

פ' קרח תשפ"ג

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ANTI-RELIGIOUS COALITIONS

“And Korach the son of... took, along with Dason and Avirom” (16:1)

Korach was very wealthy, whereas Dason and Avirom were poor. In normal circumstances Korach would have deemed it beneath his dignity to associate with them, but for the sake of deprecating Moshe he was willing to join forces with them.

Rav Yonason Eibenschutz explained Chazal’s statement that “*Talmidei Chachomim* increase peace in the world” (*Brochos* 64a) to mean that the *talmid chachom* acts as a catalyst causing those who hate religion to coalesce for the purpose of persecuting him. In our time too we see anti-religious elements who have nothing in common other than an anti-Torah platform forming alliances against religious people.

KORACH’S MISTAKE

Korach, on the one hand, possessed *ruach hakodesh*: he saw that Shmuel was destined to descend from him. Moreover, he was genuinely convinced he was right in the dispute with Moshe. If it were otherwise, he would not have willingly consented to Moshe’s suggestion to be tested by bringing *ketores*.

On the other hand, Chazal (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin *Perek Chelek* Chapter 1) say that Korach was an *epikores*. How can we understand this discrepancy?

Korach was indeed righteous, but he thought that instead of punctiliously observing *mitzvos* a person should rather focus on the rationales behind them. Thus, he asked Moshe, “Does a cloak made entirely of blue wool require *tzizis*, or is it exempt?” Moshe replied, “It does require *tzizis*.” Korach and his associates laughed, saying, “Is it possible that by a cloak of another material, one string of blue wool exempts it, and this one, which is made entirely of blue wool, should not exempt itself?” (Rashi on 16:1). Korach’s reasoning was that since the purpose of the *mitzvah* of *techeles* was to serve as a reminder of the *kise hakovod*, it stood to reason that a *talis* made entirely of *techeles* should automatically produce fear of heaven, and should therefore be exempt from *tzizis*. Similarly, when he asked “Is one obligated to affix a *mezuza* to the entrance of a house full of *seforim*?” he meant to say that since the reason behind the *mitzvah* of *mezuza* is to remind ourselves of Hashem at all times, in a house full of holy books we are in any case aware of Hashem’s Presence constantly.

This outlook was also responsible for his warped opinion regarding the appointment of Elizofon as *nossi*. Knowing that he himself was greater, he could not understand why he had not been appointed to the position of *nossi*.

Even though initially Korach was righteous and had good intentions, since he did not accept the yoke of Heaven on himself to act in accordance with Hashem’s will, but only when it made sense to him based on the reasons for *mitzvos*, he deteriorated to the extent of fighting against Moshe and becoming an *epikores*.

GOOD INTENTIONS NOT ENOUGH

Alternatively, the *talis* made entirely of *techeles* was an allusion to the argument that since the entire congregation was holy they did not need a leader. Although not every member of the

nation might be on the level of Moshe and Aharon, their intentions were good, and Moshe and Aharon had no right to lord it over their coreligionists. Surely, they concluded, Moshe *Rabenu* was only interested in leadership for his own purposes. Moshe replied that even if a *tallis* is made only of *techeiles* it was still not exempt from the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. In other words, good intentions are not enough, and the nation does need a leader.

The early Christians *lehavdil* also argued that a good heart and a person's intentions were the main qualities, which Hashem is interested in, and therefore most of the divine commandments could and should be dispensed with. Similarly, one still comes across some not-yet observant Jews who defend their way of life by claiming that they have a "Jewish heart", and that is all that matters. In reality, of course, the Torah expects us to combine physical *mitzvos* with pure intentions, and both are indispensable.

REBBES AND CHASSIDIM

On the topic of leaders for the nation, Rav Sternbuch recalls an incident when a *rov* came to see the great Rav Aharon Cohen, Rosh Yeshivas Chevron, who was a *chossid* of the *Shomer Emunim*. The *rov* said in the name of Rav Yisroel Salanter that both the *misnagdim* and the *chassidim* are wrong. The *misnagdim* think that they do not need a Rebbe, and the *chassidim* think that they have a Rebbe. Rav Aharon got very agitated, and said that Rav Yisroel did not mean that they do not have a Rebbe, but rather that they mistakenly think that they have a *Rebbe* and that that is enough, whereas in truth they have to contemplate his conduct, and strive to emulate him, instead of just making do with being his *chossid*. Similarly, Korach claimed that members of the holy nation did not need a Rebbe, and Moshe *Rabenu* responded that they did, and that they needed to have a close connection with him in order to improve themselves.

BRIBERY AND THE BRISKER ROV

Chazal say that Korach was fabulously wealthy and managed to convince 250 heads of *Sanhedre'os* to join forces with him by bribing them. They did not have the boldness to believe that the *tzaddik* Korach was actually an *epikores* denying the prophecy of Moshe Rabbenu, and agreed with his claim that he should be *nosi*. This shows that even the greatest people can become blinded through bribery.

When the Brisker Rov was staying in Switzerland, the Zionists made an appeal, and in order to get chareidim to participate they agreed that 20% of the proceeds would be designated for the chareidim. They handed over the money to a committee of chareidim so that they could distribute it. The members of the committee went to see the Brisker Rov and offered him to pay the entire costs of his yeshiva, with no strings attached. He would not be required to change anything in the Yeshiva.

The Brisker Rov responded that he understood that any demands of his would be met, but he was worried that he would not in fact make any demands, because bribery blinds the eyes of the wise, and due to his self-interest and the great profit to be gained by having the entire yoke of maintaining the Yeshiva removed from him, he would no longer see the truth, and would not make the demands that he should be making.

TACTICS OF BAALEI MACHLOKES

And they stood up before Moshe. (16:2)

People who have an agenda to generate *machlokes* are in the habit of displaying outward respect for the object of their dispute, thereby attempting to convince bystanders that they have nothing personal against him. Here too, Korach and his allies made a point of standing up for Moshe to show

that they respected him, but merely objected to Moshe's appointment of Aharon HaKohen, who, they argued, was not as great as Moshe claimed, and therefore his appointment had merely been an act of favoritism. In other words, their main purpose in standing up was to make their humiliation of Aharon more palatable.

The worst type of *loshon horo* is when people start off praising the object of their scorn in order to cushion their subsequent slander. The Chazon Ish noted that we say in the *Yom Kippur Koton* prayer, "I was stringent regarding that which You are lenient about, and I was lenient regarding that which You are stringent about." In the first phrase, what is wrong with being stringent when we do not have to be? This refers to a person whose main motivation is to be lenient when he should be stringent (the second phrase), but in order to pretend that he is particular about *mitzvos*, he makes a point of being stringent when he does not have to be to "compensate" for his custom of being lenient when he should not be.

THE ART OF FORGIVENESS

"Moshe heard and fell on his face (16:4)

The *gemoro* in *Masseches Yomo* (87a) relates the following episode. There was a butcher who offended Rav. On *Erev Yom Kippur* that butcher did not come to Rav to ask his forgiveness, and so Rav decided to go to him to give him the opportunity to appease Rav. However, instead, the butcher told that him that he had nothing to say to him. After that he suffered a work accident and was killed.

This *gemoro* teaches us a big *chiddush*: Rav surely forgave the butcher in his heart, but that was not enough, and he went out of his way to give his "enemy" a chance to obtain forgiveness, but the butcher lost that chance.

Here too, Moshe made himself available and waited for Korach to seek his forgiveness. When he saw that this was not happening, he realized that this was a very problematic situation as far as Korach was concerned. Although he could ask Hashem once again to forgive Korach's rebellion against Hashem, as he had done on three previous occasions, and he could also forgive Korach in his heart for the offence against himself, he knew that that would be not be enough until Korach himself would ask Moshe Rabbeinu for forgiveness. That was why Moshe fell on his face, not knowing what to do.

"CAREERS" IN THE TORAH WORLD

"Is it but a small thing for you that Hashem has separated you from the congregation of Yisroel to draw you close to Him" (16:9)

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky used to apply this *possuk* to a *ben Torah* who dedicates his life to Torah. He said that someone who sits in the *Beis Hamedrash* and sanctifies himself through Torah should not think in terms of obtaining a position in the Torah world, however long he has already been in learning. It is indeed a great privilege to disseminate Torah, and if the public needs him (or if he feels that his learning in *kollel* is not what it should be), a person is obligated to become a *marbiz Torah*. However, ultimately the best "position" a person can attain is to be a *ben Torah* and thereby cleave to Hashem.

The Levi'im had no property of their own, and were dependent on the donations of their fellow Jews. Although they seemingly lived the lifestyle of *shnorers*, Moshe Rabenu was telling them how important they were in the eyes of Hashem. Similarly, a *ben Torah* in his "job" is subordinate to the rest of the nation, and if he performs his job properly his merits are the source of his fellow Jews' success.

Accordingly, the *possuk* is saying the following: “Is the ‘position’ of being a member of *shevet levi*, or a *ben Torah*, through which Hashem draws you close to Him, such a small matter, that you now also seek the *kehuno*. Why are you looking for a more important position than to be a member of *shevet levi*, or to be a *ben Torah*? You will not find any better position than that.”

Similarly, Rav Schneider said that an *avrech* who learns with *hasmodo* in a *kolel* has all the superior qualities of a *maggid shiur* in a Yeshiva, even if he has not been appointed to such a position, because people witness his conduct and he is an inspiration and a teacher for his environment, sometimes even more than a *maggid shiur*. A Yeshiva *bochur* who learns with *hasmodo* teaches others by way of example even if he is not a teacher with a title.

Conversely, if he does not act like a Yeshiva *bochur* he causes a great *chilul Hashem*. Thus, for example, if a *bochur* missed *davening* in the Yeshiva Rav Schneider warned him not to *daven* in a later *minyán* (and certainly not if it was after *sof zman kerias Shema*), because then others might learn from him to do this *lechatchila*. In this situation he should *daven* on his own rather than cause a *chilul Hashem*.

In any case, there are now hundreds of *yeshivos* and *kollelim* in *Eretz Yisroel* and all over the world, a state of affairs unprecedented in our history. It seems that since the power of *tumah* in the world has increased manifold in recent times, Hashem has orchestrated events so that the side of *kedushah* can counteract the forces of *tumah*. There can be no doubt that our entire supernatural existence in *Eretz Yisroel* is due to the Torah learning and prayers of those learning in *yeshivos* and *kollelim*, and without them we would not be able to live here.

RAV CHAIM BRISKER PARTICIPATES IN A FUNERAL TO PREVENT MACHLOKES

“Dissociate yourselves from this congregation, and I will consume them in an instant” (16:21)

Hashem wanted to destroy the entire nation because of the *machlokes* of Korach. *Machlokes* poses the greatest dangers.

When Rav Aharon Cohen, the Chofetz Chaim’s son-in-law, came to live in Yerushalayim, a comfortable apartment was located for him in Sha’arei Chesed, but then he suddenly moved to Yaffo. People enquired why he had left, and he replied that before he had taken leave of his father-in-law, the latter had made him promise that if there would be any *machlokes* where he lived he should leave his place of residence, and so he had fled from his home in Sha’arei Chesed because a *machlokes* had erupted within the community there.

Rav Sternbuch heard from an elderly Jew that there was a person in Brisk who was considered to be a *talmid chochom* and *yere shomayim*, but Rav Chaim Brisker by virtue of his Torah insight realized that he had false views, and said that he was *treif* and had contaminated his mind with false views. However, when that person passed away, Rav Chaim participated in his funeral. When someone asked him what he was doing there, since he himself had said that that person was *treif*, Rav Chaim responded that he knew that if he would not come to the funeral it would cause a *machlokes* in the town, and since that *talmid chochom* had not influenced others to adopt his false views, and since he had passed away and could now no longer harm others anyway, he wanted to participate in his funeral in order to prevent a *machlokes* in the town.

DISGRACING TALMIDEI CHACHOMIM

“If one man sins, shall You be angry with the whole congregation” (16:22)

If only Korach himself sinned, why was Hashem in fact angry with the whole congregation?

Their sin consisted in not protesting, or not protesting enough, the way Korach had publicly disgraced Moshe *Rabbeinu* with his accusations. Someone who witnesses the disgrace of a *talmid*

chochom, and does not protest it, is considered an accomplice in the very severe sin of *bizuy talmid chochom*, which Hashem is very particular about.

TORAH THEN AND NOW

Moshe spoke to the Bnei Yisroel, and all their nesi'im gave him a staff for each nosi according to their fathers' houses, twelve staffs, and Aharon's staff was amidst their staffs (17:21)

Since the whole nation desired to be *shevet Levi* Hashem had to confirm by means of a sign that He had chosen only them: “*Behold Aharon's staff for the house of Levi had blossomed*”. Even though *shevet Levi* was the only tribe that was not allotted any portion in *Eretz Yisroel*, having to “beg” the rest of the nation for its livelihood, the rest of the nation still yearned to fulfil their role knowing that the greatest reward a person can have is to withdraw from the vanities of this world and merit the level of “Hashem is his portion”.

From the very beginning of our history it has been considered a great merit to support Torah and *bnei Torah* since we thereby ensure the continued existence of the nation. It was elementary knowledge that our very right to exist depends on *shevet Levi* – the *bnei Torah*. Hence, it went without saying that we would display the greatest self-sacrifice to support them.

When the sons of Yaakov moved to Egypt they received permission to settle in Goshen, which was a completely autonomous region not subject to the laws of Egypt. Eventually, all the tribes except for Levi were tempted to move to Egypt for financial reasons. When the enslavement started, only members of the tribe of Levi were exempt from the decrees, due to their status as residents of Goshen. They were not able to earn a living, but the rest of the nation with tremendous self-sacrifice shared whatever meager portions they received with their brethren in Goshen, in the knowledge that the tribe of Levi was the heart of the nation and had to be supported at all costs. They hoped that in the merit of this act they would deserve to be saved by Hashem from their torture.

Rav Sternbuch's family in Russia told him that when the Communists were in power and prohibited teaching Torah in public on penalty of death or exile to Siberia, the *gedolim* considered this to be a decree of *shmad* and ruled that Torah should be taught in secret despite the fact that lives could be endangered through this. A Yeshiva miraculously operated in secret in Minsk for several years containing a few hundred students, until they were caught and exiled to Siberia.

Rav Mordechai Programansky told Rav Sternbuch that in his birthplace Kovna, even though people were literally starving for bread, they still made a point of establishing *chadorim* for the children of the town, since they knew that the continued existence of the Jewish nation depended on Torah.

Our generation has, thank G-d, been blessed with material abundance, and we do not need to display self-sacrifice to learn Torah. This obligates *bnei Torah* to learn Torah with joy, and supporters of Torah to support *yeshivos* and *kollelim*, and to recognize the great merit and privilege of those who support the bearers of the *oron*.

Just like the world does not understand that Hashem chose the Jewish nation, so too nowadays not everybody realizes that *shevet levi* was chosen to be the heart of the nation, and anyone seeking to undermine their vitality by tempting them to leave their vocation thereby endangers both the physical and the spiritual fabric of the entire nation.

GREATNESS NOT ACHIEVED OVERNIGHT

“And Aharon's rod... bloomed blossoms and bore ripe almonds” (17:23)

Everybody witnessed the buds and blossoms on the rod, even though for the purpose of the miracle itself, it would have been sufficient if only the almonds would have appeared on the rod without the buds and blossoms.

This teaches us that Aharon's sanctity was not achieved in one go after having been appointed to his position. Were that so, people would have been justified in thinking to themselves that had they been chosen for the same position, they would also automatically have attained the level of Aharon *Hakohen*. In reality, no quality of any kind is achieved without endless toil, ascending from one level to the next, and Aharon too only achieved his levels of greatness following a long process of *avodas Hashem*.

WAVELENGTHS

It seems surprising that after the events of Korach and his followers, anyone would still entertain any doubts that Aharon had indeed been chosen by Hashem for his position, and would still require further supernatural proof of this.

Those who complained did not dispute Aharon's superior qualities, but, on the contrary, those very qualities were the source of their objections. They argued that he was so holy and elevated that he could have no influence on the simple members of the nation, and they wanted a different *Kohen* to act as their leader — someone who would be on the same wavelength as most of the rest of the nation. In a similar vein, some people argue that a Rabbi with a university degree or a professional background is more likely to act as an effective leader of his congregation.

In this episode, Hashem showed us that even a simple tree, which had Aharon's name written on it, could blossom and produce fruit, to teach us that even someone on a lower spiritual level is capable of absorbing purity if he only comes close to a real *tzaddik*. Contrary to common wisdom, the less a *rov* is involved with the secular affairs that may preoccupy his congregants, the more likely he is to find a way into their hearts and infuse them with spiritual vitality.

SPICING OUR WEALTH

"It is like an eternal covenant of salt before the Lord" (18:19)

Just like salt spices food, so too do the *matnos kehuno* and all types of charity spice our possessions. When we give charity we prove that there is a purpose to our wealth. On the other hand, the assets of wealthy people who spend all their time aimlessly accumulating more and more possessions serve no purpose whatsoever. Only someone who observes the *mitzvah* of *tzedoko* properly, and dedicates a tenth of his assets to needy *talmidei chachomim* or other designations set out in the *hilchos maaser kesofim*, will be blessed and can live secure with the knowledge that his assets are serving a useful purpose.