

LET GOD BE THE JUDGE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the grandson of Kehas, and the great grandson of Levi; Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav; and On, the son of Pelet, descendants of Reuven, began a rebellion against Moshe . (Bamidbar 16:1-2)

I remember some time back watching some interview of an actor regarding a dramatic part he had played in some movie. I think I was, at the time, at the airport in a boarding lounge, quite bored indeed, watching one of those overhead screens trying to pass the time until we finally left for my next destination.

As I recall, the interviewer asked the actor if playing the part he had played had some kind of impact on his own personal life, which was vastly different than the person he had portrayed in the movie. In real life he was famous, free, and wealthy; the person he had portrayed was very poor and forced to flee for his life just to stay alive.

The actor paused for a moment to think, and answered something to this effect:

"Certainly while you're playing the part it affects your life. I think for any good actor who takes his character seriously, even when you go home at the end of a day, you take your character with you. Sometimes you talk to your spouse, and your children, and you wonder if it is you speaking or your character. Even after you finish shooting, and a time goes by, some part of the character stays with you . You take the part in the first place because it talks to you on some level ."

I do not remember the name of the movie, the name of the actor, or even which airport I was in at the time of the interview. Boredom had put me into a state of semi-consciousness, and the lesson I learned from the interview did not hit me until some time later. The insight it provided did not occur to me until I gave a shiur much later on.

Actors are unique in society with special jobs. All of us have to act in some way or another and at some time or another because, as Shakespeare said, "All of life is a stage." But, most of us do so as matter of life, for a limited period of time, and often without even being aware that we are being different from our normal, everyday personality.

However, actors consciously choose to be someone quite different, for a sustained period of time, and in an artificial environment that suits their new character. Hence, just like hanging around with

friends for a prolonged period can affect your personality, hanging around their new character can very much affect their regular personality, and I would not be surprised if some actors have difficulty letting go once the filming is over, especially if the character they played was a dream come true for them.

In other words, the artificial character can become a real undercurrent in an actor's life. Over the time of filming, which can last sometimes a couple of years when multiple movies are made, the character he or she portrays can seep into the person's mindset and self-perception, and affect the way he or she acts in everyday life, in the REAL world.

For example, depending upon the character the actor played, he might find himself more confident or less confident in daily life than he was before. He might find himself living up to a higher standard of morality, or a lesser one than before, depending upon the character he has absorbed into his consciousness. The mind is a tricky thing, easily influenced under the right circumstances.

The truth is, unbeknownst to most people, there is an undercurrent of personality in all of us, influencing us in directions that our daily lives cannot explain. There is something affecting our personality in ways that family upbringing does not justify, for better or for worse. There are children that grow up in the best of families, but who end up messed up. There are children who grow up in the worst of homes, and yet they go on to become model citizens.

For some people, that is just one of those crazy question marks of life, one of the unlisted wonders of Creation. They just assume that, for the most part, people are who they are because of the families they are born into, the life situation they happen to grow up in, and the opportunities they may or may not get, depending upon, well, for lack of better terms, destiny or fate. When it comes to most people, "What you see is what you get," is the prevailing attitude towards themselves and others.

Nothing can be farther from the truth. You can call a Volkswagon Bug a Volkswagon Bug, even if it has the engine of a Mercedes Benz inside of it, because that is what it looks like from the outside, but you can be sure that it won't drive like one. It might not drive quite like a Mercedes as well, since the rest of the car adds to the luxury of the vehicle, but it will certainly drive far better than the average V.B.

Likewise, though it is the body we see, and not the soul, and though it has so much impact on the direction a person might go in life, in truth, it is the engine that drives the person, and that is, of course, the soul. And since a soul has its own potential, personality, and spirit, though it might be limited or enhanced by the body that houses it, ultimately it is what defines the person himself, for better or for worse.

"I don't understand how he became that way," a person might say to someone about another person. "We grew up together, practically lived in each other's houses. We did everything together, and knew each other's secret ambitions. But," the person might say with a sense of astonishment, "I

never knew he had THAT in him!"

We are probably more surprised by how people turn out in the end than we are not. This is because we judge people by how they look physically, not by how they look spiritually, something that may not be visible except during certain key moments. Some people, during moments of crisis become heroes, some failures, and sometimes it is the opposite of what we would have thought. Pushed to spiritual limits, people reveal what they are truly made of, or not.

A true Kabbalist, such as the Arizal, could use a person's Hebrew name to determine their spiritual source, and therefore their spiritual potential. As he explains in Sha'ar HaGilgulim, parents, when giving their child a Hebrew name, get Divine help in choosing it, whether they sense it or not. A "correct" Hebrew name is something only Heaven can know, because only Heaven knows the spiritual source of a soul, and therefore its true name.

The Talmud (Shabbos 156a) explains in some detail how Celestial bodies at the time of one's birth can also be used to determine spiritual potentials and holdbacks. But, today, it is questionable, at best, who is truly capable of making precise readings, something you can have to be able to do in order to avoid erring regarding such crucial information about life. Today, it is safest to use such information to corroborate known things about one's nature, not to establish them.

All of this information is important for understanding the rebellion in this week's parshah led by Korach. On the surface of it, it just seems as if Korach, like others before him and after him, simply wanted more honor and prominence than was due to him, and was prepared to fight to get it. However, below the surface, it was his soul that destined him to feel this way and to rebel as he did.

The Arizal explains:

Korach, the son of Yitzhar was from the level of the Ruach of Kayin from the side of evil, as the verse indicates, "And Korach took" (Bamidbar 16:1); see there. This evil Ruach of Kayin was en clothed within him, and therefore, he accused Hevel his brother, Moshe Rabbeinu . Korach thought he had rectified Kayin the firstborn, and therefore, he tried to overcome Moshe, who was Hevel. However, he had erred in this because the tikun of Kayin could not have come through Korach, since he was from his evil side. Rather, it could only come through his descendant, Shmuel HaNavi, who was also from the good side of Kayin. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 33)

Hence, Korach was compelled to act as he did. There were inner forces at work, which he had never chosen for himself, but rather, he was born with. Just like with respect to Kayin, who is said to have been a mixture of the snake and Adam HaRishon, at least spiritually speaking, Korach was made the way that he was, prone to err, just as Kayin was prone to kill his brother.

Does that make him a scapegoat? Not at all. For, like with respect to Kayin, God seems to have more

mercy on Korach than he deserved, perhaps. Kayin murdered his brother; he should have been killed too. Instead, he was made to wander, as if God took into account his innate tendency to fall prey to his yetzer hara.

Likewise, with respect to Korach: he was not burned up like the rest of those who offered incense, but rather, he was swallowed by the earth, and allowed to exist. His rebellion failed, and he had erred gravely. But, with the evil part of Kayin's Ruach, what else was he to do? He might have withheld himself, just as Kayin could have chosen not to murder Hevel, and had they done this, the tikun would have been phenomenal.

Phenomenal, but unlikely. It's always a much greater tikun when someone goes against his spiritual nature to sin than it is when someone who is not prone to sin does not. But, it is less likely that someone who is prone to sin in a particular way won't, than someone who does not have a pull in that direction, and who will appear to us like the one with the greater self control.

Well, actually he is. But not because of self-control, which is the basis of reward in the World-to-Come:

According to the effort is the reward. (Pirkei Avos 5:26)

Thus, we find a similar thing by Chanoch in Parashas Bereishis, regarding whom the Torah says God took him earlier than his time. Rashi explains that Chanoch wavered between righteousness and evil, quite a waver. However, the Leshem explains, that since his soul was rooted in Gevurah, which results in behavior that can make a person go against God, he was prone to sin. Hence, for him, righteousness was truly righteousness, since he had to fight against his nature to achieve it.

Knowing this, God put him out of his misery so-to-speak, by removing him from this world while he was in an upswing. He did not destroy him because of his previous sins, because God knew how difficult it was for him to avoid them, and taking that into account, God instead brought him up to Heaven and made him into an angel instead.

This is something only God can know, and can properly evaluate. For our part, we have to do the best we can to do the best we can, and leave God to figure out which shortcomings we are responsible for, and which ones we are not. And, we have to make sure to be careful before judging others, especially when it comes to sins that we have no difficulty avoiding. Others might, because that is their nature, and we have to leave their judgment up to God alone.

Text

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