

VESSEL OF PEACE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Korach

Vessel of Peace

Volume 20, No. 34
5 Tammuz 5766
July 1, 2006

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Today's Learning:
Megillah 1:9-10
O.C. 576:8-10
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yoma 24
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Terumot 57

In this week's parashah, we read of Korach's uprising against Moshe and Aharon. In Pirkei Avot (chapter 5) we learn: "Any machloket / dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will stand. Any machloket that is not for the sake of Heaven will not stand. What is a machloket that is for the sake of Heaven? The halachic disagreements in the Talmud between Hillel and Shammai. What is a machloket that is not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his cohorts."

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l observes: This Mishnah seems to imply that the disputes between Hillel and Shammai are fundamentally comparable to the machloket of Korach and his cohorts, except that the former were for the sake of Heaven and the latter was not. Is that really true?

R' Auerbach explains: All machloket is inherently bad (hence the similarity between the disputes of Hillel and Shammai and the dispute of Korach and his band). Thus, our Sages have taught (in the very last teaching in all of Mishnah): "Hashem found no better vessel for holding blessing than peace." Indeed, Bnei Yisrael merited to receive the Torah only because they were: "As one man, with one heart." (See Shemot 19:2 and Rashi.)

However, if a machloket is for the sake of Heaven, then it has the potential to ultimately increase unity. Specifically through this machloket, each participant's attachment to the Torah is revealed and is strengthened. And, that attachment forges a common bond between the disputants, thus leaving them as closer friends. (Quoted in Avot Mi'Shulchan Rabbotainu)

"Korach, son of Yitzhar son of Kehat son of Levi, took . . ." (16:1)

Rashi writes that Korach took his cohorts and attired them in robes of pure techelet wool (i.e., the color found in tzitzit according to Torah law). They then came and stood before Moshe and said to him, "Is a garment that is entirely of techelet subject to the law of tzitzit, or is it exempt?" Moshe replied to them, "It is subject to that law." Upon hearing this, Korach and his cohorts began to jeer at him, "Is this possible? On a robe of any different colored material, one thread of techelet attached to it exempts it. Should not this robe made entirely of techelet exempt itself from the law of tzitzit?"

R' David Hanania Pinto shlita (a contemporary French rabbi) observes that Korach's troubles started when he attempted to delve into the logic of the mitzvot. Indeed, his name "Korach" has the same Hebrew letters as the word "choker" / "philosopher." Korach could not accept the fact that some mitzvot are decrees. Thus, the first word of the parashah-"Va'yikach"-has the same Hebrew letters as the expression "Vay chok" / "Woe to us from a decree."

What was Korach's end? He caused "machloket" / "dissension" which has the same Hebrew letters as "lakach mavvet" / "He took death."

(Pachad David)

The midrash asks: Why did Korach use this stratagem to challenge Moshe? Why didn't he just go debate Moshe? The midrash answers that Korach knew he could never win a debate against Moshe. Therefore, he decided to ridicule Moshe instead.

R' Gershon Henach Leiner z"l (the 19th century Radzhiner Rebbe who attempted to renew the practice of putting techelet on tzitzit and was successful in some communities) writes: In addition to the many errors that are commonly attributed to Korach by our Sages and by the classical commentaries, he made another mistake. He had what he believed was a legitimate opinion on a Torah matter, and he suppressed it. This is not the Torah way. Rather, a person who is competent in matters of halachah is obligated to make his views known. Then, if he is defeated in debate, he

should rejoice that the truth has been revealed.

(Ein Ha'techelet p.8)

"The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korach, and the entire wealth." (16:32)

The Gemara relates that the sage Rabbah Bar Bar-Chanah once was traveling in the desert when an Arab offered to show him the hole into which Korach had been swallowed. Rabbah saw a fissure from which smoke was rising. He took a ball of wool, soaked it in water, stuck in on the end of a romach / spear, and then lowered it into the hole. When he removed it, he saw that the wool had been singed by fire. The Arab told him, "Put your ear to the ground and hear what they are saying." Rabbah did so and he heard, "Moshe is true, his Torah is true, and we are liars."

What was Rabbah teaching by this story? R' Yitzchak Shmelkes z"l (19th century rabbi of Lvov, Galicia) explains that Rabbah wanted to indicate the seriousness of fomenting in machloket / strife. First, he took wool, which represents tzitzit in particular and mitzvot in general. (Tzitzit, through their blue color, also remind us of the heavens, and therefore of G-d's "Throne.") Next, he dipped the wool in water, which is frequently used by our Sages as a metaphor for Torah. Then, he stuck the water-logged wool on the end of a romach / spear, alluding to the 248 limbs and organs of the human body. (The gematria of "romach" is 248.) By this, he represented a person whose entire being, all 248 limbs and organs, are steeped in Torah and mitzvot.

Finally, he lowered the spear into Korach's hole and, when he removed it, it was singed by fire. This demonstrates that even if a person is entirely devoted to Torah and mitzvot, once he becomes involved in machloket, it is impossible to emerge unscathed.

(Bet Yitzchak Al Ha'Torah)

Letters from Our Sages

This week we present a letter 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 about a shul that 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 left the room so that someone else could 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 wrote:

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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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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