

PARSHAS KORACH

תשע"ט

The story of Korach has many aspects to it. We need to explore what was motivating Korach and how he was able to convince himself and a large number of people that he was correct.

Chazal are puzzled about how Korach could actually believe what he was preaching. Although it may be easy to fool other people, Chazal say he was a pikeach—he himself must have known that to question Moshe Rabbeinu's authority was futile.

The argument Korach mounted was that Moshe and Aharon arrogated too much power to themselves. "You took the malchus and you gave your brother the kehunoh. All of Klal Yisroel are equally kodosh—no one human being should be standing on top of the authority structure."

Essentially, Korach challenges Moshe Rabbeinu's authenticity and sincerity. There is a machlokes in Chazal if this event took place before or after the parsha of the meraglim. But regardless, all of Klal Yisroel overheard Hashem instruct Moshe Rabbeinu to convey the mitzvos to Klal Yisroel. He was clearly chosen to be the authentic communicator of the will of Hashem. Korach can't contradict this. Instead, Korach accuses Moshe of adding things himself that he never heard from Hashem. His proof is that the halachos he teaches us about techeiles and mezuzah defy logic. His interpretations don't make sense so it can't be from Hashem. If his interpretations aren't authentic, then his appointments also can't be authentic.

Moshe was clearly given nevuah at Har Sinai and was authorized to be the one to convey the will of Hashem to Klal Yisroel. But Korach's skepticism needs to be addressed. Once Moshe has this enormous authority, what mechanism was put in place to ensure that Moshe Rabbeinu won't become corrupt one day and decide to present his own ideas in the name of the Torah?

The Meshech Chochmoh answers that to ensure that Torah is not corrupted from Har Sinai and on, Moshe Rabbeinu's free-will was taken away from him. After being in Heaven for forty days receiving the Torah, he became elevated to such a degree that he became similar to an angel.

Aharon and Miriam at the end of Parshas Behaaloscho failed to grasp this transformation Moshe underwent. So Hashem made this abundantly clear to them by telling them directly and by making all of Klal Yisroel wait seven days until Miriam's affliction of tzoraas subsided. Even the greatest members of Klal Yisroel struggled with this recognition. Moshe Rabbeinu is on a completely different level.

Some people are so consumed with ego and jealousy that they simply can't conceive of anyone who can rise above these petty drives. All indications to the contrary are blocked out. They immediately assume that all people they come into contact with are similarly driven by ego and jealousy. We see this syndrome in Chazal's bizarre explanation as to why the raven refused to fly away from the teivoh when Noach dispatched him. The midrash says the raven was reluctant to leave because he suspected Noach singled him out to leave the teivoh and die from the harsh climate outside so he can claim his mate! Although it sounds absurd to us, Chazal are telling us that when you harbor extreme taivos or middos, your capacity for rational thinking becomes corrupted. Chazal tell us that the raven was one of the few animals who violated the ban and engaged in reproduction during the mabbul. Because of the raven's extreme taivoh for his mate, he naturally assumed everyone harbored the same extreme taivoh—even Noach! This is how he viewed the world and he couldn't conceive that there

are people who are above this.

Korach was deeply jealous of the power wielded by Moshe and Aharon. He thought he deserved to be the nasi of Shevet Levi and he didn't get it. And because of this, he assumed that Moshe was nothing better than a power-hungry egomaniac and he ignored every indication otherwise. His jealousy and ego problems were projected onto Moshe Rabbeinu. He so convinced himself that he was right that he was willing to undergo the trial by machtos to determine who Hashem chose. He gambled everything he had. They really thought they would emerge unscathed because they really believed Moshe was corrupt. Their middos blinded them to the reality and it destroyed them.

Chazal tell us that Korach was so consumed with his ego that he was convinced that Moshe was consumed by ego and power. Nothing he saw beforehand could convince him otherwise.

Beyond the personal issue he had with Moshe, Korach tried to undermine the entire integrity of our mesorah. Moshe responds with boker. Rashi explains that Hashem imposed an absolute structure to the world. Just like you can't alter the physical structure of day and night, of male and female, you cannot alter the spiritual structure of the Torah. It has its own logical structure which must be respected. It is not subject to people's twisted logic and selfish interests.

There is something called a gezeiras melech. We try to use our logic to understand the Torah. But often the Torah defies ordinary conventional human logic. At that point, we bow to the will of Hashem. We put our own biases aside and try to understand the logic that the Torah is teaching us. We dare not impose our own human logic onto the Torah. This is an important attitude one must adopt when one approaches limud Torah.

There is an authority structure in the way Torah is learned throughout the generations. We never just open a gemara and try to figure it out without a mesorah. We don't pass judgment over the gemara we learn. We always try to understand how the previous generations understood it. We look to the rishonim and achronim to glean the method of how to properly analyze Chazal. The Torah has its own logic and its own rules of interpretation and we subject our minds to its logic. You can come up with a million sevoros for why a garment made of techeiles shouldn't need tzitzis, but if it doesn't line up with our mesorah it is rejected.

Today we live in a crazy world where there are no absolutes. Things change so suddenly and rapidly from one extreme to the other and back again. Even the physical givens mentioned by Rashi are challenged today. Night has been turned into day because of electric lights. People are now told to believe that gender is no longer binary between male and female. It is now completely fluid based on your current state of mind. Constants are changing faster and faster.

The Torah says no—there is man and woman. There is kohen, levi and yisroel. There is tzitzis on only a four-cornered garment. You can't change the halacha. We say every morning that the words of the Torah were true then and are true now. They are alive and endure forever. We are dedicated to upholding them and our children will uphold them for all future generations.

A physicist doesn't ask himself why the world works in a certain way and not another way. He can't have kashes on reality. He wants to understand the reality in a way that reveals the underlying mechanics

that Hashem used to keep the world going, so that he can manipulate the laws of physics to his advantage. But if he denies the laws of physics, he is not a physicist. He needs to bend his mind to understand the system. And if he understood the blueprint of the physical world, he would understand it better.

But if this is true about the physical world, it is certainly true about the spiritual world. There are absolutes.

Avimelech was upset that Avrohom told him Soroh wasn't his wife and got in trouble with Hashem. Why did he deceive him? Avrohom responded that there is no yiras Hashem if you don't have a sense of absolutes. You can make any rule you want to serve the interests you have at the moment. If the king of the land has a desire to have this woman, he will find a way to legalize murdering her husband. But we believe there is one G-d with one Torah and one set of absolute rules forever and ever. This is a dangerous religion because it threatens to undermine the control that people want to have over their society by bending the rules and changing the rules as they go along.

Korach got so tied up with his jealousy and his ego, he couldn't see beyond his petty desires. He influenced a lot of people with his wealth and his logic. Moshe said no, there are absolutes.

At the end of the parsha Hashem tells Moshe to gather the firepans which the ketores were brought on and make them into a shell over the mizbeiach. It is to serve as a memorial to remind people of those who questioned the kehunoh and threatened to undermine the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu. The kehunoh is an example of the basic structure of the Torah. Anyone who threatens the basic structure is a danger to our survival. You have to accept absolutes.

Finally we have Korach's fate of being swallowed up by the earth. Moshe made a test—if a new briya will be created to punish Korach, this will prove that Moshe is an authentic messenger of Hashem. It happened as predicted—all the people who opposed Moshe were killed instantly. But then Klal Yisroel complain—"Moshe is causing all these people to die because Hashem has to defend his kovod!" What is this about?

At a certain point, people have to open their eyes, see the hashgochoh in their lives, and realize that Hashem is sending them a message. Often that message is that Hashem wants you to strive for higher levels of

spirituality, to move into a growth pattern, and not be complacent on the level that you are at.

The problem at the core was that the people couldn't understand that Moshe was beyond the petty motives of the average person. People who are stuck inside their small, petty lives need something to shake them out of this stuck view. Hashem brought catastrophic nissim to prove that Moshe Rabbeinu is on a completely different level than they assumed him to be on.

It was a tragedy that they couldn't see this based on their own experience of Moshe Rabbeinu. People had a problem with being tomei on Pesach and complained—Moshe said "wait here, I'll ask Hashem what to do." And Hashem told him what to do! People have to be able to see it and realize that not everyone is on their own low and petty level.

Klal Yisroel were artificially brought up to a level, and they kept saying they didn't want to stay on that high level. And the corollary is that once you choose to operate on a lower level you assume everyone has the same weakness that you have and bring them down to your level.

Parshas Korach teaches us many lessons. One is that Korach was a pikeach, a wise person who should have known better. But his own bad middos twisted his logic. He couldn't accept that Moshe Rabbeinu was on a higher level and could rise above the petty concerns that he was mired in. In his blind pursuit of ego and jealousy he wound up destroying himself. This kind of self-destructive behavior happens all the time.

Another lesson of Parshas Korach is that Hashem created the world with absolutes. There is an internal logic to the Torah that we need to bend our minds towards in order to understand. We don't change the Torah based on our own logic and self-interests. The Torah is an eternal and unchanging document. It is the blueprint which underlies the entire physical universe. As long as the world continues, the Torah continues in an unchanging manner.

People think that we need to update the Torah to adapt to a changing reality. They don't understand that the world hasn't changed because people fundamentally haven't changed. The Torah and Hashem are permanent.