

LEARN THE LESSON

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Korach the son of Itzhar, the son of Kohas, the son of Levi took [himself to one side]...(Bamidbar 13:2)

THE LAST MISHNAH in Tractate Sotah, speaking about the End-of-Days, mentions that chutzpah will increase. The truth is, when has chutzpah NEVER been rampant? Nevertheless, chutzpah will be even MORE noticeably common in advance of Moshiach's arrival.

What does this mean? The Talmud gives examples, such as young people not showing adequate respect to their elders, etc. The GR"A however has a different explanation, and it is VERY eye-opening.

It's part of another discussion about love of God triggering redemption. Both the Ramchal and the GR"A speak about different levels of love of God, and in this respect, there are two. There are "chassidim," Jews who love God and Torah and do whatever they can do to do "good" and avoid "bad."

But there is a higher level. This is a love of God that drives a person to "Tikun Shechinah," the rectification of the Shechinah. On this level, living by Torah is not enough to spiritually satiate a person, as long as the Shechinah remains in exile.

Think about it for a moment. Many people enjoy life today because it is going well for them, thank God. They learn Torah and can freely perform mitzvos. They have homes and many of the niceties that once-upon-a-time were considered to be complete luxuries. They live in wonderful communities that support a Torah way of life, allowing their children to grow up in peace and comfort. How can it not feel very geulah-like for them?

Consider the following hard facts. There is no Temple in which the Shechinah can reside, and it has been replaced by a mosque, and that is surrounded by churches. Assimilation is higher than 80 percent, and intermarriage occurs quite freely. Even within the Torah community, there are serious poverty issues, health complications, among other debilitating problems. The situation is VERY far from perfect.

All of it results in terrible Chillul Hashem—profanation of God's Name. People don't know why God is justified in allowing all of this to happen to His people. So they just assume He isn't there, or doesn't care, which is a terrible Chillul Hashem.

Furthermore, the nation is still divided regarding the Land of Israel. Some love the Land, and others

not so much. Some say it is our God-given land while others say we have no right to it, or at least all of it. All of that is also a Chillul Hashem.

The amazing thing is how easy it is to be "frum" and not take note of this, or care much about it. As long as a person is personally untouched by these problems, they can blissfully pursue a life of God and even earn the title, "lover of God" and "chassid," a VERY high level.

But there is a higher one. It is a love of God that drives a person to do whatever he can to rectify the Shechinah, the Divine Presence. Such a person doesn't learn Torah only for himself, or perform mitzvos only to avoid punishment, get to the World-to-Come, or be more respected. They do ALL of it to contribute to the rectification of the Shechinah, to bring it back to the Temple, and to restore the nation to its land.

So the GR"A says, when the Talmud warns about chutzpah increasing at the End-of-Days, it does not refer to the very insolent, non-God-fearing people. That's always been here, since man was first expelled from Paradise. Rather, the Talmud refers to the "chassidim" who no longer learn Torah for the sake of "Tikun Shechinah," but only for their own PERSONAL reasons.

So when a person learns this mishnah or sees the same warning later in the Talmud about increasing chutzpah at the end of history, just before Moshiach comes, and thinks to himself, "Well, this doesn't apply to me. I'm FRUM. I LEARN Torah. I LOVE God." He needs to ask himself one more question: Do I learn Torah and do my mitzvos to rectify the Shechinah?

If the answer to this question is yes, then great. If the answer is no, then they should worry about whether THEY are precisely who the Talmud is talking about. Then they should find a way to change that, and focus instead on rectifying the Divine Presence.

And lest one think to himself, "Well, at least I LOVE God. At least I'm a chassid!" they should read this week's parsha more carefully. Because the difference between the two levels can be the difference between Korach and Moshe Rabbeinu. Korach, believing himself a "chassid" of God attacked Moshe Rabbeinu's authority, ultimately destroying himself and so many others along the way down.

Moshe Rabbeinu was called by God Himself, the most reliable person in God's House. Reliable in what sense? In the sense that everything he did was for the sake of Tikun Shechinah. It was his operating principle, the standard by which Moshe measured the worthiness of whatever he did. It didn't have to make sense to him, as it did to Korach, to be important to do. If God said it was the best way to rectify the Shechinah, then that is what he did.

This is very important. How a person looks at life determines how they understand it. A person's worldview is the framework into which they weave the everyday details of their lives. Change the framework and you change the picture. If the framework is correct according to God, a person will see what God wants them to see. If it is wrong, then they will see the wrong thing.

It's that simple, and that complicated. Building a framework is relatively straightforward. Build an

incorrect one, and you will be deluded the rest of your life. You will misread situations. You will see good where there is bad and bad where there is good. In some cases it might be too subtle to notice at first, but down the line the mistake becomes obvious once it is out-of-hand and beyond repair.

This is worth thinking about. There are two levels of love of God. Which one are we on? Learning from Korach, it is advisable to make a point of reaching the higher one, and do EVERYTHING for the sake of Tikun Shechinah.