

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And the earth opened her mouth wide, and swallowed them up, their houses, their tents, and all the substance that was at their feet . . ." (Devarim 11:6)

The posuk is not from this week's parshah, but it is obviously a review of what happened previously, and it remains an important lesson for all generations that is worth repeating every year. In truth, it is a theme that runs through all of Torah, but specifically Sefer Bamidbar, since it is this sefer that specifically deals with the preparation for life in Eretz Yisroel. And, even more specifically, in a parshah that has already passed, but which has much to add to the discussion.

Let us begin with analyzing the source of Korach's downfall. The Talmud provides the following insight based upon the above posuk:

The substance that was at their feet: This refers to a man's property, that which stands him on his feet. (Pesachim 119a)

In other words, Korach was overly independent. Independence is a good thing, as we see from Moshe Rabbeinu who made some very important decisions, such as the breaking of the first set of tablets, without first consulting G-d. And, when Pinchas killed Zimri to fend off the plague, he merited to become Eliyahu HaNavi, whereas the daughters of Tzelofchad used their independence to be the cause of a halachah regarding the laws of inheritance.

Thus, a certain amount of independence is rewarded by G-d, but too much of it can be the source of one's downfall, as history has revealed time-and-time-again. The trick is to know when your independence is making you more G-dly or when it is pushing you further away from G-d. Unfortunately, many people fail to notice the difference, and walk the plank of independence right into the sea of self-destruction.

Fortunately, the Torah provides some excellent case studies of those people who got it right. The foremost example was Moshe Rabbeinu, because he was both the most charismatic of all leaders, and yet G-d Himself called him "the humblest of all men." He was bold enough to stand up to the entire nation that rebelled under the direction of the Spies, and Korach and his entourage in this week's parshah, and yet he remained totally unassuming.

However, before we even look at Moshe Rabbeinu and what it meant to be "trustworthy in the

House of G-d," we can start the lesson with his brother, Aharon HaKohen. For, he too appears to have been very unassuming, yet he held off the Erev Rav when they wanted to create the golden calf. However, his decision to give the impression of participating was one that he made completely on his own, at great risk to himself and his people.

As Moshe Rabbeinu said to him after seeing the golden calf:

Moshe asked Aharon, *"What did this people do to you to make you bring so great a sin upon them?"* (Shemos 32:21)

In fact, so risky was his decision that even he wondered later on if he had made a grave mistake, as we see at the beginning of Parashat BeHa'alotecha.

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d spoke to Moshe, saying, "Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps-beha'alotecha-toward the face of the Menorah should the seven lamps cast light." (Bamidbar 8:1)

That the flames rise upward, and expression of ascending is used, implying that one must kindle the the lamps until the light ascends on its own. (Rashi)

The mitzvah to light the Menorah follows last week's parshah that ended with the Chanukat HaMishkan, the Dedication of the Tabernacle, and Rashi asks why. He answers that it is for Aharon HaKohen's sake, who apparently was upset that neither he nor his tribe were amongst the princes who brought gifts in honor of the dedication.

For, when Aharon saw that he was left out, he could only assume that it was because of his involvement in the golden calf episode, even though he acted completely for the sake of Heaven. Therefore, G-d told him, through the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah that he will do in the Mishkan on a daily basis, he will be offering a "dedication offering" continuously, whereas that of the princes was only a one-time gift.

The question is, what was bothering Aharon HaKohen? He was a man of whom it says:

"Is not Aharon HaLevi your brother? I know that he can speak well. Right now he goes out towards you; when he sees you, he will be very glad." (Shemos 1:14)

Thus, we see that Aharon was never one to be jealous of another, but rather, he was someone who was "rodeif shalom," a pursuer of peace, something which is not possible when someone is subject to jealousy.

Rather, it wasn't from the dedication ceremony that Aharon felt excluded, but from the Klal itself. For, as the Torah testifies and the Talmud explains, the Torah was given to the entire nation as one people, as a whole. At Mt. Sinai at the giving of Torah, we camped "k'ish echad b'leiv echad," as a single person with a single heart, and by being left out of the Chanukat HaMishkan, Aharon

wondered if he had forfeited that privilege as a result of his involvement in the construction of the golden calf.

In contrast to this, we have in the same parshah the account of Moshe Rabbeinu's father-in-law, Yisro. He converted to Judaism, and Moshe implores him to continue on with the Jewish people to Eretz Canaan, where G-d has promised to do good for His people.

Moshe said to Chovev, Moshe's father-in-law, the son of Reuel the Midianite, "We are journeying to the place which G-d said He would give to us. Join us; you will benefit, for G-d has promised Israel good." He answered him, "I will not go, but will instead return to my own land and relatives." (Bamidbar 10:29-30)

However, explains Rashi, Yisro already learned that a ger does not have a portion in the land of Israel, and therefore he decided to return back to Midian, though he had the assurance of the Gadol HaDor that his life would be great in Eretz Yisroel.

Ironically, while Aharon remained independent he sought to be part of the Klal, while Yisro who was being invited to be part of the Klal, chose independence. It is a theme that recurs in the parshah (BeHa'alotecha) on different levels of understanding, as we shall see, b"H.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

He said, "Listen to Me. To the prophets amongst you, when I appear, I reveal Myself only in a vision, and speak in a dream. Not so with My servant Moshe, who is the most trusted in all My house. (Bamidbar 12:6- 7)

What does this mean? The commentators say that it means that even though he possessed great abilities to change the situation, for example, by splitting the sea using the Shem HaMeforesh (the Ineffable Name of G-d that he used to kill the Egyptian), and by solving the troubles of the Jewish people in the desert, he did not use them. Rather, he "did everything as G-d commanded him."

Another example of this point is Yitzchak Avinu. Of course Yitzchak knew that Ya'akov was more fitting to receive the brochat. However, there was a law that the brochat went to the firstborn, which was Eisav. Therefore, in spite of the fact that all of us would have rationalized why it was a mitzvah to by-pass Eisav for Ya'akov, Yitzchak stuck to the rules of G-d, and let Hashgochah Pratit take care of the rest.

From a Torah perspective, this is what it means to be "ne'eman." Ne'eman means loyal to G-d and His will, in the most basic way possible. Nadav and Avinu had only wanted to serve G-d more deeply, but in doing so they veered from the path set out by Torah, and in the end, undid all the good they tried to accomplish. They took advantage of their independence and went too far, and the very love they desired to express became an expression instead of rebellion against G-d, and thus they were killed.

Even this is alluded to in this week's parshah, but on the level of Sod. The posuk says:

This is what is written, "There were men who were unclean by the dead body of man (nefesh Adam)" (Bamidbar 9:6) - literally (nefesh Adam), for it is talking about Nadav and Avihu, as Chazal write, and they were on the level of the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon. (Sha'ar Hagilgulim, Ch. 31)

Obviously, the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon went into Nadav and Avihu for the sake of tikun. And what had been his mistake? He acted overly independent by taking from the forbidden fruit without G-d's permission, albeit with the best of intentions. Thus, the same drive that pushed the first man to try and bring rectification to the world was the same drive that pushed Nadav and Avihu to bring their "unauthorized fire," albeit, again, for the right reason, but the wrong "fire."

MELAVE MALKAH:

Miriam and Aharon complained about Moshe regarding the Cushite woman he married. They said, "*Does G-d speak only to Moshe? Has He not spoken also to us?*" (Bamidbar 12:1-2)

Another example was the loshon hara Miriam spoke about her brother, Moshe Rabbeinu. Being the sister of the Gadol HaDor, the sister-in-law of his wife, and a prophetess in her own right, she had plenty to be independent about.

All sin, whether well-intentioned or as the result of just plain selfishness is really the measure of a person's willingness to live outside the will of G-d, to depend upon himself as oppose to being dependent on the Creator. In Miriam's case, she was only interested in the well-being of her brother and sister-in-law, even if he happened to be the greatest prophet that ever lived. That is why she mentioned her own level of prophecy, as if to say, "We talk to G-d, but He does not require us to live away from our spouses. So why then, does Moshe feel compelled to?" Hence, G-d's answer:

"With him I speak face-to-face, while he is con-scious, and not in riddles; he has a true vision of G-d." (Bamidbar 12:8)

In other words, G-d answered them, "As true as it is that you are both prophets of great standing, your level of prophecy does not match that of Moshe's, the most trusted in My house, who must be ready for prophecy at a moment's notice. As great as you are, you have overstepped your boundaries."

It is essentially the same problem that man has always struggled with, THE man, as in Adam HaRishon: how great am I really, and what is within my limits of serving G-d to do? Adam HaRishon had tried to subdue the K'lipos associated with the Aitz HaDa'as, but found himself incapable, and far more vulnerable to their attack than he was to theirs.

Much later on in history, Nadav and Avihu, in a position to truly rectify that mistake since they had inherited the soul of Adam HaRishon, instead carried on with the same mistake. And, Shlomo HaMelech married the daughter of Pharaoh the very night he had presided over the inauguration of

the First Temple. At such a spiritually climactic moment, the wisest man in history, felt capable of subduing all evil in the world and ushering in Yemot HaMoshiach. Once again, man had been wrong. How many times in history have great people arisen and tried to accomplish too much, only to fall and push off the redemption for a much later time?

But not Moshe Rabbeinu, and not Aharon HaKohen. They were different, and that is what G-d was trying to tell Aharon HaKohen in the parshah about the Menorah. It was also the message inherent in the flame's need to burn "independently," yet facing the middle branch that pointed towards G-d, as if to say to Aharon HaKohen, "Don't feel left out. What the princes brought was of their own doing, and as a result of their own independence, which in this case is certainly praiseworthy.

However, it can also result in a service of G-d like that of Nadav and Avihu, or that of Korach, which is not praiseworthy, but highly destructive. "But yours, Aharon HaKohen," the Torah says, "like the Menorah itself, is an independence that can only exist in the framework of what I would want," G-d says, "also like that of your brother, Moshe."

Each Jew must take a close, personal look at himself or herself, and ask, "Am I independent enough, or am I too independent when it comes to serving G-d?" For, the moment independence plays too much of a role from a Torah perspective, then the service of G-d becomes, the service of oneself instead.

*Have a great Shabbos,
PW*

Text

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