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Rebbetzin Slovie Jungreis-Wolff The Last Conversation

Parshas Korach is one of the most dramatic and painful episodes in the Torah. The Parsha describes an outright rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen. The leader of the rebellion was their own cousin, Korach, a man of stature and influence who presented himself as a champion of the people and attempted to portray Moshe in a negative light.

Korach did not stand alone. Two hundred and fifty distinguished leaders joined his cause. Alongside them stood Dasan and Aviram, two men who had opposed Moshe from the very beginning. In fact, their antagonism dated back to Egypt, to the moment when Moshe first intervened and attempted to stop them from fighting with one another. From that point forward, they repeatedly challenged his authority.

Another participant in the rebellion was On ben Peles. Yet unlike the others, On would ultimately be spared. Through the wisdom of his wife, he was saved from becoming part of one of the greatest tragedies in Jewish history (Sanhedrin 110a).

When we read this Parsha, a question immediately presents itself.

The Jewish people had complained many times throughout their journey in the wilderness. They complained about the lack of water and food, and claimed that

they had been brought into the desert only to die there. They likewise danced around the Golden Calf after miscalculating the date of Moshe's return from Har Sinai, and panicked when it came time to enter the Land of Israel. Moshe had seen all of this. Yet when Korach and his followers rose against him, the Torah records a reaction we have not seen before: "Vayipol al panav—And Moshe fell upon his face" (Bamidbar 16:4).

For the first time, we sense the depth of his pain. Later, when Moshe attempts to make peace and summons Dasan and Aviram, they refuse even to meet with him. "Lo na'aleh—We will not come" (ibid. 16:12), they say. And then they add insult to injury. "Is it not enough that you brought us out of a land flowing with milk and honey to die in the wilderness? Now you seek to dominate us as well?" (ibid. 16:13).

Imagine the cruelty of those words.

Egypt, the place of slavery and suffering, is suddenly described as "a land flowing with milk and honey." Moshe, who sacrificed everything for the Jewish people, is accused of seeking power and control over them. At that point the Torah says: "Vayichar l'Moshe me'od—Moshe grew very angry" (ibid. 16:15). One can only imagine the pain he must have felt.

Continuing further, after repeated attempts to restore peace, after every effort at reconciliation had failed, Moshe finally declares that the people would know that Hashem had

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sent him and that everything he had done was by Divine command. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed Korach, his followers, their households, and their possessions.

Why was this episode so different from all the previous complaints and rebellions, such that Moshe resorted to squelching Korach and his followers? Why not pray for them to turn around and recover, like he did for Miriam, his sister, when he prayed for her to heal (Bamidbar 12:13)?

Korach was not merely challenging Moshe. He was challenging the legitimacy of Moshe. Until this point, the complaints of the Jewish people had been directed at circumstances. They complained about food, water, hardship, and uncertainty. But Korach attacked something far more fundamental. Korach claimed that Moshe had appointed Aharon as Kohen Gadol not because Hashem commanded it, but because he wanted to keep power within the family. And once that accusation was made, a far more dangerous question emerged.

If Moshe can be suspected of appointing his brother out of personal interest, then perhaps he can be suspected regarding everything else as well.

Perhaps the Torah itself is not entirely Divine, but some of its teachings originate with Moshe. That would leave the entire foundation of Torah authenticity and authority open to question, and that was why this rebellion was so dangerous. If Moshe's integrity could be undermined, then the entire transmission of Torah from Sinai could be undermined as well. For that reason, there could be no compromise or tolerance.

The earth therefore opened its mouth and swallowed Korach and his followers, measure for measure.

Korach had opened his mouth to spread falsehood, and the earth now opened its mouth to silence those accusations and demonstrate before the entire nation that Moshe's authority came from Hashem alone.

These were among the most critical moments in Jewish history. At stake was the mesorah, the sacred chain of transmission stretching from Sinai and passed from generation to generation, from parent to child, from teacher to student. The rebellion of Korach reminds us that disagreement is one thing, but undermining the foundations upon which Torah stands is something entirely different. The Jewish people could survive complaints, fears, and frustrations, and they could even recover from grave mistakes. But they could not survive a world in which the truth of Torah itself was placed in doubt.

In our dividing times, the question becomes: what does Hashem want from us now? Our Parsha gives us a clear answer. We must put away machlokes. We must put away the arguments, the grudges, the resentments, and the endless conflicts that tear apart families, friendships, communities, and nations. The gamut is far-reaching: parents who no longer speak to children and children who no longer speak to parents; brothers and sisters who cannot sit in the same room and in-laws who avoid one another; friends who were once close and now walk past each other without saying a word; and business partners who became enemies.

The Hebrew word machlokes itself contains a profound lesson. The word machlokes can be broken into two ideas: chelek—a split, a division—and maves—death. Every time we create a division between

ourselves and another person, we create a form of death. The death of a relationship or a friendship. The death of trust or of a family.

Benjamin Zander, the world-renowned conductor, tells the story of how he once met a woman after a concert who had survived Auschwitz. She told him that she was fifteen years old when she and her younger brother, who was only eight, were forced into cattle cars bound for Auschwitz. Their parents had already been murdered. When the train doors opened and they were ordered out, she looked down and noticed that her little brother's shoes were missing. In frustration she snapped at him. "My goodness," she said, "can't you keep your things together?"

Then she paused.

"I never saw him again," she told Benjamin Zander. Those were the last words she ever spoke to her brother. She survived and he did not. And from that day forward, she made a vow that changed her life. "I resolved that I would never say anything to another person that could not stand as the last thing I ever said to them."

What a remarkable way to live.

When Jews attack other Jews with words, a piece of life dies. That is why shalom (peace) is so precious. Shalom is the willingness to see another person's humanity and rise above our pride and need to be right. It is the greatest gift Hashem can bestow upon us.

Hashem has protected us and shown us His love in disproportionate ways these past few years, and now He is asking something of us. Stop the cycle of division and build peace. Because none of us knows when a conversation will be our last.

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**Rabbi Yisroel Majeski**

**A Fair Comparison**

**P**arshas Korach is not simply the Parsha of a rebellion that took place thousands of years ago. In many ways, this is the Parsha of life itself.

Every one of us has a little Korach inside. We all carry inside us jealousy, desire for honor and middos that quietly pull us away from who we are meant to become.

We all have projects in life. Some of us have business projects; some have community projects; some have educational projects; and some have family projects. All of those things are important and need to be done. But at the end of the day, none of them is the biggest project. The biggest project is ourselves. The greatest undertaking of our lives is not building a business, an organization, or even a community. The greatest undertaking is building ourselves by working on our middos, refining our character and becoming the people Hashem created us to be.

Bad middos rarely arrive as a catastrophe. They begin as a small leak, which you can live with. You can ignore it and tell yourself it's no big deal. But if you leave it unattended, eventually the stain spreads and the water seeps deeper and deeper. That is how middos work. A little jealousy or resentment, left unchecked, eventually brings down the entire structure. Look at Korach. He was a man of tremendous stature, and yet a single unchecked middah ultimately consumed him.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz zt"l makes a fascinating observation.

The Mishnah (Avos 5:20) teaches: "Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will endure." The Mish-

nah then asks: what is an example of a dispute for the sake of Heaven? The debates between Hillel and Shammai. And what is an example of a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? Korach and his followers.

Now think about that comparison. Hillel and Shammai and Korach? Imagine someone asking who the greatest basketball player of all time is. Nobody asks whether the greatest player is Michael Jordan or the guy who plays at the local YMCA. Those are not comparable categories. Why then is the Mishnah comparing Korach to Hillel and Shammai?

Rav Yerucham explains that Korach was not some cartoon villain twirling his mustache. Korach believed he was right. Korach wanted closeness to Hashem. Underneath everything, there was a kernel of sincerity. And that is precisely what makes the story so frightening.

The greatest dangers in life are not always obvious; they are often mixed together with truth. There was truth in Korach's argument. But there were also bad middos. There was ego and jealousy, and those hidden motivations corrupted everything.

Interestingly, Chazal tell us that in many areas of life we can begin with imperfect motivations. "Mitoch shelo lishmah ba lishmah—From doing something with not the right intention one will come to do so with the right intention" (Pesachim 50b). Give tzedakah for honor, learn Torah for recognition and do a mitzvah for personal reasons. Eventually you will do it with the right motivation.

But when it comes to machlokes,

as underscored by the above Mishnah in Avos, Chazal are far less forgiving. A machlokes cannot be driven by personal agendas, but must be completely pure. That is extraordinarily difficult. A person must constantly ask himself: why am I fighting this battle? Am I standing up for truth or my ego? Am I defending a principle or my honor?

Sometimes we tell ourselves we are doing something for our children. "We don't allow this in our house. We have principles." And perhaps we do. But sometimes, if we are honest, it has less to do with principles and more to do with control. The only way to know the difference is to know ourselves, which requires us to learn mussar, have mentors and consult with rabbanim.

Korach stopped asking those questions. And because he stopped asking them, he lost everything.

Moshe Rabbeinu, in contrast, goes running after Dasan and Aviram who are opposing him. The Gadol HaDor runs to make peace! Most people would say, "They're attacking me; let them come apologize." But Moshe says, "No, maybe I can still make peace." That is greatness.

Even after the rebellion ends, the Jewish people turn around and accuse Moshe and Aharon. "You killed Hashem's people!" (Bamidbar 17:6) they say. Can you imagine hearing that? But Moshe and Aharon never say, "Enough, I'm done." Next we know, a plague begins and the very people who attacked them are now in danger. And what does Aharon do? He takes the ketores (incense) and runs into the middle of the

camp to stop the plague. The people are attacking him and he is trying to save them. That is what greatness looks like.

Someone steals from you and now he's sitting in jail. We might be inclined to think, "Good. He deserves it." Moshe and Aharon would be the

people trying to help him.

That is the power of good mid-dos. They always lead us down the right road.

## Rabbi Dovid Eisenberg

### The Solider at the Supermarket

When Korach looks at Moshe Rabbeinu, all he sees is what Moshe is not. He accuses him of favoritism, appointing Aharon for personal reasons, and of elevating himself above the people. Again and again, Korach focuses on deficiencies and on what Moshe supposedly failed to do.

But what is remarkable is Moshe's response. Moshe does not simply tell Korach that he is wrong. Moshe tells Korach what he already has. "Ha'm'at mikem?" Moshe asks him. "Is it a small thing that Hashem separated you, Korach as a Levi, from the rest of Klal Yisrael and brought you close. Hashem gave you a unique role and privilege. And now you seek the Kehunah as well?" Korach focuses on what is missing. Moshe focuses on what is present.

This brings to mind a story.

There was a young man shopping in a supermarket outside Yerushalayim. He was doing a large shopping trip before Shabbos, filling his cart with challos, drinks, and everything he needed for his family. When he finished his shopping, he arrived at the cashier. Just then, a distinguished-looking officer in uniform approached him. The officer looked at the cashier and said, "I'd like to pay for this man's shopping."

The young man was startled. "This is my shopping," he said. "Why would you pay for it?" "I want to pay for it," the officer repeated. He introduced himself as a senior officer involved with Is-

rael's Iron Dome defense system. Thank G-d, the Iron Dome has saved countless lives, intercepting incoming missiles and protecting Israeli cities from devastation.

The officer explained that Israel has sold versions of this technology to other countries, including Ukraine. Recently, he said, they received a complaint. The Ukrainians informed them that the system was only intercepting about fifty percent of incoming missiles.

Israeli experts traveled there to investigate and checked the hardware and software. They checked every component of the system, and everything was functioning exactly as designed. The conclusion was simple: under those conditions, fifty percent was the expected success rate. Then the officer said something remarkable.

"When I came back to Israel, I started thinking. We use the same technology and we have the same equipment. Yet here in Israel, we are seeing interception rates far beyond that. Sometimes over ninety-five percent. So I asked myself a question: if fifty percent is what should happen naturally, then why are another fifty percent of the missiles not landing here?" He paused, and then answered his own question.

"Because there is something else protecting this country. There is something beyond the technology. You're sitting and learning Torah. You are contributing to the protection of this country in a different way. Because of that, I want to pay for your shopping."

What a beautiful perspective. The easy thing would have been for the officer to focus on what the young man was not doing. "You're not in uniform or on the front lines." That would have been the Korach perspective: looking at what someone doesn't do. But instead, this officer chose the perspective of Moshe Rabbeinu. He looked at the other person and asked, "What are you contributing? What is the positive role you play? You may not be serving in my way, but you are serving in your way. You may not be contributing what I contribute, but you are contributing something valuable nonetheless."

That changes everything. So much conflict begins when we focus on what other people are not doing. My spouse or child is not doing enough. But what happens if we reverse the question? What if we begin asking, "What are they doing?" That shift changes relationships.

Korach looked at Moshe and saw only what he believed was wrong. Moshe looked at Korach and reminded him of what was right.