



Parashat Korah



English version

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CHASING SPARKS

One of the greatest challenges for the spiritual Jew is that after we get inspired, we try to live according to our inspiration for a day or two, but then nothing changes. When bringing up children, when inspiring our students, we face the same dilemma. We get them inspired to grow, but not long after, we see that nothing has really changed. In a world where success is measured only by results, this can be defeating, depressing and discouraging.

It seems that all we are doing is just chasing sparks. Why then is inspiration so important?

In Parashat Pinhas, the Torah tells us that the sons of Korah did not die. Originally, they had advised their father to dispute Moshe's authority; during the rebellion, however, they had "thoughts of Teshuva in their hearts". (They stood up for Moshe, despite the dispute. Yalkut Shimoni 752) So, G-d made them a "high place" in Gehinom, a place where they were able to safely stay. (Rashi 26;11)

This is interesting. King David compiled the Sefer Tehillim from the prayers of ten great personages: Adam Harishon. Malki Tzedek. Avraham. Moshe. Heyman. Yedutun. *And the three sons of Korah.* (Bava Batra 14b) How did King David know what the sons of Korah said if they were in Gehinom, underground? Who ever heard them?

Rashi explains that *Asir, Elkanah, and Aviasaf, the sons of Korah, did not die; but rather, they said Shira there, and that is where they made their Mizmorim. Then, Korah's sons went up from Gehinom, and Ruach Hakodesh was bestowed on them.* (Rashi Tehillim 42)

Why is it that just thoughts of teshuva were powerful enough to save them from the harsh punishment they deserved?

This is a fundamental principle of Judaism, that a single thought of Teshuva can turn a Rasha into a Tzaddik, even if the Rasha did not go through the cleansing process of Teshuva. הרי את מקודשת לי על מנת שאני צדיק אפילו רשע גמור מקודשת (Kiddushin 49b) If someone just says that he is a tzaddik, even if he is, in fact, a Rasha, it can make him into a tzaddik. How does that make sense? The person has not yet gone through the process of Teshuva! All he did was have a thought to be better!? Because a single thought is the first part of the process of connection with G-d, of becoming a Tzaddik. Allow me to explain.

There are two parts to Teshuva. There is the relationship part of it. Then, there is the cleansing part. There is *השיבנו אבינו לתורתך*, which is rekindling the relationship, and there is *סלח לנו*, wiping away the sins. The two are not interdependent. And this is the reason why, before



being judged on Rosh Hashana, before blowing the Shofar, we recite the Psalm of the Shofar blowing, that is attributed to the sons of Korah. למנצח לבני קרה מזמור (Tehillim 47). From them we learn the power of a single thought of spiritual inspiration, at a time that we need it most. That just a thought, alone, of wanting to be a Tzaddik, is enough to save a person from the worst punishments he deserves, even without going through the whole cleansing process!

How can we understand this concept, that just a thought alone can make you into a Tzaddik? This sounds so foreign to judgmental thinking!

Here is how the Zohar begins its very first words. *Rabbi Chezkiah said: "It is written: כְּשִׁשְׁנָה בֵּין הַקִּנּוֹת הַבָּנוֹת כֵּן רַעֲיָתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת: 'As a rose among the thorns, so is my beloved amongst the daughters'.* (Song of Songs 2:2) *Who is the rose? This refers to 'Knesset Yisrael' ... Just as a rose has in it thirteen petals, so, too, Knesset Yisrael has within her thirteen paths of mercy which surround her from all sides.* (Zohar I, Intro. pg. 1)

What does this mean, that we, the Jewish Nation, are compared to roses?

לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל-שְׁשָׁנִים לְבָנֵי-קֹרַח...רָחַשׁ לְבִי דְבָר טוֹב...
LaMenatzeach on roses to the sons of Korah... My heart whispered a good thing...(Tehillim 45) The Yalkut Shimoni asks why the sons of Korah were likened to a rose. *Weren't they more like thorns, and did they not deserve to be burned like the rest of the thorns that they were a part of in their dispute with Moshe!? ... The sons of Korah wanted to give G-d from the golden pans full of incense. But G-d said, I do not need your gold and silver. I do not want your incense of abomination. Instead, I want roses! The sons of Korah said, We are the roses! To which G-d answered, "You have won*

over me! (נצחה תני) *This is the meaning of על למנצח* (Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 747).

What does a rose exemplify? Universally, it relays the message, "I thought about you." In the big world, results, bottom line, dollars and cents are what counts. It does not make a difference how you think, because everything is based on technical considerations. In relationships, though, thoughts are what make the relationship or break the relationship. There is a golden rule in relationships. People do not remember what you do for them. People only remember how you make them feel. You make people feel better by thinking about them, and *showing* that you thought about them.

Roses are used to improve relationships, because relationships are dependent on what place the relationship has in your thoughts. G-d told the sons of Korah, *I do not need anything from My Children. All I want is that you will be thinking about Me! All I want is roses!*

The comparison of Klal Yisrael to a rose conveys the idea that even if we are surrounded by thorns, or evil deeds, in the darkest moments of our lives, we find a way to think about G-d, we look for inspiration. Why are the Jews compared to roses? *The rose is unique in that no matter how fiercely the wind blows, no matter how much it is pricked by thorns, it always finds a way to be facing upwards; so, too, the Jewish people. No matter what type of exile we go through, or what situation we find ourselves in, our hearts are always in line with our Father in Heaven.* (Vayikra Rabba Acharei M. 23)

Sometimes, we are just chasing sparks of inspiration, but that's fine. Because that is precisely what makes Klal Yisrael the roses we ultimately are.



FRIEND OR FOE

The wisest of men wrote that the definition of a good wife is a wife who knows how to build a family. Not a woman who is fashionable, witty, fun, supportive, rich, always encouraging or cute. But one who does her job, to build the home, whatever that entails. King Solomon wrote in Mishlei, חכמת נשים בנתה ביתה, the wisdom of women built her house. ואולת בידיה תהרסנו And the foolish woman destroys her house, with her own hands. (Mishlei 14:1)

The Talmud teaches that the former part of the verse is referring to the wife of On Ben Pelet. She told her husband that whether Korah was right or Moshe was right, On was not going to be upgraded to High Priest. He had nothing to gain, and could only lose. She did not support her husband's argument. She challenged him, ever so gently and respectfully. And by doing so, she saved her family.

Korah's wife seemed to be the kind of woman that many men would wish to have. A woman who holds her husband on a pedestal - as "*the*" first and foremost. "You can do it, Korah!" "You can be number one, the man closest to G-d! Moshe's position is a cinch for you!" "I will make you the most beautiful tzitzit, a blue garment, and you, the richest of all men, my brilliant husband, my tzaddik, father of wonderful children, will be elected over Moshe!" Pretty encouraging, wasn't she? Yet, she demolished her house with her own hands. Because a good wife is not a blindly encouraging one.

In marriage, some of the hardest conversations are the best ones. Opinions, differences, backgrounds. When you see things from another perspective, you notice your blind spots. The Hebrew word for marriage is נישואין, the root being to uplift, נשא. Marriage is about constantly uplifting yourself, and one another. If you do not keep rising to the challenge, the marriage can be terminated.

At times, we tend to think that love in marriage means oneness. Fun, schmoozing, romance, support, and encouragement. But real love is harmony, two different beings complementing each other, even if they are not always complimenting. Quite often, when I am coaching yeshiva students, being part of the chevrah, part of the social life going on in yeshiva, is a major topic. Usually, the way I help boys overcome giving in to the social pressure is by defining what a best friend is. Your best friend is not the one you have the best time with, the one with whom you go on trips, make a barbeque, play ball, and shmooze. Your best friend is the one who brings out the best in you. (Lucky is the man whose best friend in the world is his wife. As long as she brings out the best in you, she is your best friend!)

We like to think that our friends in life are those who smile to us, those who we chill with, those who see the world the way we see it. But quite often, that is not the case. Sometimes, those can be our greatest enemies. Before the Pesach Ben Hazmanim, I got a phone call. It was from a yeshiva student who is a weekly reader of Thinkingaboutme.org parasha papers. "Rabbi, can I ask you a quick question? I have a problem. I am going back home to LA for Pesach, and I have friends there that smoke weed. I have been clear from drugs for my year in yeshiva in Israel. No one else in the yeshiva takes drugs. I really do not want to go back to drugs when I am home for the Pesach break. Rabbi, please, help me."

I recommended either that he delete all of his "drug friends" from his contacts, or that he stay in Israel for Pesach. He opted to delete his friends. Fine.

After Pesach, I bumped into him and asked him how things are going. "Fine". Were you able to stay strong and stay clean over your Bein Hazmanim? "Yes. Until the last few days. Before coming back to Israel, I called one of my best "friends". I told him that I am going back to Israel, and I needed from him a huge favor. I needed him



to contact the dealer and buy me some weed. My friend said, I am not doing it. You have been off of drugs for a year. If you want the weed, I'll give you the number of the dealer, and you pick it up yourself. But I am not calling for you. I told him, 'Come on, you are my only best friend in the world. I really need you now, and I promised my Rabbi I will not put those numbers in my phone again. Please, don't do this to me bro, just one pack of weed. Come on! You're my only friend in the world.' So, he went and got me the weed. Rabbi, I am addicted. I am out of control. It's hopeless."

I raised his chin so that his gaze would be locked into mine. "I thought you said that you erased all of your 'Friends' from your contacts? Why was he not erased? If you would like me to help you, I can do so only if you erase him, right now, from your contacts."

Rabbi, you can't ask me to do that. He is my only friend. He is my best friend. He always pulls through for me. Please, I'll do anything you ask of me, just not to erase my only friend in life, who was always there for me since pre-1a! (I used to think that the greatest enemy to change is speed. Now I believe that the greatest enemy to change is "friends".)

Many times in life, we need to clarify Chevrah, social circles, we need to evaluate the influence that social circles have on us. It has been said, that if you want to make enemies, try to change something. So when deciding who is friend or foe, first clarify your goals in life. Define a "friend" as one who can help you to get where you want to go in life; those who stand in the way of your goals, or who keep you away from them, are your enemies. Or, you can just leave things up to chance, ignoring your ability to make decisions and guide your own life, making "friends" with people who are nice to you, even though those people are not in line with your life's goals.

Whenever we want to make a change for the better, to improve, we need to examine our social contacts: the ones who are on board with our goals, encouraging new habits that we would like to adopt, are our friends. The people who attempt to pull us away from our life's values are, in this case, our enemies!

This is the secret to all change. And this is the secret to genuine, constructive, long-term relationships.

Exciting news...

I am starting a summer podcasts series for women! These podcasts will be similar to the Women's Chabura classes but in an extremely condensed version. I will present the problem at hand, the Torah Wisdom, and the "Selfie Steps", the concrete tools that will allow you to transform your lives. Sign up via email and you will receive the link to download these podcasts, so that you can listen at your own leisure. I hope these 15 minute bursts of Torah Growth will help you reach your personal summer goals.

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