

BAD ATTITUDE

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Korach

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Today's Learning:

Shevi'it 8:3-4

Orach Chaim 124:12-125:2

Daf Yomi: Beitzah 24

Yerushalmi Megillah 32

The midrash relates that Korach was incited to rebellion by his wife. She argued: "Why did Moshe appoint his brother as Kohen Gadol and leave you to carry the heavy aron/ark?" (Korach was one of the levi'im who carried the aron containing the luchot.) Yet, this midrash is difficult to understand, because the Sages teach that the aron was weightless; in fact, it "carried its carriers" so that they expended no energy when walking! What then were Korach and his wife complaining about?

Also, Rashi asks what led Korach to "shtut"/"foolishness"? Were Korach's actions merely foolish or were they wicked?

R' Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg shlita explains that the ease or difficulty of any endeavor is dependent on one's attitude. If one believes in the Torah's power to carry a person, it will do so. If one views the Torah as a burden, it will feel like one.

Similarly, if one devotes himself to spiritual growth, it is not hard to accomplish. This is the meaning of the teaching in the gemara (Sukkah 53a) that at the end of time, tzaddikim will be surprised to discover how "big" the yetzer hara is. Because tzaddikim devote themselves to overcoming the yetzer hara, it seems easy to them.

Certainly Korach's actions were wicked, R' Scheinberg concludes. However, he could never have stooped so low if he had not first been foolish enough to confuse righteousness and wickedness (i.e., to confuse the Torah with a heavy burden). Thus Rashi asks: What led Korach to "shtut"/"foolishness"? (Derech Emunah U'Bitachon p.177)

"Therefore, you and your entire assembly that are joining together are against Hashem! As for Aharon - what is he that you protest against him?" (16:11)

R' Moshe Teitlebaum z"l (died 1840) writes: There is a discussion in the Talmud as to whether the kohanim who served in the Temple were "shluchei d'Rachmana"/G-d's agents or "shluchei di'dan"/"our agents." R' Yonatan Eyebchutz z"l (died 1764) observes in his work, Keshet Yehonatan, that Korach must have held that the kohanim were shluchei di'dan/our agents. The Shulchan Aruch states that any member of the congregation may veto the appointment of an agent of the congregation (e.g., a chazzan), and thus Korach attempted to veto Aharon's appointment. However, such a veto clearly has no place against shluchei d'Rachmana/G-d's agents.

On the other hand, R' Teitlebaum writes, the mere fact that Korach wanted to be Kohen Gadol implies a belief that the kohanim were shluchei d'Rachmana. If the Kohen Gadol was G-d's agent, that was an honor worth fighting for - but to be man's agent? Is that worth fighting for? To the contrary, one could argue that being the person who sends the agent is more honorable than being the agent himself!

Thus, Moshe said to Korach: You are challenging Hashem's choice to be His agent, for you clearly hold that the kohanim are shluchei d'Rachmana. If not, if your complaint is against Aharon himself, for you consider him to be shluchei di'dan, what is he? What is the position of kohen gadol worth if it is only to be man's agent? (And, since you are challenging Hashem's choice, you have no right to do this, as R' Eyebchutz explained.) (Yismach Moshe)

R' Natan Zvi Brisk z"l (rabbi of Cs,ke, Hungary; killed in the Holocaust) writes: Based on the above, we can understand the mishnah (Pirkei Avot ch.5): "Which dispute was not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his entire company."

How can we be sure that Korach and his company did not act for the sake of Heaven? Also, why does the mishnah say "The dispute of Korach and his entire company" rather than "Korach's dispute with Moshe"?

If a group of people bands together to depose the chazzan, the members of the group can argue

that they are acting for the sake of Heaven. The chazzan is shlucha di'dan/our agent, and it is within our rights to replace him. However, if each member of this group nominates himself to be the new chazzan, we cannot say that they are acting for the sake of Heaven.

Korach and his company were not merely trying to depose Aharon. Each member of the group wanted to be Kohen Gadol in Aharon's place. There was a dispute between Korach and his company, and that is how we know that their dispute was not for the sake of Heaven. (Nachalat Zvi Al Pirkei Avot, p.54b)

"Ha'ish/Shall one man sin, and You be angry with the entire assembly?"

(16:22)

Rashi writes: "He is the sinner! Should you be angry with the entire assembly?"

What is Rashi teaching us? R' Wolf Heidenheim z"l (1757-1832; noted grammarian and printer in R"delheim) explains: Rashi is informing us that the common translation of this verse is incorrect. The pasuk is not merely a question, "How can You be angry with the whole assembly if only one man has sinned?" That translation would be correct if the word "ha'ish" was vowelized with a "patach" (a short horizontal line) under the letter "heh." However, because the vowel under the "heh" is a "kamatz" (the vowel that looks like the letter "T"), the correct translation is: "He is a sinner! Should you be angry with the entire assembly?"

R' Heidenheim continues: Although the letter "heh" often introduces a question, sometimes the Torah or the prophets omit it. How then do we know what the verse means? Kuzari (II 72) explains that we know based upon the trop (the tune). In conversation, a speaker doesn't always say what he means, and we have to derive his meaning from his gestures and intonations. Similarly, much of our understanding of Torah comes from correct pronunciation and correct reading of the trop. The trop tells us where to put the commas, periods and question marks, and it tells us the tempo of the verse, i.e., whether to slow down or to speed up. The trop conveys the meaning, and that is why, R' Heidenheim writes, the gemara (Megillah 31a) says, "If one reads without a tune, about him it is said (Yechezkel 20:25), 'So, too, I gave them laws that were not good'."

R' Heidenheim adds another point: An popular proverb says that it is better to learn from a teacher than from a book. This is because so much of the meaning is conveyed by the teacher's gestures and intonations, rather than by the words alone. (Havanat Ha'mikra)

"Moshe said, 'Through this you shall know that Hashem sent me to perform these acts, that it was not from my heart'."

(16:28)

R' Yaakov Kaminetsky z"l (died 1986) writes: Moshe said these words on his own, without consulting with Hashem. By doing so, he placed the entire Torah at risk. If Hashem had not caused a miracle to happen (i.e., the earth swallowing Korach), the implication would be that Moshe was not Hashem's agent.

How could Moshe take this risk? He had no choice! If his own contemporaries could question his authority and not be dealt with decisively, how could later generations be sure that Moshe spoke for G-d? If Moshe had not risked his own reputation (and the Torah's) to impress his own generation, he would have lost future generations. (Emet Le'Yaakov)

Letters from Our Sages

This week's letter is from She'eilot U'teshuvot Maharik (No. 9) by R' Yosef Colon (France and Italy; approx. 1410- 1480), an important halachic authority who is quoted frequently in later works.

What follows is a brief excerpt from a lengthy responsum involving a shul which had the following custom: On the Shabbat on which Parashat Bereishit was read, the first aliyah (usually reserved for a kohen) was given to a member of the congregation who donated oil for the entire year. The custom was that if a kohen was present, either he bought that mitzvah or he left the room, allowing someone else to be called to the Torah.

One year, there was a kohen who did not buy the mitzvah and also would not leave the room. The members of the congregation agreed to prevent this kohen from entering their shul and they enlisted the help of the municipal government. Maharik's letter follows:

A Torah scholar to whom secrets are revealed, the foundation of the building, one who asks relevant questions, my soul's friend, the wise man, R' Shmuel: . . .

It appears, in my humble opinion, that even if that kohen is as great as [the sages of the Mishnah] Shimon ben Azzai and his friends, he went too far, for we should not change the customs which our forefathers before us, pious men and men of deeds, practiced. Regarding matters such as this, Chazal said, "Leave the Jews alone - if they are not prophets, they are the sons of prophets." Certainly this is true regarding this custom which honors and elevates the Torah. It is obvious that [the honor of the Torah] is elevated when people jump at the chance to read its beginning in exchange for money - there is no love of Torah greater than this. Also, in this way, oil to light [the shul] is more readily available.

In all of the holy communities of France and Germany, a similar custom is observed on Simchat Torah. These and these intend [their deeds to be] for the sake of Heaven, except that these do it when they finish the Torah and these do it when they begin the Torah . . .

Regarding the most insignificant custom we learn in Bava Metzia [86b]: "R' Chanina ben Chachilai

said, 'One should never deviate from the local custom, for Moshe went up to the Heavens [to receive the Torah, and he did not eat; the angels came to visit Avraham, and they did eat]'. Also, we learn in Bereishit Rabbah on Parashat Vayera: "When you enter a city, follow its customs." Certainly then, in the case of an important custom such as this which honors and elevates the Torah; it may not be changed and must be followed.

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