential *machlokes* – strife. Had Hashem waited until after the Jews conquered the land, and then divided it, arguments may have ensued. Some people would perhaps say, "I exerted myself more, I was more successful in battle than others and I therefore deserve a greater portion of the land." Others would disagree and a *machlokes* would occur. Instead, Hashem, in His Ultimate wisdom, clearly delineated the borders before such a disagreement could even begin. From this, the Ralbag tells us, we see that we must do our utmost to avoid *machlokes*.

The Land of Israel was populated, as described in the spies' report, by mighty people, huge fortified cities and the offspring of giants (Bamidbar 13:28; see Ramban ibid. that this was an accurate description). If so, the claims described by the Ralbag really make no sense. The victory over the Canaanites was totally miraculous. This ragtag group of former slaves – with no military training – could never have imagined conquering the mighty Canaanite armies without Divine assistance. How could a Jew claim that he put more effort into the battle, or was more "successful," than the other Jews? Their efforts were totally secondary and inconsequential to the victory. If the victory was obviously Divine, how can the Ralbag say that this seemingly ridiculous claim could be the starting point for a *machlokes*?

It can take even these frivolous claims and use them to stoke the flames

When someone is jealous, he can convince himself of the validity of the most absurd ideas. *Machlokes* is such a dangerously powerful force that it can take even these frivolous claims and use them to stoke the flames of dispute and discord into a full-blown conflagration. The Ralbag is telling us that we must be aware of this lethal potential and take steps, well in advance, to avoid even the smallest possibility of the beginnings of a *machlokes*. This extends even to preempting the most irrational claims, the most far-fetched ideas that would be immediately discarded by an impartial, clear-headed person.

Do we bend over backwards to avoid inciting jealousy and discord?

Do we bend over backwards to avoid inciting jealousy and discord? In dealing with our children or with our students, do we avoid making comparisons and excessively praising one individual in front of another? Are we careful to be as fair and even-handed as possible in distributing things to them? We can follow Hashem's example and anticipate times fraught with *machlokes* potential. We can prearrange and settle contentious matters before they become issues of dispute. Concealing our accomplishments and not flaunting our material possessions, whether they be our homes, our cars or clothing, is also a valuable method of avoiding jealousy and resentment in the hearts of others. One who is sensitive to refrain from displaying or describing areas of personal, financial or familial success where others are lacking, is emulating our Creator, Who taught us in His wisdom to avoid arousing jealousy and to maintain love and brotherhood among the Jewish people.