

A TALE OF TWO EVIL CHARACTER TRAITS: JEALOUSY & MACHLOKES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #950 – Pidyon Habein: Not Your Regular Cases. Good Shabbos!

This week's parsha – Parshas Korach – highlights the evil of two terrible character traits: Jealousy and Argumentativeness. The first destructive character trait we encounter is that of jealousy. Rashi spells out Korach's motivation for starting his rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu: He was jealous that a younger cousin became the prince of the descendants of Korach.

"What was it that Korach saw that led him to dispute with Moshe? He was jealous of the princely position of Elizaphan son of Uziel, for Moshe had appointed him prince over the sons of Kehus by the word of G-d. Korach said: Father's brothers (including Father) were four, as it says 'The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uziel'. Amram, the firstborn, his two sons assumed greatness: One is king and one is Kohen Gadol. Who is fit to take the second (i.e. – to fill the next position of greatness, that of the Kohathite prince)? Is it not I, for I am the son of Izhar who is second to Amram? Yet he (Moshe) appointed as prince the son of his brother who is the youngest of all, Behold, I will dispute with him and nullify his words." [Rashi to Bamidbar 16:1]

Despite the fact that Chazal say that Korach was a clever and wise person, he lost control of himself over his jealousy of the appointment of Elizaphan son of Uziel to position of prince. Any person who is an observer of life can see how jealousy can drive a person to crazy extremes. Just as the insatiable desire that people have for honor (kavod) can cause a person to do foolish and even wicked things, so too a person must master his tendency to become jealous lest he be driven to self-destructive behavior. Chazal say in Avos [4:21]: Jealousy, lust, and pursuit of honor drive one from this world. This is not just referring to the "world to come". Jealousy, lust, and pursuit of honor can destroy a person's "Olam Hazei" ["this world"] as well. This is the story of what happened to Korach.

The Gemara [Shabbos 152b] expounds the pasuk "...envy brings rotting of the bones" [Mishlei 14:30]. The fate of a jealous person is that his bones decompose; conversely, one who is free of jealousy will not have his bones decompose. Under normal situations, when a person dies, the body

decomposes but the bones do not decompose. That is why there is such a thing as a skeleton. Normally, long after the skin and flesh have decomposed, the bones remain intact. However, the Talmud expounds from this pasuk in Mishlei that in the case of a person who was jealous during his lifetime, even his bones will fall apart after death.

Perhaps the "measure for measure" calculation in this Divine punishment is the following idea. If there is anything that represents the essence (atzmius) of a person, it is his bones (atzamos). The Hebrew word etzem means both 'bone' and 'essence'. Thus, a person's bones represent his essence. When jealousy consumes a person, he does not want to be himself. He wants to be somebody else. A person who wants another person's job or house or wife or power or money – fundamentally indicates he is not happy with who he is and what he possesses. Kinah [jealousy] represents a serious lack of Emunah [fundamentals of faith]. A jealous person fails to understand that the Almighty wants him to have this house and this money and this job and these children and this power, etc. Jealousy of someone else represents denial of one's essence (one's atzmius). Therefore, the Talmud teaches (based on the verse in Mishlei) that the appropriate measure for measure punishment for a jealous person is for his bones to rot.

I saw an ingenious application of this idea in the name of the Maharal Diskin: The Gemara [Nazir 45a] says on the pasuk "And Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him" (Vayikach Moshe es atzmos Yosef imo) [Shemos 13:19] – "what does 'with him' connote – it means with him in his confines (imo – b'mechitzaso).

Maharal Diskin comments that the pasuk should really read "Vayikach Moshe es atzmos Yosef ito". This is because Yosef's instruction to the people (before he died) was "and you shall bring up my bones with you (itchem)". Thus, the appropriate pronoun to indicate Moshe fulfilled Yosef's instructions would be ito rather than imo [with him]. Maharal Diskin explains that the word "imo" always connotes "equals" whereas "ito" which also means "with him" does not necessarily indicate equality of rank. The Torah is thus hinting that Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him, as though they were equals. What does that mean?

Yosef told the Children of Israel "You shall bring up my bones with you" – meaning that my bones will not decompose! My bones will remain intact because despite what the brothers did to me, I never was jealous of them and I never hated them. The proof of this will be that whoever has jealousy suffers the fate that his bones decompose. "My bones will not decompose", Yosef promised. Moshe Rabbeinu took that lesson with him (imo). In other words, Moshe Rabbeinu also had a rough sojourn with the Jewish people in the Wilderness. There were so many times that Klal Yisrael abused Moshe. The Medrash on this week's Parsha even says that every man in Klal Yisrael warned their wives not to seclude themselves with Moshe Rabbeinu, implying that Moshe might commit adultery with them. It would only be logical that Moshe Rabbeinu would feel some jealousy or hatred towards the members of Klal Yisrael. However, "he took the bones of Yosef WITH HIM". He took with him – as an equal partner – the lesson of Yosef not to allow the evil character traits of

jealousy and hatred to consume you.

A Tale Of Two Evil Character Traits Part Two: The Destructive Power of Machlokes

The second negative character trait illustrated in our parsha is the destructive power of machlokes [argumentativeness]. This is no doubt the prime example of this destructive character trait in the entire Torah. People lost their lives, their possessions, and even their children because of machlokes. Rashi notes that machlokes is the only aveyra [sin] for which the Almighty punishes women, children, even innocent babies. Machlokes is like a fire – it consumes everything in its path – guilty or not. Fire does not discriminate – it burns everything in its path.

Just think how crazy these people were. Moshe Rabbeinu in effect challenged these people to a duel. The odds were 250:1 that any of them who offered the Ketores would not be chosen. Nobody plays with those kinds of odds. However, they did it anyway because machlokes consumed them.

I once read the following incident involving the Chofetz Chaim: A Jew once lived in a little village and was neighbors with the (Jewish) "Mayor" of the town. They got into a fight and as is the tendency with machlokes it grew and grew and grew until the point where they were at each other's throats. The neighbor told the Mayor that he was going to go to the Russian authorities and squeal on him that he used his influence to get kids out of the Czarist draft. (Being drafted into the Czarist army was a virtual death sentence – certainly a spiritual death – and people tried all sorts of means – bribery and the like – to get out of being drafted). This Mayor had apparently illegally used his influence in the community to prevent certain boys from being drafted.

This neighbor told his wife what he was going to do. His wife said to him, "Are you crazy? One of the boys the Mayor illegally freed from the draft was our son! If you squeal on him to the authorities, our son might get drafted!" She told him that what he was contemplating doing was like drilling a hole in a boat under the seat of a companion you dislike. The entire boat will sink with all passengers on board!

The man, in his anger against his neighbor, told his wife "I don't care if they arrest my son, I don't care if they arrest me. I don't care if they arrest you – as long as they punish him!" Human beings always act in their own self-interest. The urge to survive is perhaps the most basic of human emotions. However, a person may be willing to sacrifice himself and sacrifice his own child just so that "I should win and defeat the other person". This is the power of machlokes.

Parshas Shlach demonstrates what desire for Kavod [pursuit of honor] can do to a person. Parshas Korach demonstrates what Kinah [jealousy] and Machlokes [argumentativeness] can do to a person. This is why the Torah records these stories. They should make an impression on us. If we do not keep these evil character traits in check and fix them when we need to, then -- Heaven Forbid -- we will pay the price later on.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Korach is provided below:

017 Visiting the Sick
062 May the State of Israel Extradite a Jewish Criminal?
106 The Temple Mount Today-Obligations & Restrictions
151 The Mitzvah of Pidyon Haben: Some Fascinating Facts
198 The Ethiopian Jewry Question
244 Tachanun
288 "Masiach L'fi Tumoh": The Coca Cola Question
334 Leaving a Chasunah Before Benching
378 Truth Telling to Patients
422 Bais Din's Power to Subpoena
466 Tachanun: To Say Or Not To Say
510 Pidyon Habein and Vending Machines
554 The Kohain and the First Aliyah
598 Siamese Twins
642 Different Minhagim for Saying Kedusha
686 Ma'alim B'Kodesh V'ain Moridin
730 Divergent Minhagim in One Shul
774 Tachanun: Most Fascinating Insights
818 Bikur Cholim on Shabbos
862 Preventative Medicine To Avoid Chilul Shabbos
906 Tachanun Without a Sefer Torah?
950 Pidyon Habein: Not Your Regular Cases
993 Pidyon Habein Without A Bris Milah?
1037 Should A Chosson Come To Shul During Sheva Brachos?
1081 Ha'arama: Halachic Loopholes – Advisable or Not?
1124 Segulos for Refuos
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