

THE SYMBOLISM BEHIND KEEPING HANDS AND FEET TOGETHER DURING PRAYER

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Korach

The Symbolism Behind Keeping Hands and Feet Together During Prayer

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 686 Ma'alim B'Kodesh V'ain Moridin. Good Shabbos!

Rabbeinu Bechaye writes in his commentary on this week's parsha that when Gentiles pray, they hold their palms together with their fingers pointed upward. He says they themselves do not know why they hold their hands in that position while praying. He asserts they got it from the Jews and the reason for this is reminiscent of the expression "I'm sorry I can't do anything my hands are tied." (In other words "I am powerless to do anything" therefore I pray to G-d to help me).

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that this used to be a Jewish custom and the Gentiles took it from us. Once it became their custom, the Jews refrained from doing it any longer. However, he says, a remnant of the Jewish custom still remains by the fact that we still keep our feet together when davening. This too indicates that we are bound up, not able to move at all, without G-d's intervention.

Moshe Teaches The Importance of Trying To Make Peace

The main topic of Parshas Korach is inner-communal squabbling amongst the Jewish people (machlokes). Unfortunately, machlokes has been around from the beginning of time (going back to Kayin and Hevel in Parshas Bereishis). There were only 4 people in the universe at that time and they could not get along. The two who argued were brothers. It is no surprise, then, that machlokes is still around until this very day in our very diverse world and in our very diverse communities.

Parshas Korach is the paradigm parsha for teaching what to do to avoid prolonging machlokes. The Gemara [Sanhedrin 110a] derives from the fact that Moshe sought out Dasan and Aviram to try to bring the dispute to an end that one should not persist in an argument. Rashi says that we learn this

from the fact that Moshe was willing to forgo his honor and protocol and personally seek out those who started the rebellion against him - to try to make peace. Some enumerators of the commandments actually count "And there shall no longer be like Korach and his followers" [Bamidbar 17:5] as one of the 365 forbidden actions (Lavim) in the Torah - namely that one should not persist in a machlokes.

There is some irony in the fact that the Torah just told us that Moshe was the most humble man on the face of the earth [Bamidbar 12:3] and the fact that Korach and his followers claimed that Moshe was "exalting himself over the congregation of Hashem" [Bamidbar 16:3]. Despite the fact that these other people started the fight and they hurled the most absurd and inflammatory charge against Moshe, Moshe himself (who was the prophet of G-d and the King of Israel) went to seek peace with these two obnoxious people (the same two people who slandered him in the past to Pharaoh and almost cost him his life in Egypt). Moshe swallowed his pride and his honor and tried to take Dasan and Aviram aside and reason with them logically against the folly of their rebellion. The Talmud derives from here that one should not persist in an argument, but should take the initiative to bring it to an end.

When two people get into a fight and someone goes to one of the parties and asks him to "make shalom", typically the response is "Why should I sue for peace? I am right. He wronged me. Let him come ask me for peace!" Moshe Rabbeinu's actions here teach us the impropriety of such a response. One will never be more "right" in a machlokes than Moshe was in his dispute with Korach. Despite that fact, it was Moshe who tried to end the argument and make peace.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz once explained that the pasuk "And there shall no more be like Korach and his followers" is not only a negative transgression, but it is a prediction as well. There will never again be such a one sided argument, where one party was so clearly right and the other party so clearly wrong as in this case of Korach and his followers arguing with Moshe Rabbeinu. This was a case where one side was 100% right and the other side 100% wrong. Never again would there be such a morally lopsided argument.

The following story illustrates this concept. (The names in the following true story have been changed to protect the innocent.)

Reuven had a subscription to the NY Times. His neighbor Shimon did not subscribe to the Times. However, Reuven noticed every morning that his NY Times had already been read before he brought it in the house. Shimon had known that Reuven would pick the paper up from his porch at 7:00 AM, so he came by at 6:00 AM, brought the paper into his own house, read it for 45 minutes and then re-folded it up and returned it to Reuven's porch. Reuven suspected this and woke up early one morning and caught Shimon in the act. He challenged him, "How dare you take my paper before I read it!" Shimon responded back "What are you getting so excited about? You're acting like a Sodomite. I get benefit and you lose nothing. You have no right to complain about what I'm doing."

Reuven was at his wits end. He did not know what to do, so he consulted his Rabbi. He wanted to take Shimon to a Din Torah. The Rabbi told Reuven he had good advice for him: Buy your neighbor a subscription to the NY Times. Reuven could not believe his ears. "What? My neighbor steals my paper and I should buy him a subscription to the NY Times? Rabbi, Are you out of your mind?"

Ultimately, however, Reuven listened to his Rabbi's advice and years later he admitted that his purchase of the NY Times subscription for his neighbor was the best investment he ever made! He now not only can read a clean newspaper in the morning without coffee stains, but he also still has good relations with his neighbor!

Reuven was certainly not obligated to buy his neighbor a subscription to the paper. Perhaps Reuven was not even obligated to forgive his neighbor for taking his own paper without offering to pay something. But, sometimes that which is ethically appropriate to do should take precedence over what one is legally entitled to do.

But, one may ask: It cost Reuven money to buy that subscription for his neighbor. Why should he have to do that? The answer, the Chofetz Chaim says, is as follows: An Esrog and lulav costs money. Matzos costs money. Making Pesach costs money. Kosher meat costs money. Every year a person has to make a calculation that he needs X amount of money for mitzvos. The Chofetz Chaim says a person should put away money at the beginning of the year in a "machlokes fund". This is the money earmarked to forgo or to layout to avoid machlokes, to preserve peace among family and community members.

The Medrash at the end of Parshas Tzav states: Chizkiya stated "Great is peace, for by all other mitzvos the Torah specifies 'If' - If you happened to see your friend's item is lost; If you happen to see your friend's donkey straining under its load; If you happen to see a bird's nest. Meaning if the mitzvah happens to come to your hand, you do it, otherwise you do not need to do it. However, in connection with peace the Torah teaches "Seek out peace, and chase after it" [Tehillim 34:15].

If we need to pay for matzah and for lulav and for tephillin and for everything else, we need to pay for Shalom as well. Where did that money for the subscription to the NY Times come from? It came from Reuven's "Shalom fund". Money from that account is the best money a person spends the entire year!

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. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

Tape # 017 - Visiting the Sick

Tape # 062 - May the State of Israel Extradite a Jewish criminal?

Tape # 106 - The Temple Mount Today -- Obligations and Restrictions

Tape # 151 - The Mitzvah of Pidyon Haben: Some Fascinating Facts

Tape # 198 - The Ethiopian Jewry Question

Tape # 244 - Tachanun: To Say or Not To Say

Tape # 288 - "Masiach L'fi Tumoh": The Coca Cola Question

Tape # 334 - Leaving a Chasunah Before Benching

Tape # 378 - Truth telling to Patients

Tape # 422 - Bais Din's Power to Subpoena

Tape # 466 - Tachanun: To Say Or Not To Say

Tape # 510 - Pidyon Habein and Vending Machines

Tape # 554 - The Kohain and the First Aliyah

Tape # 598 - Siamese Twins

Tape # 642 - Different Minhagim for Saying Kedusha

Tape # 686 - Ma'alim B'Kodesh V'ain Moridin

Tape # 730 - Divergent Minhagim in One Shul

Tape # 774 - Tachanun: Most Fascinating Insights

Tape # 818 - Bikur Cholim on Shabbos

Tape # 862 - Preventative Medicine to Avoid Chilul Shabbos

Tape # 906 - Tachanun Without a Sefer Torah?

Tape # 950 - Pidyon Habein: Not Your Regular Cases

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.