

PARSHAS KORACH

תשפ"ד

Korach, Dason and Avirom, and Ohn ben Peles rose up together with 250 heads of Sanhedrin to challenge Moshe's authority. We need to remember what Aharon and Miriam learned at the end of Parshas Behaaloscho. They thought Moshe Rabbeinu was fundamentally on the same level of nevuah as the rest, only a little greater. Hashem had to inform them that Moshe occupied a different class entirely. And Hashem made this very public. Miriam was stricken with tzora'as and the entire community waited seven days for her to recover. So everyone knew about what happened. All of Klal Yisroel were at Har Sinai. They all heard how Hashem communicated the Aseres Hadibros directly to Moshe, demonstrating that he was the only one who could convey the d'var Hashem with complete authenticity.

The Meshech Chochmoh points out that this verification process was only done for the Aseres Hadibros. It was not done for any other mitzvah given to Klal Yisroel by Moshe on Hashem's behalf. So how could Klal Yisroel trust that Moshe didn't corrupt anything he was told after Har Sinai? The answer is that once it was established that Moshe had a nevuah on a totally different level, it made him lose his bechiroh and he was incapable of deviating one iota from what he heard from Hashem. If that wasn't sufficient, Hashem testified to Moshe's complete faithfulness in Parshas Behaaloscho, and again after his death. Moshe was completely devoted as the eved Hashem and he utterly submitted himself to the will of Hashem.

Now we have these ba'alei machlokes who are enticing these sincere 250 heads of Sanhedrin who were appointed by Moshe Rabbeinu to rebel against Moshe and accuse him of distorting the Torah. It is a recipe for disaster. Dason and Avirom have been making misery for Moshe Rabbeinu all the way back when he was a young man in Egypt – they caused him to flee for his life – and they continued making trouble for him ever since.

They declare that they want total democracy and no-one should be appointed as the Kohen Godol to the exclusion of anyone else. They had questions about techeiles – if some strings are enough to remind you of the kisei hakovod, certainly an entire garment made from techeiles shouldn't also require an additional string on the fringes! Very logical question.

But the first thing to be aware of is that the Torah follows its own internal logic and its own internal halachic framework. We don't rely on common sense to be critical of any halacha in the Torah. We try to decipher the logic of the Torah. The second thing to remember is that the Torah assigned different roles to different types of Jews. We all have kedushas Yisroel – there is no question about that. But there are kohanim, levi'im and yisroelim, each of whom have different roles in avodas Hashem. Men and women have different roles as well. This is the will of Hashem and it can't be questioned.

These heads of Sanhedrin challenge the right of Moshe Rabbeinu to explain the Torah and impose his will on the rest of Klal Yisroel. We all stood at Har Sinai together, they claimed, and this makes everyone equally qualified. This is a very dangerous line of thinking – that everyone has the right to interpret the Torah as he sees fit.

Moshe responds with the word "boker" – morning. On the simple level it means "wait for the morning when our minds are fresh and clear." The second explanation is that the truth about his dispute will become clear as day.

It means Klal Yisroel lost clarity about who Moshe Rabbeinu was.

There is a problem when you are overexposed to greatness – you stop appreciating how unique it is and you start to think it's nothing special. This cannot be allowed to happen. Moshe isn't just a higher level novi – he is on an entirely different plane. He has no ego, no sense of self or independent will that is capable of corrupting the will of Hashem for his own personal gain. They saw this for themselves at Har Sinai and heard it with Miriam! But Klal Yisroel saw 250 heads of Sanhedrin challenge Moshe's authority with sincerity because they were swayed by these professional ba'alei machlokes, and they got confused. It is a standard problem of being in the presence of the gadlus of Torah and cheapening it. People don't appreciate there is a massive gap to always be mindful of when speaking about talmidei chachomim.

Moshe responds – you are Bnei Levi whom Hashem chose to serve Him out of all the shevotim in Klal Yisroel, and you are coming to demand more privileges? Getting a special status in avodas Hashem isn't about ego. That is just not what it is all about. Hashem gave each type of person their portion in avodas Hashem and there is no point in wanting someone else's job. Hashem assigned these roles according to His infinitely deep logic and we can't question it.

Moshe offers to sit down and discuss the matter with Dason and Avirom, and they refuse. They knew that after the sin of the meraglim, they will all die in the desert. But they considered it a failure of Moshe's leadership that they won't make it to Eretz Yisroel! They refuse to acknowledge that it was because of their own failure to appreciate how Hashem is delivering them to Eretz Yisroel on a golden platter. People often lack the ability to look at themselves and take responsibility when things go wrong and are very quick to shift the blame to someone else.

Moshe Rabbeinu is confronted with the following issue. You have a group of very sincere people whose minds have been corrupted by a cunning group of ba'alei machlokes. They have a sincere desire to serve Hashem on the highest level, which they considered to be bringing the ketores. They didn't accept the fact that Hashem has different roles in avodas Hashem for different people. Moshe has to ask Hashem not to justify their twisted sincerity by accepting their offering. Moshe proposes making a contest to see who is the one Hashem chooses. Moshe leads a delegation of ziknei Yisroel to try to settle this thing peacefully. When this attempt fails, Moshe tells everyone to distance themselves physically from these ba'alei machlokes.

People do not appreciate the greatness of gedolei Yisroel – they automatically assume everyone is acting out of ego and self-interest. There is a teshuvah of Rav Betzalel Ashkenazi, the compiler of the Shita Mekubetzes, who was a rav in Egypt. He said that a sign of the generation before Moshiach is a blurring of madreigos. No-one recognizes the greatness of great people and their ability to rise above the petty considerations of average people. This is what they do to Moshe Rabbeinu – after everything they have seen so far! So Moshe has to make a clear proof that he was chosen, by predicting an unbelievable miracle – a new creation! The earth will open up underneath them and swallow them and all their property down into Sheol. And a fire went out and consumed the 250 nefashos who brought the ketores.

Hashem tells Aharon to use these firepans to cover the mizbeach as a reminder that Hashem assigned different tasks in avodas Hashem to different people. He will judge each person according to the unique task he was given. You would think Moshe has made his point very

clearly and there would be no shadow of doubt remaining about Moshe's leadership. But Klal Yisroel don't accept it! They assume Hashem was just protecting Moshe's honor! They just don't get the message after all they've been shown.

Hashem gives up on Klal Yisroel and starts a plague and people start dying left and right. But Moshe doesn't give up – even though he is the one they are constantly attacking. Moshe tells Aharon to bring the ketores to stop the plague and bring kaporoh – the very ketores which caused 250 people to die!

Hashem tells each of the shevotim to bring a staff to the Mishkon and only Aharon's staff miraculously blossoms and grows fruit – showing once again that Hashem has picked Aharon and Shevet Levi to serve in the Mishkon and no-one should dare attempt to usurp their role. Hashem has chosen each person for the specific task Hashem wants them to fulfil and it is futile for someone to try to adopt another person's task.

There is an unbelievable story here with so many lessons for contemporary Jewish life.

We are living in very unusual times. Anyone who doesn't see the hand of Hashem involved in our lives on a regular basis, doesn't understand what kind of unique period in history we are going through. There is a lot of confusion regarding what Hashem's plan is for us. Just like Klal Yisroel needed an incredible open miracle to prove that Moshe is a faithful transmitter of His Torah, Hashem is trying to wake us up today. The world is going insane – Hashem is turning the world upside down. We can never forget what we went through before Pesach – understanding all the details of how Iran's missile attack was thwarted – making Hashem's intervention so clear and obvious. We have to first wake up and be sensitive to these messages, and not just turn over and go back to sleep.

We also have to understand that each person has their unique task, and be sensitive to the greatness of talmidei chachomim and not dismiss them.

We read a very serious kinoh on Tisha B'av about the tragedy of King Yoshiyahu. He was a big tzaddik and a great talmid chochom. He was asked by Egypt to pass through with its army to fight Bovel. He refused because he thought the times of Moshiach have arrived and one of the

pesukim say that not even a sword of peace will travel through Eretz Yisroel. Yirmiyahu tells King Yoshiyahu to stand down because he has a mesorah from his rebbe, Yeshaya Hanovi, that Hashem wants the army of Egypt to fight Bovel on our behalf. King Yoshiyahu refuses to yield. He says he is going with his pshat in the posuk that he claims Moshe – your rebbe's rebbe – taught him. They went out to battle Egypt and lost. King Yoshiyahu was pierced with many arrows. As he lay dying on the battlefield, he whispered that Hashem was right for killing him because he rebelled against the word of Hashem delivered by the novi.

When there are disputes regarding how to interpret the Torah, we don't follow our pshat against the pshat of superior talmidei chachomim and ba'alei mesorah. Unfortunately, there can be sincere people who are misguided and do not appreciate whom they are disputing.

One final lesson is about machlokes. Throughout your lives, you will be involved in various situations. Don't get involved in machlokes – it will destroy your lives. The Rambam writes a phrase in one of his letters that shook me – machlokes will erode the tzidkus of tzaddikim – even though they start out l'shem shomayim, it eventually devolves into a personal vendetta.

How can you tell if a person is really acting l'shem shomayim? We see this from what happened to Peninah. Elkono had two wives – Chana and Peninah. Chana had no children and Peninah had seven. She taunted Chana about her lack of children and made her cry in order to get her to daven harder for a child. Chazal say Peninah acted l'shem shomayim, but in the end she was punished – for every child born to Chana, she lost a child. Why? Because even if you act l'shem shomayim, you are never allowed to lose your middos and act maliciously against another person to cause them pain. The minute you do that, Hashem wants nothing to do with your acting l'shem shomayim.

These 250 heads of Sanhedrin were acting l'shem shomayim. But they didn't understand how Moshe was head-and-shoulders above them and they had no right to assume Moshe was acting out of self-interest. One cannot assume the authority to interpret the Torah against Moshe Rabbeinu. One has to know one's place and not talk loosely and flippantly about great talmidei chachomim.

This parsha is full of lessons that we need to learn and integrate deeply in our lives.