

GOING PUBLIC

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Ego brought down the Miraglim. Ego brought down Korach. Ego brought down Dattan and Avirum. Humility was the foundation of Moshe's greatness.

The Miraglim were a group, they needed each other to support their logic and goals. They needed each other to bolster their assumed greatness. Korach was part of a group, he needed them to follow his lead and support his logic. He needed them to credit his assertions of greatness. Dattan and Avirum used to stand-alone. However, in the end, they too needed an audience, they too needed the support of a group. Moshe was an individual, he stood alone. Moshe's intellect and logic were absolute. He had no doubts. His greatness did not require anyone else for support or affirmation.

Why does the egotist need an audience to bolster his ego, and courage? Why is the humble man able to stand-alone against all opposition?

Following the incident of the Golden Calf, G-d threatened to destroy the entire nation, except for Moshe. It was G-d's backup plan that Moshe would become the next progenitor of the Jewish people. However, Moshe refused G-d's offer and demanded forgiveness for all the people. Moshe's devotion to the nation was as absolute as his intellect and logic.

The Miraglim needed an audience. It was not enough that they had doubts and concerns regarding Eretz Yisroel. They needed the rest of the people to share those doubts and thereby give credibility to their fears. When enough people feel the same way it transcends the level of personal fear, paranoia, and concern and becomes absolute and fact, regardless of rational or reason.

Korach's rebellion could not remain on the level of one against one, Korach against Moshe. He had to gather around him 250 additional men of stature. Their presence gave substance and credibility to Korach's personal ambitions. The Talmud in Sanhedrin (110 a) describes the 250 men as being from among the best of the best. "Of such great stature that they were able to establish the leap year (could have been members of the Sanhedrin)." Korach's bid for power could not stand-alone against Moshe. However, bolstered by 250 of the most honored and popular leaders, his selfishness became noble, altruistic, and above suspicion.

Moshe had suffered the attacks and criticisms of Dattan and Avirum from the very first moment of his ministry. From the start they distrusted Moshe and his motives, and said as much to Moshe. Yet, Moshe did nothing about it. G-d did nothing about it. In fact, Moshe himself summoned Dattan and

Avirum before his final confrontation with Korach. His intention was to convince them to divorce themselves from Korach and his cohorts. Until that moment their differences with Moshe were open and honest, even if they were wrong. They were "for the sake of heaven". However, once they joined Korach's rebellion, they revealed that their motives had been selfish from the start.

The Mishnah is Avos 5:17 says, "Any argument that is not for the sake of heaven will not survive an example of such an argument is Korach and his entire group."

"For the sake of heaven" assumes adversaries who truly believe that their motives and logic are noble and proper. It also assumes that their approach to defining, substantiating, and presenting their positions are equally noble and proper. Such combatants can do battle forever and the outcome will be a stronger and more viable relationship. The process toward resolution will enhance the respect each has for the other as well as keep the adversaries honest about their own positions. However, as soon as they feel the need "to go public" and garnish support for their position, motives become suspect. The need for public support borders on the lynch mobs of old. The immediate majority must be right, even when they are so very wrong!

Once Dattan and Avirum "went public" it became clear that they knew their arguments and criticisms of Moshe could not stand on their own merit. They would not pass the test of honest scrutiny and confrontation. They needed the mass hysteria and confusion, the gang mentality, to accomplish their desired goals. It was no longer a conflict "for the sake of heaven." Therefore, Dattan and Avirum refused to meet with Moshe!

From the moment of the Burning Bush, Moshe never went public. In fact, Moshe never attempted to argue his own position, or defend himself. Moshe did not act independently; Moshe did as he was told. Moshe did not need to defend himself. He knew that he was right because it was from G-d. If challenged, G-d would have to defend him. Therefore, as Rav Hirsch explains, Moshe and Aharon fell on their faces whenever challenged. With absolute subservience and trust they accepted G-d's directives. They let G-d deal with the challenge.

The Miraglim, Korach, Dattan and Avirum were punished for their "rebelliousness." On what basis did they deserve punishment? True, they confronted Moshe's authority. True, their motives were self-serving and ignoble. True, they chose the public arena rather than the privacy of Moshe's tent. However, maybe they thought they were "for the sake of heaven?" Maybe, they were not able to see the self-centeredness and dishonesty of their positions. Why did they deserve to be destroyed?

Rav Dessler in his essay The Truth Perspective, references the Yalkut Shimonie on the story of the Miraglim. "We find that when Israel first suggested sending spies into the land of Canaan, Moshe asked "Why?" They replied: "G-d promised us that we would find treasures of all kinds" But the Canaanites will have heard that we are about to enter "If they hide their property" and we do not find anything, it will seem as if G-d's promises have not been kept. Therefore let spies go - (to find the hiding place.) When Moshe heard this he fell into the trap, as it says, "And the matter seemed good

in his eyes." (Translation by Aryeh Carmel)

In analyzing this Medresh, Rav Dessler (Truth Perspective) explains that every person has an inner sense of truth and falsehood. Regardless of rationalization, circumstances, and desires, the inner sense of truth remains intact. It is possible for others to be fooled, but not yourself. That is why Moshe was not punished for "being taken in" by the people's request. He did not see the self-serving falsehood of their argument. On the other hand, the Miraglim themselves and the people were held responsible for their own falsehood. At the moment of their request they thought they were being honest. They thought they were doing it "for the sake of heaven. However, had they only paid closer attention to their real motives, they would have recognized their self-delusion.

The Miraglim, Korach, Dattan and Avirum were held responsible for not accessing their inner truth. They were destroyed because G-d deemed them non-rehabilitative. They had sunk so far into their own selfishness that nothing external would have helped for them see the truth. On their own they could have done so; however, they refused to look at themselves from the perspective of their inner truth. Therefore, they had to die. (Rav Dessler - Obstinacy and its cure)

In the end, the Miraglim destroyed themselves and the hopes of a generation. In the end, Korach destroyed his whole family along with 250 others. In the end, Dattan and Avirum destroyed themselves and all their loved ones. In the end, the need of the egotist for public confirmation and support destroyed himself and his support.

On the other hand, Moshe's humility allowed him to ignore the personal affront of each rebellion and see the much bigger picture, affirming his absolute trust in G-d. In the end, Moshe's humility saved his nation. Moshe's humility confirmed G-d's absolute control over the universe.

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