

TWENTY/TWENTY VISION

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

This week's sidrah centres around the story of Korach, son of Yitzhar, Moshe Rabbeinu's first-cousin. Korach became overly ambitious and tried to overthrow Moshe, our beloved leader. Yet Chazal, our sages, admit that Korach was a very great man. How did a rational and intelligent person come to make such a blatant error as to challenge the G-d granted leadership of the greatest Jewish leader of all time?

Rashi apparently addresses this question: "Korach, who was an intelligent person, what did he see that caused him to err such? His eye fooled him: he saw a great lineage coming forth from him..."

Rashi's choice of words is certainly unusual: His eye (eyno) fooled him. One would usually say that his vision fooled him, since we are not talking about physical sight but about his "seeing" into the future.

It is no coincidence, explains the Yismach Moshe (Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum zt"l), that man was created with two eyes. Had Hashem so desired, He could no doubt have created us with only one eye. By giving us two eyes, He indicated by way of symbolism that our "vision" must be concentrated in two different directions: One eye should be used for seeing and beholding the greatness of G-d. With the other eye we should focus on perceiving our own faults, shortcomings and insignificance.

A person who sees with one eye is severely vision-impaired. If he sees only from his right eye, then things from that direction will be clearly perceived and noticed, but most everything happening on his left side will pass him by. So too, one who focuses his vision on only one of these principals will experience severe difficulties in serving G-d properly.

One who concentrates too strongly on his own faults and insignificance becomes easily dejected and has a very difficult time serving Hashem, "with joy and with goodness of heart (Devarim/Deuteronomy 28:47)." We all know people who spend too much of their time agonizing about things they've done in the past, or about their lack of character or intelligence etc. They spend their hours and days wallowing in lowliness and self-pity, and see very little positivity in their lives. Such people are lacking in the "greatness of G-d" aspect of their vision. They fail to perceive that, relative to the greatness of Hashem, of which we have only the tiniest comprehension, we are all - even the greatest of us - sorely lacking and full of shortcomings. In spite of this, perhaps even because of this, G-d has let us know in no uncertain terms that He desires our devotion to Him, that we serve Him with joy and exhilaration, and do our best to elevate ourselves and become the

greatest people we can become.

It is equally shortsighted to focus on Hashem's greatness without stopping to remind oneself of one's own deficiencies and unworthiness. Such people, while strongly focused on serving G-d with all their might and souls, often sadly perceive themselves as G-d's gift to the world. If G-d is so great, then doesn't it follow that I must do all I can to serve Him and come close to Him? Often this comes at the expense of others. One who steps back and takes the time to perceive his own insignificance in relation to Hashem has no problem with the concept that ultimately we are all equal in His eyes, and that my service of Hashem is no more nor less worthy than yours. We each have our own place and purpose in life. It is pointless to try and serve G-d by taking away from others. Dare we presume that what we may be capable of doing is any more significant than what someone else has to offer? The main point is that we all serve Hashem, and if His will is being done, then it is of no significance whether it is I who am now having the opportunity to do so, or whether I step back and allow another to have his chance. (Anyone like to take a turn writing this column?) Whereas the first person had a severe lack of self-esteem, this person has an over-indulged self-esteem to the point of self-centredness and lack of sensitivity to others.

One who makes sure that his "eyesight" is equally distributed, striving constantly to grow in his relationship with G-d and perceive His greatness and omnipresence, while at the same time stepping back and remembering that he is truly insignificant and unworthy and that it is only by the supreme kindness of Hashem that He even desires our service at all, will have no problem leading a healthy and balanced spiritual life. He will connect with both his Creator, and with his fellow man. He will do much, and encourage others to join him in doing.

Korach, says the Yismach Moshe, was misled by "his eye" (singular). His vision was lopsided. He spent too much time dwelling on Hashem's greatness, without giving enough thought to himself and his own insignificance. He was so focused on serving G-d that he came to think it must be he who takes the highest position, which would, in his warped version of reality, enable him to give Hashem the "greatest" pleasure. He failed to see that all of us, from the leaders of the nation right down to the water-carriers and wood-choppers, give G-d equal pleasure when we find our place in serving Him and doing the best we can. This is how Korach, a highly intelligent and spiritual person, came to challenge Moshe's leadership.

Perhaps, also, this explains how Korach and his bunch could have been so foolish. After all, even if they were G-d forbid correct, and Moshe had somehow acted in a self-serving manner, at any rate all agreed that there was only going to be one leader and one Kohen Gadol (High Priest). How absurd it is that Korach managed to round up 250 people and convince each of them to challenge for the position of High Priest together with him! But perhaps this itself emphasizes the shortsightedness of his position. Instead of each of them looking for his own way to be good and bring good to the world, they had become so self-centred that only "the best" would do. Each and every one of them felt he could not fully serve Hashem unless he was at the helm; the very pinnacle

of power, glory and recognition. So, absurd as it seems, they all had to be leaders.

So from Korach we learn that we have to balance our vision. To make sure that both our "eyes" are functional and focused. (Remember too that one can have equally balanced vision, poor in both eyes (10/10, or something like that), and still walk into walls. So if we're balanced but unfocused we're still missing the boat.) Had a check-up lately?

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