

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn



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The Midrash known as *Seder Olam* states that the episode with Korach took place after the incident of the *meraglim*. This raises the question: Why did Korach initiate this argument specifically then?

Korach's complaint was that all the power was being concentrated within Moshe's family—Moshe was the leader, while Aharon was the *kohen gadol*. But Aharon had been appointed *kohen gadol* much earlier! He also complained that Elitzafan had been declared *nasi* of Kehas, but that too had happened at an earlier point! So why did he begin his dispute specifically after the story of the *meraglim* (i.e., after Tishah B'Av)?

Additionally, Korach's entire argument seems flawed. He claimed that everyone was equal, and that Moshe and Aharon's positions of power were without merit. Yet, at the same time, his supporters included 250 leaders who never offered to relinquish their positions! How can you disagree with the concept of leadership if you yourself are a leader, and are comfortable remaining one?!

We must say that Korach was opposed (not to leadership in general, but) specifically to the type of leadership characterized by Moshe and Aharon. What exactly was his position?

KORACH'S CLAIM

Chassidus explains that the *meraglim* contended that only spirituality mattered. Although Eretz Yisroel offered more possibilities for doing practical *mitzvos*, it would be easier for them to focus their minds and hearts on Hashem in the desert, and they felt it was worth sacrificing *mitzvos* for the sake of spiritual accomplishments. The *meraglim's* downfall highlighted that this view was incorrect: the ultimate goal is to actually perform *mitzvos*; *kavanos* without the actual *mitzvah* are worthless.

It was in the wake of that debacle that Korach demanded to know: If only practical *mitzvos* mattered, wasn't everyone equal? Moshe and Aharon's superiority lay only in the field of spiritual accomplishments, but not in the area of actual *mitzvos*! He argued that everyone was holy, and that "*u'b'socham Hashem*"—Hashem's essence is found within *mitzvos*, which every Jew performs equally.

A LUMINOUS HOME

This is why he hadn't offered resistance previously. Earlier, it was assumed that spirituality was paramount, and Moshe and Aharon's advantage in this area was undisputed. But the *meraglim's* mistake brought to light that action is what is most important. That being the case, "*madua tishnas'u*," in which way are Moshe and Aharon superior?!

TWO TYPES OF LEADERS

More specifically, there are various forms of "*hisnas'us*," of lifting oneself above others, some of which Korach and his cohorts had no problem with. For example, even if action is predominant, there must be a knowledgeable *Rov* who can issue rulings. There's always a need for some sort of leadership, even if it's just in terms of dictating how to behave. To Korach, such leadership was understandable. But to have someone who is a *tzaddik*, who is above and beyond everyone else? This Korach felt had no place.

This is why Korach's followers wished to preserve their own leadership, and they all wanted to serve as *kohen gadol*. They felt that the *kehunah gedolah* should be a technical position which could alternate between different qualified leaders. Why the need for a single *kohen gadol* who is above the rest, with a special connection to *kedushah*? All you needed was someone to do the *avodah* in the Mishkan, and for this purpose, any one of the 250 leaders was fit for the task! Aharon's *kehunah*, however, was another form of *hisnas'us* altogether, and it was this type of leadership they could not accept.

Korach asked: "*Madua tishnas'u*? Why should a Jew strive to reach higher levels of spirituality?"

There's an even deeper meaning to their question: When Aharon lit the lamps of the menorah, an action the Torah describes as "elevating the flames," he was simultaneously elevating the *neshamah* of every Jew,

inspiring them to yearn for higher levels and to draw ever closer to Hashem. So they asked: "*Madua tishnas'u*," what is the point of this elevation? Why is it important that a person fulfill a *mitzvah* with excitement and *kavanah* when all that matters is action? Why should a Jew strive to reach higher levels of spirituality?

ESSENCE AND LIGHT

Moshe responded to their claims by saying: "Let morning come, and Hashem will notify who belongs to Him and who is holy, and He will bring him closer to Him." It appears as if Moshe was simply responding to their suspicion that his and Aharon's power were his own idea, proving it untrue through the test of *ketores*, which would demonstrate who was the one Hashem had chosen. But what was the actual flaw in Korach's reasoning?

The clue can be found in Moshe's reference to "*boker*," the morning.

We know that Hashem desires a *dirah*, a place where He can dwell. How do we create this *dirah*? There are two components.

Let's take an analogy from a human king. When he appears before a crowd, he must look beautiful and exude a royal appearance. However, this is not his true essence; his mode of dress must match the crowd's idea of splendor, and is not who he truly is. His abode, however, is a place where he can simply be himself.

But then there is a second component to a *dirah*: it must be bright. Being oneself in the dark is not much of a dwelling; there must be light.

The dwelling place Hashem desires similarly consists of both elements.

One aspect of the *dirah* is that it must be a dwelling place for Hashem Himself, and this is accomplished specifically through practical *mitzvos*. A spiritual activity is limited to the capabilities of the person experiencing it, whereas *mitzvos* are where Hashem placed His essence, allowing Himself to be reached through them, and those are His quarters.

But additionally, there must be brightness. It's true that we can access Hashem's essence through wearing kosher *tefillin*, but does our *mitzvah* shine? Only if it's done *lishmah*, for Hashem's sake. A *mitzvah* without *kavanah* is like a body without a *neshamah*; without the right intentions, the *mitzvah* is soulless and doesn't shine.

This is true for *mitzvos* but especially for Torah. If a person studies Torah and lacks the proper intention, it lacks brightness, but it's possible for there to be a worse scenario: if he studies for an ulterior motive (for example, to receive honor), the Torah is in exile among the *kelipos*.

THE PROPER BALANCE

When Moshe mentioned "*boker*" he was alluding to the need for brightness. It's true that it's crucial to perform physical *mitzvos* in the most meticulous manner, and they are the way we access Hashem's essence. However, we also need *hisnas'us*, to strive to elevate ourselves to greater spiritual levels, and that's when it's "*boker*," Hashem's *dirah* is bright.

The two *parshiyos* of Shelach and Korach teach us the proper balance in *avodah*. Some might contend that it is feelings that are most important, and although we must certainly perform *mitzvos*, the exact particulars don't need to be emphasized that

much. Parshas Shelach teaches us not to make the *meraglim's* mistake, and that Hashem chose to be found in the physical.

Conversely, some might argue that only our actions matter, and that there's no need to learn Chassidus and serve Hashem with the heart. "Saying the words of the siddur is enough," they claim.

"There's no need to develop a feeling for what's being said."

Parshas Korach teaches us that this is incorrect. Saying the words of davening must be complemented by the *avodah* of davening. When both elements are combined, we create a *dirah* that is a dwelling place for Hashem's essence, as well as being bathed in light.

For further learning see לקוטי שיחות חלק ד' פרשת קרח

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