



NEFESH SHIMSHON

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

ישראל בן רחל נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

A Measured Response

רב לכם בני לוי. (במדבר טז, ז)

Levites, you've taken too much upon yourselves. (*Bemidbar* 16:7)

We can learn a lot from how *Moshe Rabbeinu* handled the controversy with Korach.

Korach and his followers were real *resha'im*. One of the Thirteen Principles of *Emunah* is to believe that the prophecy of *Moshe Rabbeinu* is different and superior to that of all other prophets. Korach and his congregation denied this basic principle of faith. They were thus *apikorsim* and deniers of the Torah.

Not only that, but they disgraced and mocked that which is holy, and dragged along the whole Jewish people, to the point that *Hashem* said to Moshe and Aharon: הַבְדִּילוּ מֵתוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶכְלָה – אֹתָם כִּרְגֵעַ – “Separate yourselves from this evil congregation and I will instantly destroy them.”¹

Nevertheless, when Moshe came to reprove them, he did not speak harshly or curse them or put them down. He sufficed with saying רב לכם בני לוי

– “Levites, you’ve taken too much upon yourselves.” He was telling them: please remember your eminence and the honor of your family and your tribe. You are all prominent people of illustrious lineage. Take this into account; don’t sully your good names by getting together just to stir up a quarrel among the people.

We could say that *Moshe Rabbeinu*, when he so replied, was acting in accordance with the following *halachah* mentioned in the *Gemara*:

There was an incident with a certain disciple of *Beis Hillel* who brought his burnt offering [on Yom Tov] to the Temple Courtyard with intention to perform *semichah*, to place his hands on its head and lean on it [before its slaughter]. A certain disciple of *Beis Shammai* [who held that it is forbidden to do this on *Yom Tov*] said to him, “What is this *semichah*?”

The disciple of *Beis Hillel* replied,

¹ *Bemidbar* 16:21.

“What is this silence?” [In other words, why don’t you remain silent?]. Whereupon the disciple of *Beis Shammai* silenced him with a growl and walked away.

Abaye commented: Therefore, when a Torah scholar hears his friend say to him a sharp word, he should not respond more sharply than what was said to him. Because one said, “What is this *semichah*?” and the other responded, “What is this silence?”²

It was the same here, with *Moshe Rabbeinu*. When Korach and his followers came and said to him **לכם** – “You’ve taken too much upon yourselves,” Moshe answered them using their own words: “Levites, *you* have taken too much upon yourselves.” He didn’t say more than they did.

Naturally, when a person gets upset, he becomes like an erupting volcano. He bursts out angrily. Just look at how an ordinary argument sounds: one

2 Beitzah 20a.

person shouts, “Why did you do that?” and the other shoots back, “And what about you? Who do you think you are? Yesterday you did this, and the day before you did that! Your father was a... your mother was a...” He drags up every old grudge and dumps it into today’s quarrel.

But *Chazal* say that when a person must respond to a sharp word addressed to him, because it is a situation where it is forbidden for him to remain silent, and he must answer back, he should not overstep the proper boundaries. He should say only what he needs to, and not say back more than was said to him.

This is why *Moshe Rabbeinu*, when Korach said to him, “You’ve taken too much upon yourselves,” answered back with, “Levites, *you* have taken too much upon yourselves.” Although he was obligated to respond, because of *kevod haTorah*, he said only that. About this is written **שִׁפְתֵי צַדִּיק יִדְעוֹן רָצוֹן** – “The lips of a *tzaddik* know how to bring favor.”³ ●

3 Mishlei 10:19.

Naturally Proven Prophecy

וְהָיָה פֶּרֶחַ מִטֵּה אֶהְרֹן לְבַיִת לֵוִי. (במדבר יז, כג)

And then the staff of Aharon, from the House of Levi, blossomed. (*Bemidbar* 17:23)

Why was the authenticity of *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s prophecy proven in this particular way, by a staff

that brought forth flowers and almonds?

Korach denied the basic principle of the

לעילוי נשמת

אמינו מרת חיה זיסל עלקא בת ר' שמעון דויטש ע"ה

ומרת אסתר רויזא בת אברהם יחיאל דויטש ע"ה

ומרת משה בן אליעזר ע"ה ומרת חוה בת דוד האמבורגער ע"ה

ומרת ברוך זאב בן נפתלי ע"ה ומרת גיטל צביה בת מרדכי קראוס ע"ה

ומרת שמעון בן צבי דב ע"ה ומרת בלומא בת אפרים מעגלו ע"ה

נרבת משפחת מרדכי דויטש

uniqueness of Moshe's prophecy. He argued that Moshe is no different from other prophets [and therefore there is room to suspect that Aharon was not actually chosen by *Hashem* to serve as *Kohen Gadol*]. *Moshe Rabbeinu* wished to demonstrate that *Hashem* Himself speaks straight through him. What he says is purely and exactly what *Hashem* said, with nothing added or altered. He clarified this point by the earth opening its mouth upon his command. This amazing and unprecedented event showed that his words are *Hashem's* words.

Still, this miracle was not enough to settle the matter entirely, because people still argued אַתָּם – ה' "You caused the death of the people of *Hashem*." They were saying that it doesn't prove Moshe is different from other prophets, that what Moshe says is purely and exactly what *Hashem* said.

To resolve the matter once and for all, they needed to hear the point expressed directly by *Hashem*, not through Moshe, so it will be perfectly clear that Moshe's prophecy is on a completely different level, that hearing from Moshe is the same as hearing from *Hashem*.

That is why *Hashem* commanded to put the staffs of every tribe into the *Kodesh Kodoshim*. Because the *Kodesh Kodoshim* was a place that even Moshe

was not allowed to enter unless he was specifically called by *Hashem* to come in. It is a space that belongs entirely to *Hashem*. What happens there is not Moshe's doing. If a proof of Aharon's status as *Kohen Gadol* will come from there, then everyone will know for sure that what Moshe said is what *Hashem* said.

However, a Heavenly voice could have emanated from the *Kodesh Kodoshim*, or the message could have been written on the wall as it was with Balshatzar, or something similar to this. Why did the staff of Aharon need to blossom and produce almonds? Why did the miracle involve the natural world?

Because nature itself is intrinsically the word of *Hashem*. It is an act of *Hashem* Himself. Heavens and earth and everything in them were created on the very first day, even before the angels, and certainly before man. They are the work of *Hashem* and *Hashem* alone.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu demonstrated to the Jewish people that Moshe's prophecy is unique by showing them something from the *Kodesh Kodoshim*, something that also involved the natural world. Blossoms and almonds. This is how *Hashem* made it clear that He and He alone was speaking. ●

PARSHAH TOPIC

Let's Not Quarrel

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן יִצְחָר בֶּן קֵהָת בֶּן לֵוִי וְגו' וַיִּקְהֲלוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב לָכֶם כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמִדּוֹעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קֵהָת 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.

First, 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 regarding 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 is essential.

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.

A “Jewish” Aveirah

The Torah prohibits keeping up a quarrel.

The introduction to *Sefer Chofetz 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 does the *Chofetz Chaim*.

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 did *machlokes*. 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 people, an intelligent people, a people that feels strongly about things. And *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created each individual with his own character, different from 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, *Hashem* sought to wipe out the Jewish people after the sin of *Eigel Hazahav*. And He forbade them to enter *Eretz Yisrael* for forty years because of the sin of the *Meraglim*, and this totally changed the course of Jewish history. 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 suddenly arose. The Jewish people in *Bavel* became a non-entity.

What happened?

We don't know 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*,

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

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 are. This is why it is so damaging.

The Torah has a whole system 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 *tzitis* 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 hanging over a lense of 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 external 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*.

This principle applies to every *mitzvah*. For instance, we were commanded to take an *esrog* on Sukkos, and the Torah describes this fruit as פרי עץ הדר, a beautiful fruit, and we are to rejoice with it before *Hashem*.⁴ But if we just take a different kind fruit that we think is beautiful, it has no value at all. Even if we take a bona-fide *esrog*, but it does not satisfy all *Halachic* requirements, it is nothing.

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*. A *mitzvah* has a certain form in which it is to be performed, and only in that form does it have inner power.

It's the same with prohibitions. For instance, *Hashem* commanded us not to eat pork. If a Jew

2 Bemidbar 15:39.

3 Menachos 43b.

4 Vayikra 23:40.

eats pork, *chas v'shalom*, the inner aspect of the sin is infinitely worse than the outer form of eating this forbidden food.

This 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. An unpleasant conflict between two people is just the external form. There is much more to it than this. *Machlokes* is an *aveirah*, forbidden by Torah law, like eating pork is. And an *aveirah* is a blazing fire.

This is true as well 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 what 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* due to its being an *aveirah* is inestimably greater than the damage due to 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 not the point. Besides the unpleasant taste, it has a very destructive quality to it. It contains a chemical that causes internal damage that could be fatal.

This is 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 problem, but it is not the main part. The main part is that it is prohibited by the Torah, so it has a very destructive quality that reduces everything to ruins.

Shalom Bayis is Your Obligation

By the way, this point is quite 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 רֵעַ means "friend," and one's best friend is one's spouse.

When a person wants to fulfill this *mitzvah*, he finds a way to engender love of 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.