

NATIONAL OR PERSONAL CRISIS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape# 62, May the State of Israel Extradite a Jewish Criminal? Good Shabbos!

Moshe Sees Korach as a National Crisis; Not as a Personal Crisis

The pasuk [verse] says, "And G-d said to Moshe: 'Bring back the staff of Aharon before the Testimony as a safekeeping, as a sign for rebellious ones; let their complaints cease from Me that they not die'" [Bamidbar 17:25]

After the rebellion of Korach, G-d performed a miracle with the staff of Aharon, thereby proclaiming the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon. This signified that the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu should never again be challenged and that Korach and all of his compatriots were wrong. Moshe is the Divinely chosen leader and Aharon is the Divinely chosen Kohen Gadol.

The next pasuk continues "Moshe did as Hashem had commanded, so he did". Clearly there is a redundancy here. First the pasuk says Moshe did what G-d commanded him, then it says "that's what he did". How many times does the Torah need to tell us that he did it? Why the emphasis?

There is an interesting Medrash on the pasuk "And Korach gathered the entire assembly against them (Moshe and Aharon)" [Bamidbar 16:19]. The Medrash says that Moshe trembled because of the controversy. He fell to the ground, seemingly losing all strength. Chaza"l explain that Moshe reacted in this way because this was already the fourth offense of the Jewish people which had caused Moshe to beg for mercy from Hashem on their behalf.

The Medrash gives a parable. A prince offended his father, the King. The King's friend begged for mercy in behalf of the son and the King was appeased. This happened a second and a third time. When it happened the fourth time, the friend of the King became exasperated saying, "How many times can I bother the King?".

Moshe Rabbeinu felt the same way. They sinned by the Golden Calf and Moshe prayed for them. They sinned complaining for meat and Moshe prayed for them. They sinned with the incident of the

Spies and Moshe prayed for them. Concerning the argument with Korach Moshe said, "How many times can I bother G-d?". Therefore, when Moshe heard the argument of Korach "he fell upon his face".

Moshe Rabbeinu was the leader and the teacher of the Jewish people. The sins of the Golden Calf, of the complainers, and of the Spies were not challenges to Moshe's leadership, per say. But, by Korach, we have a direct frontal assault to the leadership of Moshe.

What would be the reaction of any normal leader? He would feel stressed and depressed and perhaps powerless "because they are attacking **me**".

What concerned Moshe Rabbeinu? It did not bother him that he was being attacked. What bothered him is "What will be with Klal Yisroel? How many times can I go back to G-d for Klal Yisroel?"

"What do you mean 'Klal Yisroel'? What about yourself, Moshe? It's your prestige that's on the line! Aren't you worried about that?"

The Medrash says, "No!" Moshe was not concerned about his image or about his stature. He wasn't concerned about his position. There was no personal crisis. There was only the national crisis. Moshe fell on his face strictly out of concern for his people.

This, then, is perhaps what the pasuk is telling us. When G-d told Moshe to place the staff so that the entire Jewish people could see it and know that he was chosen to be their leader, Moshe's reaction was not that of a normal leader. The normal reaction would have been "I'm right! You see -- I told you all along! I'm right! You had no reason to question me!"

The Torah tells us, therefore, that G-d commanded Moshe to put the staff there, and that is the only reason that he put the staff there. He did not put it there as justification for his position. That did not bother him in the least. Moshe did not put the staff there to rub it in their faces or to prove his authority; he put it there only because he was commanded to put it there by G-d.

This is the greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu. This is why he is the Rabbi of all of Israel. Because he had the ability to elevate himself above his own personal needs and his only concern was the needs of the Jewish people.

How Good and How Beautiful ... Brothers together; Oil on the Beard

The Medrash says on this week's parsha (also a Gemara in Kerisos [5b]) "Come and see the piety of Aharon, for at the moment that Moshe poured the Oil of Anointing on his head, Aharon trembled fearing that he was not worthy of being anointed with the Oil of Anointing (due to his involvement with the sin of the Golden Calf) and consequently was inappropriately using the holy Oil (transgressing the sin of me'ilah).

Therefore, the verse testifies, [Psalms 133:2] 'How good and pleasant is it when brethren are sitting (peacefully) together, like the Oil of Anointing on the beard of Aharon, like the dew of Hermon on the mountains of Zion'. Just like the dew of Hermon is not subject to the laws of me'ilah, so too the oil on the beard of Aharon was not subject to the laws of me'ilah."

We understand that the latter phrases of the pasuk teach that Aharon was, in fact, worthy to be the High Priest, by indicating that just as there is no trespass dew, so too there was no trespass with the oil that dripped on Aharon's beard. But what does the first part of the pasuk -- brothers dwelling together -- have to do with this?

The answer is that the Rabbis are telling us how to achieve a state of peace between brothers. This is a state which we as parents and we as human beings and we as siblings try so very hard to achieve. This is a very difficult state to achieve. Any person who has children knows that it is virtually impossible to achieve "brothers dwelling together peacefully". Anyone who himself comes from a larger family and looks back at the fights that he had with his brothers and sisters knows that "Behold how good and how pleasant..." is not an easily obtainable goal.

So what then is the key? The key is the following: The reason there is sibling rivalry, the reason why all of us as 'brothers' cannot live together peacefully is because we are always worried that 'I deserve more'.

It starts out with "Why is he getting the candy bar? Why is he getting the cookie? Why is he going with Daddy?" and it grows into bigger and better things -- "Why is he making more money? Why is he receiving more kavod? It belongs to me! I'm no less worthy!" The reason for the lack of peace between brothers is because people are always thinking that they deserve more.

Our Rabbis tell us that one who has the attitude of Aharon the Kohen that says "Maybe I'm not worthy; maybe I shouldn't be the High Priest; maybe there shouldn't be the Oil of Anointing on my head; maybe there's me'ilah involved here" will be able to achieve "How good and how pleasant is it for brothers to live together".

When people can live together and they are not always out for 'Number One'; not always going around complaining above their breath or below their breath "Why not me?"; when they are willing to see their faults and say "Maybe I'm not worthy," such an attitude, the Torah tells us, breeds an atmosphere of "How good and how pleasant is it for brothers to live together".

Glossary

Kohen Gadol -- High Priest

Klal Yisroel -- Nation of Israel

me'ilah -- the laws of 'trespass' when secular or profane use is made out of sacred property

kavod -- honor

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