

NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF **RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l**

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Prophetic Mistake

ויקח קרח. (במדבר טז, א)

Korach took... (*Bemidbar 16:1*)

He took himself to one side, to disassociate himself from the congregation. (*Rashi*)

Clearly, Korach made a mistake. The question is why?

Rashi explains¹ that Korach erred because he saw a prophetic vision that from him will descend *Shmuel Hanavi* and twenty-four groups of *Kohanim* serving in *Beis Hamikdash*, all of them possessing *ruach hakodesh*.

How could it be, he reasoned, that this whole glorious future is destined to come from him, and he will just let Moshe and Aharon grab it all for themselves? Thus he was not afraid to bring his incense censer before *Hashem*, although the odds of him coming out alive were ostensibly slim.

This brings us to an awkward point. Korach sinned due to prophetic vision. And what he saw

was indeed true; his sons did *teshuvah* before it was too late, and thus survived, so everything Korach foresaw came true. How could a true *nevu'ah* from *Hashem* lead to sin?

All the prophets saw their visions through an obscured mirror, but *Moshe Rabbeinu* saw through a clear mirror.²

This means that *Moshe Rabbeinu*, from whose throat the *Shechinah* spoke, saw the word of *Hashem* exactly as it was, without any extraneous coloring. But all other prophets saw *Hashem's* word with various colorings. They did not see it with total clarity.

The *Rema* explains this further, by way of allegory, in *Sefer Toras Ha'olah*:

¹ Bemidbar 16:7.

² Yevamos 49b.

If you hang up a plane of glass on a wall, people who look in it will see themselves. But if you take away the wall behind the glass, people will see what is on the other side of the glass, which is how *Moshe Rabbeinu* saw the word of *Hashem*. However, the other prophets saw by means of their own souls, so what they saw had their own coloring.

This has the potential to lead to mistake. The person's essential being is serving as a vehicle for prophesy, and he needs to self-negate in order to prophesize clearly. This leaves open the possibility that he will see himself not just as a means to

achieve prophesy but as something with intrinsic importance, for after all, he merited *nevu'ah*. In such a case, his *nevu'ah* could lead him to sin.

This is what happened with Korach. He saw that he was *zocheh* to *nevu'ah* and this magnified his self-worth. He saw himself as a distinguished personality, which led him to sin.

Rashi alluded to this when he explained that Korach "took himself." Korach took his essential being and accorded it importance not just as a vehicle for attaining *nevu'ah*. This brought him to err. ●



You Have a Role

כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כְּלָם קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמִדּוֹעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קְהַל ה'. (במדבר טז, ג)

Because all the congregation is holy, and *Hashem* is within them. Why do you act superior to the congregation of *Hashem*? (*Bemidbar* 16:3)

There is a wonderful thing we can learn from the *parshah* about Korach. It was only natural that the Jewish people's division into the various levels of *Kohanim*, *Leviim* and *Yisraelim*, each with its own status, will elicit jealousy. Yet, we find no evidence of jealousy among the Jewish people other than the Korach incident.

The fact there was one incident of *kinah* actually shows us the greatness of the Jewish people. Because had it not been for Korach, we might have thought

that the situation didn't tend to elicit jealousy, for whatever reason. But we see that a significant personality did feel jealous, so we know that the situation was indeed liable to elicit this feeling. Despite this, the Jewish people rose above jealousy in every other instance.

We see the same with the event of *Matan Torah*. The people divided into several levels, each keeping a different distance from *Har Sinai*, the highest being Moshe, who was allowed to ascend the mountain.



לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמָת

מוֹדֵד מוֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַמְּבוֹרָגַד ז"ל

וּמוֹדֵד בְּרוּךְ זֶאֵב בֶּן נִפְתָּלִי קְרָאוֹס ז"ל

נִדְבַת נִדְרֵיהֶם ~ עֲטַרֵת זָקִינִים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְהַפְּאֶרֶת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם

Nevertheless, the people encamped there with exceptional unity: “Like one person, with one heart.”¹

What was their secret? How did they rise above *kinah*?

When a person does what he is meant to be doing, and feels that he is completely fulfilling his role, he doesn't feel any *kinah*. It doesn't bother him if someone else is greater and higher than him. Because all *kinah* comes from the feeling that one is lacking. The sense of lack brings a person to want what his friend has and feel jealous of him. But when

a person does what he is meant to, he is not disturbed by someone else being on a higher level than him.

I remember that when the first manned spaceship landed on the moon, there were two astronauts in it. One went out and walked around on the face of the moon, and the other one stayed behind inside the spaceship.

I asked my brother, “How could the one who stayed behind tolerate it?”

He answered me, “They are not playing children's games.”

In other words, they understood that each has his own role to fulfill, so there was nothing to be jealous about. ●

¹ Rashi, *Shemos* 19:2.



It's Never Black and White

ולא יהיה כקרח וכעדתו. (במדבר יז, ה)

One should not be like Korach and like his congregation. (*Bemidbar* 17:5)

Due to a certain incident that took place, I interpreted this *pasuk* in an innovative way. ולא יהיה – “It is not going to be” like Korach and his congregation.

In other words, a case like the controversy of Korach is not going to repeat itself. That was a unique event in history. The *machlokes* of Korach was black and white. *Moshe Rabbeinu* was 100.00% right and Korach was 0.00% right. There was not even a tiny fraction of truth to Korach's claims.

This type of *machlokes* happened only once in history. With every other disagreement from then until now, there is never one side that is 100% right. Neither side has the absolute truth. It is always a matter of which is more right.

If we keep this in mind, if we remember that even our adversary has a point, that there is no absolute truth, many fights will just dissolve.

We need to know that the main thing in Judaism is keeping the laws of the Torah. When two *bnei Torah* meet, two people who serve *Hashem* and are looking for the truth, but who were raised on different schools of thought regarding *avodas Hashem*, they need to pay attention to the fact that despite their divergent approaches and conflicting opinions, they actually agree on all the fundamental points of *Yiddishkeit* and have no disagreement regarding them.

When uncertainties arise, each person should decide on them according to the *derech* he received from his rabbis and teachers. But this doesn't mean something is wrong with his friend who was taught a different *derech*.

The abundance of views and approaches in Torah issues is actually the beauty of the Torah. Together with all the truth, each has his own hue, his own approach and his own understanding. ●

Let's Not Quarrel

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן יִצְחָר בֶּן קֵהֵת בֶּן לֵוִי וְגוֹ' וַיִּקְהֵלוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב לָכֶם כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קֵהֵל ה': (במדבר טז, א-ג)

Korach son of Kehas son of Levi took himself [to one side]... and they assembled against Moshe and Aharon, and said, “You have taken too much for yourselves, because all the members of the congregation are holy, and Hashem is among them. Why do you act superior over the assembly of Hashem? (Bemidbar 16:1-3)

Korach Did Two Things

The incident of Korach involves two main issues, the first of which is that Korach challenged *Moshe Rabbeinu* as leader and chief prophet.

This brings us to the Thirteen Principles of Faith as enumerated by the Rambam.¹ The sixth principle is summarized in the *Siddur* as follows:

I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the Prophets are true.

Right after that comes a principle that relates directly to our subject:

I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, may peace be upon him, was true, and that he was the chief of prophets for those that preceded him and those that followed him.

It is a basic tenet of the Jewish faith that *Moshe Rabbeinu's* prophecy has a special status. Moshe was not just another prophet. And Korach challenged this principle. He held Moshe to be like other prophets.

This principle which Korach took issue with is a very basic one, as we explained in *Parshas Beha'alos'cha*.

The second issue in the incident of Korach is the *machlokes* he stirred up. Korach quarreled with Moshe and Aharon. This is the issue we will focus on here.

¹ Rambam's Commentary on the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin*, introduction to chapter *Chelek*.

A “Jewish” Aveirah

There is a Biblical prohibition on keeping up a quarrel.

The introduction to *Sefer Chafetz Chaim* enumerates all the prohibitions that a person transgresses when he speaks *lashon hara*. One of them is the prohibition on *machlokes*. The Rambam does not count it among the 613 *mitzvos*, but *Rabbeinu Yonah* and *Sefer Mitzvos Gedolos* do mention it as a Biblical prohibition, as the *Chafetz Chaim* does.

What I am about to say regarding *machlokes* may not contain much that is new to you. But it is extremely important, nevertheless.

Machlokes is a Jewish *aveirah*. There were controversies in all generations, in the *shtetl* and in the *kehillah*, and the results were always disastrous.

From a historical perspective, there is nothing that wreaked more destruction on the Jewish people throughout the generations up to this day than *machlokes* did. The factions and infighting among Jews were tremendously destructive, since they were even within families, inside the *shul*, between the closest people.

This is something unique to the Jewish people. The reason is that *Am Yisrael* is a special and intelligent people, a people that feels strongly about things. And *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created each individual with a different character from all others, so friction naturally arises. We are all thinking people. This causes a lot of *machlokesim*.

But Why is It So Bad?

There are sins more severe than that of quarreling. For instance, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sought to wipe out the Jewish people after the sin of *Eigel Hazahav*, the Golden Calf. And He forbade them to enter *Eretz Yisrael* for forty years because of the sin of the *Meraglim*, the Spies, and this totally changed the course of history for the Jewish people. The sin of Korach did not change history.

On the other hand, *machlokes* is so destructive! It is what undid the Jewish people throughout the generations.

I once heard from a prominent rabbi who was an expert in Jewish history that every place where there was *machlokes*, great changes took place in the Jewish people; entire communities vanished from the face of the earth.

One example among many is from the period of the *Gemara*. There were two great *yeshivos* in *Bavel*: Sura and Nehardea. They existed for hundreds of years. Shmuel was *rosh yeshivah* of Nehardea and Rav was *rosh yeshivah* of Sura. After the end of the Talmudic era, these *yeshivos* were still there, and carried on. But then a vacuum was suddenly created. The Jewish people in *Bavel* became a non-entity.

We don't know what happened there exactly. What we do know is there were a lot of *machlokesim*, mainly between the *Gaon* and the *Reish Galusa*. The *Reish Galusa* was the governor of the Jewish people in *Bavel*, and the *Gaon* was the *rosh yeshivah*. Between them, and between the people around them, personal fighting was going on, and as a result, these great communities simply vanished.

Let's try to understand this. If the *rosh yeshivah* was called "*Gaon*," he must have known almost every word of the *Gemara* by heart; otherwise he would not have been titled "*Gaon*." These *Geonim* were almost on the level of *Amoraim*. The *Reish Galusa*, too, was on approximately the same spiritual level. Nevertheless, there was quarreling between them, and this destroyed the Jewish people. Until this day, there are *machlokesim* in *yeshivos*, and they destroy us.

Mitzvos and Aveiros

We need to realize that *machlokes* is an *aveirah*. It is

forbidden just like the other *aveiros* in the Torah. This is why it is so damaging.

There is a whole system in the Torah of *mitzvos* and *aveiros*. We all know that the quality of a *mitzvah* or an *aveirah* is not measured by its external form. Its true quality depends on its internal aspect, on what's inside. So to speak, *mitzvos* and *aveiros* contain a lot of "explosives." They pack a lot of power. The power of *mitzvos* is for the good, and of *aveiros*, not for the good.

For instance, we were commanded to wear a garment with *tzitzis*. Why?

וראיתם אותו וזכרתם את כל מצוות ה' ועשיתם אותם – You shall see them, and remember all the *mitzvos* of *Hashem*, and do them.²

The *tzitzis* serve as a reminder to do the *mitzvos*. When a mother sends a child to the grocery store, and wants him to remember to buy milk, she might tie a string on his finger as a reminder. This is human nature; when you tie something on, it helps you remember.

So we tie the strings of the *tzitzis* onto the edges of our garment in order to remember *Hashem's mitzvos*. *Tzitzis* originally had strings dyed with *techeles*, because this is the color of the sky, and is thus indirectly associated with the Divine Throne of Glory.³ *Tzitzis* by nature cause a person to remember, and simply speaking, this is the purpose of the *mitzvah*: to remember *Hashem*.

But if the entire content of the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* is to remind, why does it have to be specifically *tzitzis*, and specifically on the corners of a garment? A person could tie a string to his eyeglasses so it will be a constant, visible sign by which to remember *Hashem*. He won't ever forget *Hashem* because every time he looks at anything, he will see the string.

There is a lot more to *tzitzis* than its eternal form. *Tzitzis* are a *mitzvah*, and, like *Hashem's* other *mitzvos*, they contain tremendous power. They contain the fire of *kedushas Hashem*. So if the strings and their placement don't satisfy all *Halachic* requirements, one who wears them will lack that power, that fire of *kedushas Hashem*. As a result, it will not help him to remember *Hashem*.

² Bemidbar 15:39.

³ Menachos 43b.

This principle applies to every *mitzvah*. For instance, we were commanded to take an *esrog* on Sukkos, which the Torah describes as *פרי עץ הדור*, a beautiful fruit, and we are to rejoice with it before *Hashem*.⁴ But if we just take some fruit that we think is beautiful, it has no value at all.

The same goes for Chanukah candles, whose purpose is to publicize the miracle. Let's say instead of lighting a little candle that burns for half an hour, a person hangs a giant poster on his porch, publicizing the miracles of Chanukah for all to see. But that's not the *mitzvah*.

It's the same with prohibitions. For instance, *Hashem* commanded us not to eat pork. If a Jew eats pork, *chas v'shalom*, the inner aspect of the sin is infinitely worse than the outer form of eating this forbidden food.

The idea applies to *machlokes* as well. People sense that quarreling is destructive. If a person is in a fight with someone, he usually suffers greatly from it. But this is not the main thing. *Machlokes* is an *aveirah*, forbidden by Torah law, like eating pork is. And an *aveirah* is a blazing fire.

This is true also with *aveiros* of the *bein adam l'chaveiro* type. When it comes to sins against *Hashem*, we know that we don't comprehend the full significance. We know that a *mitzvah* such as eating *matzah* has deep Divine qualities and vast powers.

What about forbidden behavior toward human beings? We tend to think that there is no more to it than meets the eye. We think we know what it is all about. We measure the *mitzvah* or the *aveirah* according to our own understanding. But a *mitzvah* of the *bein adam l'chaveiro* type is no less of a *mitzvah*. An *aveirah* of the *bein adam l'chaveiro* type is no less of an *aveirah*. And an *aveirah* is fire!

The destruction caused by *machlokes* being an *aveirah* is inestimably greater than the damage caused by its eternal, practical form. If we would just understand this, it would totally change our lives.

If a person eats poison, it doesn't taste good, but that's

4 *Vayikra* 23:40.

not the point. Besides that it doesn't have a good taste, it has a very destructive quality to it. It contains a chemical that causes internal damage and could be fatal.

That's how it is with *machlokes*. When a fight is going on, it doesn't "taste good." It is a bitter experience. This may be part of the matter, but it is not the main part. The main part is that it is prohibited by the Torah, which has a very destructive quality that reduces everything to ruins.

Shalom Bayis is Your Obligation

By the way, this point is very relevant to *shalom bayis*. We need to know that it is a *mitzvah* to love every Jew. *ואהבת לרעך כמוך*, "You shall love your friend as you love yourself."⁵ The word *רע* means "friend," and one's best friend is one's spouse.

When a person wants to fulfill the *mitzvah* he finds a way to create love for his friend. But when it comes to one's spouse, many people simply don't get the point.

In married life there are ups and downs to the relationship. We need to know that this is part of the *mitzvah* of *ואהבת לרעך כמוך*. Any lacking or problem in *shalom bayis* is a lacking or problem in our fulfillment of a Torah-ordained *mitzvah*.

Husband and wife are not "doing a favor" to one another by promoting domestic harmony. A fully obligatory Torah *mitzvah* devolves upon them to find a way to love their spouse, and if they don't feel love, they need to find a way to arouse it. For instance, the husband could give gifts to his wife, buy her clothing, etc. He owes it to his wife, and she owes it to him, because of the Biblical obligation of *ואהבת לרעך כמוך*.

There are ways to solve problems. You just need to have the desire to solve them. If you get used to a problem, you don't look for a solution, and this is the big downfall. If we truly want something, we all can find solutions and techniques and workarounds to get there. ●

5 *Vayikra* 19:18.