

YOU CAN'T FOOL G-D

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

In the Torah, people can rise to prominence in a single parshah, either for good or bad. In a few weeks from now, b"H, Pinchas will commit an act of zealousness and, as a result, emerge from the wings of history to secure a position of tremendous importance forever. He will evolve into Eliyahu HaNavi, the herald of the Final Redemption.

However, before that happens, Korach, in this week's parshah, will attempt to do the same thing but will accomplish just the opposite, and become infamous instead. After this week's parshah, his name will be associated with machlokes—argument—for selfish reasons (Pirkei Avos 5:7).

What went wrong? What goes wrong?

Every day, billions of people, trillions over the course of the millennia, get up in the morning and go about their business for hours each day before retiring for the evening at the end of one. By the time their heads hit their pillows, they will have accomplished many things, perhaps failed at some, tried some new ones and rejected others.

Sometimes their lives will resemble those of others while at others, while others will be unique, different from the entire world. Most amazing of all though is how little thought most will give to why they live as they do, why they strive to achieve what they do, and end up being who they are. They will spend most of their time looking out, and not in, and live, for the most part, as if on some form of auto-pilot.

It's a lot like someone who, around 11:30 in the morning, begins to get hungry as lunch time rolls around. Since his hunger is still minimal, he may not be distracted away from his task at hand to even start considering what he is going to eat in an hour or so. Rather, he just tells himself, "Gee, I'm starting to get hungry," and continues to work.

However, after a person one chair over opens up a cheese sandwich and coffee, he finds himself thinking, suddenly, "Something with cheese." This is ironic, because another worker on the other side of the cheese sandwich, starting to get hungry as well, is thinking, "Anything but cheese." One hour later, Worker A heads out for pizza while Worker B goes for a burger and fries, neither aware at all at what sent them in their respective directions.

And when people drive their cars, how many think about the engines moving them? Perhaps at the time of purchase people consider the kind of engine they are buying inside the chassis that has

caught their attention. However, soon after driving away in their new cars, they tend to forget that their cars even have engines, as if their cars only needed one to leave the store, but not to drive the streets.

So, when the car does not drive well, they hit the steering wheel or kick the tire, as if that had anything to do with the poor driving performance. Under the hood, and far more complicated than the rest of the car, the true driving force of the vehicle is tucked away from eyesight, and unlikely to feel the brunt of its owner's anger.

What we see in the mirror or when we look into the faces of others is unlikely to be the thing that is driving us or other people, to act as we do. The body is only as old as it can be since conception, and may lack a lot of knowledge and experience, but the soul inside it is all knowledge, a lot older than the body that hosts it, and driven to behave in ways that may shock even us.

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) . . . This evil Ruach of Kayin was enclothed within him, and therefore, he accused Hevel his brother, Moshe Rabbeinu. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 32)

And, of course, when we see such unusual behavior in ourselves or others, the most natural assumption we make is that it has nothing to do with past incarnations, and that it only has to do with the person's present life. We assume that their behavior is deviant, because there is nothing about the person's present life that can excuse such behavior, so we condemn it instead.

It takes a real chacham to look at himself, or at others, and ask himself, "What is really driving me, or the other person?" A person has to be really wise and clever to realize that moments played out in real time can be based upon moments long gone. That would mean extracting oneself from the situation, something that is not easy to do in normal situations and even harder to do during emotionally charged moments, and seeing people and history in a larger content.

However, if God creates a new thing, and the earth opens up her mouth and swallows them up with all their possessions, sending them to their graves alive, then you will know that these men have rebelled against God." (Bamidbar 16:30)

Apparently, Moshe Rabbeinu has this ability. In fact, he first exhibited it when he killed the Egypt back in Parashas Shemos, as Rashi explains there, and he revealed it here again in this week's parshah by invoking the earth to swallow up Korach and his assembly. This was his way of warning Korach that he should consider what was really driving him to make his demands and disrupt Jewish history.

Does the earth have a mouth? Does it really swallow up things? No one should know the answer to that question better than Kayin himself, as the Torah states:

Then [God] said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood shouts out to Me from the ground. Therefore you are cursed by the land that has opened its mouth, taking your brother's blood

from your hand. (Bereishis 4:10-11)

To the average onlooker, it was about Korach, the champion of the masses taking on Moshe Rabbeinu, the possible nepotist. However, Moshe Rabbeinu was not an average onlooker, and he was telling Korach, all declared good intentions aside, what drives you is an age-old desire to get even for a situation that you brought onto yourself.

"And, though you can fool yourself most of the time," Moshe was indicating to Korach and his followers, "and other people a lot of the time, you can't fool God, or me for that matter, any of the time," he showed them. And, just to prove his point, he had Korach and his assembly die a death that was tied to the one Korach, as Kayin, caused in his first incarnation. "As the ground swallowed up my blood when I was Hevel," Moshe said, so-to-speak, "it will swallow you up as Korach."

We don't really talk much about gilgulim, reincarnation, in the Torah world. In fact, some aren't even sure they believe in the idea, assuming that it is a mistaken one which emanated from the East and which has been glorified in the West. Others, who may accept the concept as being a Torah concept, just assume that it is one that has no bearing on their everyday lives and therefore, it is one to be ignored.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Not that many of us can figure out who we have been in previous lifetimes. However, what we can do is take a look inside as well as outside, and at least ask ourselves, "What is driving me, and how much can be considered appropriate given life and its circumstances?" You'd be surprised by your own answer, and perhaps, saved from making mistakes that may be crucial to your level of success in life.

Text

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