

WHERE KORACH DESERVES CREDIT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Korach

Where Korach Deserves Credit

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #598 Siamese Twins. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Korach is one of the most tragic parts of the Torah. This is the prototype of machlokes in Klal Yisrael (dispute within the Jewish nation). The Torah herein demonstrates the ill effects of machlokes. Korach challenged the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe responded with a counter challenge: "Do this. Take for yourselves fire-pans -- Korach and his entire assembly -- and put fire in them and place incense upon them before Hashem tomorrow. Then the man whom Hashem will choose, he is the holy one..." [Bamidbar 16:7]

Rashi comments: "Korach was wise (pikeach haya). What did he see in all this foolishness?" In other words, the odds against Korach's offering being accepted were 250 to 1 (given the fact that 250 men were participating in this challenge). 249 people were going to die. This is far more ludicrous than participating in "Russian Roulette" (involving shooting oneself with a revolver having a single bullet in one of the gun's six chambers) where one has 5 chances out of 6 of coming out of the game alive. Here 249 out of 250 contestants were going to wind up dead!

Rashi responds that Korach was misled by a prophetic vision. He saw through ruach haKodesh (holy spirit) that he was going to be the progenitor of greatness. The great prophet Samuel was one of his descendants. Shmuel haNavi was in some sense on par with Moshe and Aharon. Korach miscalculated. He figured "If I know that I have a descendant like Shmuel haNavi, I know that I am safe! I see that the Almighty has great things in store for me and my family!"

This explains why he did something that was very foolish. But another question may be asked. Rashi says: "Korach was a 'pikeach' - a wise man." Where do we ever see that Korach was a wise man?

It is rare, if not unprecedented, for Chazal to speak of someone as a 'pikeach'. Which other Jewish

personality is ever given such an accolade? And where in fact do we see that Korach was a 'pikchus'?

The following approach, based on a Kedushas Levi, may be suggested:

Earlier, Rashi mentions that Korach's motivation for starting up with Moshe was based on the appointment of Elizafon ben Uziel as the Head of the Family of Kehas. Moshe Rabbeinu, based on Divine command, gave this honorable job to Elizafon, who descended from the youngest of the sons of Kehas. This appointment bothered Korach to no end. Of Kehas's four sons, Amram was the oldest brother. Therefore, Korach was willing to live with the fact that both of the sons (Aharon and Moshe) of Amram had leadership roles. One was the King and one was the High Priest. But, he felt, that the next major appointment in the family should go to himself, who was the son of Yitzhar - Kehas' second son. He was so consumed with jealousy over the fact that he was passed over for the son of a younger brother that he started a revolution against Moshe.

But the difficulty with Rashi's scenario is that the appointment of Elizafon ben Uziel took place in Parshas Bamidbar on Rosh Chodesh Iyar! That event took place long ago. If Korach was so upset by this appointment, where was he for the last five parshiyos (which transpired over far longer a period than 5 weeks)! When a person is consumed with jealousy, he does not bide his time and sit back waiting for an opportune moment. Jealousy makes a person crazy.

The answer is that Korach was a pikchus (shrewd individual). He was a smart person who knew that in life, timing is everything. One has to know when to make his move. In Parshas Bamidbar, Moshe Rabbeinu was riding high. He was the Master of all Israel. He performed the great miracles in the desert. He took care of all the people's needs. His approval ratings were off the charts! It was certainly no time to mount a challenge to his leadership!

The Ramban explains the reason why Parshas Korach follows the chapter of the Spies: The people were depressed as a result of the aftermath of the Spies debacle. Morale was at an all time low. We must remember that the incident of the Spies followed the incidents of the Complainers (Mis'onenim) and the Graves of Lust (Kivros haTayvah). Now they faced 40 more years of desert wandering.

It was at precisely this moment that Korach decided to make his move against Moshe. This was the 'pikchus' (shrewdness) of Korach. If he was a foolish person, then he would have opened up his mouth to complain as soon as he was upset about something. For a person who is so consumed with jealousy and so upset to realize that "now is not the time to address this issue" is the sign of a special person. Instant gratification is the sign of a fool, an immature baby, and a person with no intelligence. The older we get, the more we realize that we often need to put things off.

Korach nursed his grudge against Moshe until the proper time. Perhaps this was not the sign of a person with sterling character; however it was the sign of a 'pikchus' (a shrewd individual). We need to give Korach that much credit. He had the wisdom to understand that in life, timing is everything.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (# 334). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Leaving a Chasunah Before Benching. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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