

THE MEASURE OF A PERSON

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Korach

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 334, Leaving a Chasunah Before Benching.
Good Shabbos!*

The Measure of A Person Is How He Acts When He Is Right

When Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to demonstrate that he was correct and that Korach was wrong, he made the following challenge: "If these men die a natural death, that means G-d did not send me. But if G-d will make a new creation such that the earth opens its mouth and swallows them alive, then this will prove that G-d did send me." [Bamidbar 16:29]

Let us analyze Moshe's statement. 250 people challenged Moshe. They questioned his leadership. Moshe maintained that he was the G-d chosen leader and that these challengers were phonies. Let us suppose that the next day, all 250 challengers had not woken up from their sleep. Wouldn't such an occurrence, in and of itself, be a strong proof as to who was right and who was wrong? Would we not have seen their death as Divine Retribution?

Moshe was not satisfied with that level of proof. He explicitly said that if they die in their sleep or of other natural causes, then that indicates that "G-d did not send me." Why did Moshe specifically need the creation of a miracle and an unnatural death to prove his legitimacy?

The Belzer Rebbe, zt"l, explained: Had they all died in their sleep or by some natural means of death, it would still have been possible to conjecture that Korach was right. Perhaps we would have said that they did not receive the punishment because they were wrong but rather because they acted improperly in shaming a Talmid Chachomim (Torah scholar). [One who shames another publicly is

compared to a murderer (Talmud B.Metz. 58b); all the more so when the victim is a Torah scholar.]

Conceivably, Korach and his followers could have been 100 percent correct that Moshe was a power hungry nepotist who was appointing 'his people' and taking everything for himself. But even so, they would have been deserving of death for the disrespectful way that they presented their argument. They humiliated the greatest man of the generation and the leader of Israel.

A person can be 100 percent right and still be deserving of death for other reasons, such as shaming a scholar. Therefore, Moshe insisted upon ironclad proof that he was right -- a miracle to cause their death. Natural deaths would not have proven Moshe's legitimacy since they already deserved death -- right or wrong -- because of the way they presented their claim.

The mussar [ethical teaching] that we must learn from this insight is that even if one is right, he must know how to fight! A person must present arguments with tact and sensitivity, regardless of the cogency of those arguments.

A person can have a complaint about a friend, a spouse, sometimes even a Rabbi, but that does not give him the right to fight or argue or act improperly.

Suppose a Rabbi made a mistake. Perhaps he did not treat someone properly. Does that permit a congregant to chastise his Rabbi in the middle of shul? Heaven forbid! That would be shaming a Torah scholar. The congregant's complaint may be 100 percent valid, but that does not justify improper behavior on his part against his Rabbi.

Sometimes a person may have an argument with his wife. He might be 100 percent right. But nevertheless he must confront her in a proper manner. If he does not, he can be right on the merits, but all can be lost if his argument is not presented in the proper manner.

Sometimes we may be right regarding an issue with our children. But there is a way to talk to a child and a way not to talk to a child. Sometimes a child may owe his parent an apology. But the parent's reaction can be so bad that it makes the parent's sin worse than the child's sin.

The Belzer Rebbe says that the true measure of a person is to see how he acts when he is RIGHT -- not when he is wrong. If when he thinks he is right, he feels that he has license to act like an animal -- to yell what he wants and to act however he wants to act -- then he is in fact quite wrong! Even if Korach had been right in his original argument, he was already a 'dead man' because of the way he acted towards his teacher.

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