



Parashat Korach



English version

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THE ART OF ASKING A RABBI

One of the worst things that has ever happened to Ultra-Orthodox Jewry is that it is not cool anymore to have a Rabbi that you consult with. It has become cool for people to be brave, to make their own decisions. It has become “in” for people to decide their own halachic behavior, or behavior when dealing with people, to feel that they are “grown up and can make their own decisions”. Until now, this was common in Reform and Conservative circles. But now, it has become part of our systems, as well. This causes great destruction, as we can see now, with “religious politicians” who do not consult with their Rabbis. They can choose injustice, unfair, anti-religious decisions in the name of the greatest values, when underlying their actions is a driving desire for power, pride or fame. On the way to achieving their personal goals, they are causing infinite damage to the entire Jewish people.

I have four people in the world whose opinion of me and what I say and do is important: my Rabbi, my wife, my father and my mother. And my Rabbi always has the final say. I can't afford, emotionally, to care about what anyone else thinks. Recently, a girl in Shidduchim, was asked Hashkafa questions by the prospective yeshiva bachur, and was questioned as to what type of house she wants to build. The answer I told her to say, in the future, is simple. Whatever the rabbi of her husband will tell him is the way of the Torah, and what the Torah wants from us, that is going to be my Hashkafa as well. Simple. There is no place for opinion.

Some people think I am crazy, wrong, irresponsible, immature, for consulting with my Rabbis so much. I don't care. I actually asked my

Rabbi this question as well. He answered that Shaul Hamelech's downfall was precisely from that point of not waiting for his Rabbi, Shmuel Hanavi. (Shmuel 1;13; 14) He had good answers not to wait for Shmuel, but no answer is good enough to justify not asking a Rabbi. Although Shmuel told King Shaul to wait for him, Shmuel had not yet arrived, the people were leaving, the Pelishtim gathered to wage war against Israel, and Shaul still had not yet prayed ... All the good excuses in the world. From this point of not listening to his Rabbi, Shaul was destined to lose the royalty, as Shmuel said, “*ועתה ממלכתך לא־תקום*”, *בְּקֵשׁ יְקִינָה לֹא אִישׁ כְּלִבּוֹ וַיִּצְוֶהוּ יְקִינָה לְנֶגִיד עַל־עַמּוֹ בִּי לֹא יִשְׁמְרֶתָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־צִוֶּה יְקִינָה*” *But now, your kingdom shall not continue; YKVK has sought for Himself a man after His heart, and YKVK has appointed him to be a ruler over His people, for you have not kept that which YKVK commanded you.* G-d is not interested in “kings” that are so brave that they make decisions, without consulting with their rabbis. No matter how great or brave you are, no matter how right, virtuous and altruistic you seem to be, and no matter how many excuses you have!

This was Korah's fight. All of us are holy, all of us want to be close to G-d - we do not need middlemen; no one will teach me how to be G-dly; no one will teach me what Judaism really is. If we are all Tchelet, we do not need Tchelet strings; if we are all Sifrei Torah, we do not need Mezuzot; if we are all holy, we do not need rabbis. This argument took down too many great men, not just the great Korah, carrier of the Holy Ark, and the candidate for being the “Levi Gadol”, but the Nesiim as well.

This year someone told me that according to the opinion of the Shelah, it took down Nachshon Ben Aminadav, Aharon's brother-in-law, and the forefather of King David! Nachshon was one of the Nesiim, one of the 250 great Rabbis who joined Korah's argument against Moshe! As great as he was, and he was one of the greatest men to walk the face of the earth, he made this grave mistake. Nachshon, who was so brave, who was the first to enter the raging Yam Suf, did something without a directive from Moshe, and that was praiseworthy and rewarded. But when joining Korah to be a "rabbi-less" Jew, after G-d had given the Torah, he should have first asked Moshe or Aharon to explain their position of their positions.

I wanted to write this idea, this week, but I asked my Rabbi, if it is appropriate to write this about Nachshon, especially because the Torah did not mention who those who joined Korah were, probably because the Torah wanted to hide the identity of the great men who fell. My Rabbi said, absolutely not! Nachshon, who was the forefather of the King David dynasty and was praised for his actions, would not have joined Korach! I looked into it more, and found that the opinion that Nachshon was part of those who joined Korah, is not an accepted one! Although it is clear from the Seder Haolam 12 that Nachshon died in the second year of the desert, the accepted opinion is that he died by the *מתאוונים*! And even the Shelah's words can be interpreted differently!

Either way, even if Nachshon was not in the fight against Korah, amongst the men who joined Korah against Moshe were men of the greatest stature. We learn from the way the Torah mentions who Aharon married, *אֵלִישֶׁבֶת בַּת־עַמִּינָדָב אֶחָת נְהֻשָּׁן*, that Elisheva's brother was Nachshon, to teach you that when someone marries, he should check to see what type of brothers she has, because her brothers have the nature that will be found in her sons. And behold, the two older sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, died, for using the acclaimed nature of Nachshon to jump to do what their heart tells them is the will of G-d, even before being told do so, in the wrong way!! As the Midrash Sechel Tov tells

us, Nadav followed *נדב רווחו*, the generosity of his spirit. *אביהו*, Avihu, that he said, "Aharon is my biological father, not my father for advice." And Nadav and Avihu, even though they were greater than Moshe and Aharon, their not being willing to accept guidance caused their downfall!

Even King Solomon, who was one of the wisest men ever, fell after he did not have his Rabbi, Shimi Ben Gera, anymore. Immediately after Shimi was killed, just one Passuk later, (Melachim1; chapter 2-3) King Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh! Although K. Solomon did this with the intention of *לתקן עולם במלכות ש-די*, to make a universe that would serve G-d, it was the beginning of King Solomon's downfall. That's what happens when one does not have a Rabbi, even if he is the wisest of men!

In today's busy and "connected" world, people do not have time to ask Rabbis. They would prefer submitting a question, electronically. There is no *personal* connection with a Halachic authority or mentor. But the more connection, the better. Here is a story that will blow your mind.

My mother, may she merit all the blessings of the Torah, told me last Shabbat the following story. For those who don't know, my mother, answers all the Kashrut questions regarding the different products, for the JSOR, the Kashrut of Deal, where my father is the Supervising Rabbi and coordinator. One of the most amazing things about the Syrian community is that there are women who, according to the way they dress, you would never think they would be so particular when it comes to Kashrut. My mother, who answer the questions of the three WhatsApp chats, of 1000 people each, said that there was one such particular woman who would bombard my mother with questions, of even things like the kashrut of soap. My mother always answered her questions with due diligence, no matter how trivial they seemed to be.

One time, this woman Whatsapped my mother. "Mrs. Farhi, I ask you the smallest questions and you always are so kind to take the time to answer me. Mrs. Farhi, I am presently in the hospital, and I



am on the bed waiting for the doctor to come in and do an abortion. The doctor said the baby will not be a healthy one, and it will be a big deal to me and my family to have such a baby. I just had this thought that if I ask you every small question, I should ask your advice regarding this question, as well.” My mother responded that she does not have the authority to answer such questions, but to wait, as she will immediately take the details of the doctor’s opinion, and my father will bring it to the authority who is able to answer such questions, R’ Moshe Feinstein’s closest, right-hand man. The woman waited for the response. The Rabbi said that she **cannot** go through with the abortion!

This woman got off the bed and started preparing to leave. The doctor came into the room and asked her where she was going. She said, “My Rabbi said I cannot make an abortion, so I do what my Rabbi tells me.” The doctor gave her this confused, and

then angry, look. “Ask your Rabbi, if he is willing to be the one to bring up this child!” The woman, calmly, turned toward to the door, confidently saying, “I trust my Rabbis. I only put *in* my body what they tell me to. And, I will not take out of my body what they tell me not to.”

It turned out that the baby girl needed just minor surgery, and was totally fine! My parents help people they never saw, including this woman, just because they are Jews! 10 years later, when my parents were in the airport before a flight, they noticed a mother and a 10-year-old girl, pointing at them. My parents asked if everything was okay. Do we know you from somewhere, or do you know us? The mother explained with a tear in her eyes, “Yes, this daughter is the girl that I almost killed. But because of my trivial Kashrut questions, you saved this daughter. Thank you!”

THE ART OF NARRATION

Your life decisions and everyday decisions are generally limited and confined to your four S’s. Social (the people you associate with and see, role models, community), State of mind (emotion, mood, physiology, etc.), Structure (what is most accessible, easy, simple, available), and Story (the narrative of your life and of the people you associate yourself with). It is impossible to change yourself, or motivate others to change, without changing at least one of these four S’s.

All motivational speakers know this secret. To get you motivated about something, they need to temper with, or implement, one of the four S’s. Changing the narrative, the story that people have come to believe, is probably the most powerful. All the pain, anger and grudges in your life, which you cannot rid yourself of, are all your version of your personal story. And people can live their whole life in pain, just to preserve their version of the story, the one they are familiar with, the version they relate to.

The Torah, itself, is written in story form, not as a dry list of laws. Because the way human beings think, the way things stick, is in story format. Any successful storyteller will tell you that there are elements that make specific stories, and specific versions of a story, etched in the listeners’ memory.

Korah gathered the people and told them a story. After all Moshe had done for the Jewish Nation, how could Korah persuade the people to go against Moshe Rabbenu and question his trust and validity? Listen closely to Korah’s story; pay attention to every detail. You will learn all the wisdom of persuasion and marketing from it. You will learn how to cause people to sell out of one version of a story and buy into another. You will learn how to question your own life stories, the ones that have caused you pain, anger, and grudges.

There was a widow in my neighborhood. She had two daughters and one field. She was plowing her field, and Moshe showed up. “You can’t plow with



an ox together with a donkey. It is Kilayim (two different species of animals, together)...” She was planting her field, and Moshe showed up. “You cannot plant your field Kilayim (two different crops, together) ...” She was harvesting, and Moshe showed up. “You need to leave Leket, Shikcha and Peah for the poor” ... She was setting up the grain in the silo, and Moshe showed up. “You need to give Terumah to the Kohen, Maaser to the Levi, and Maaser to the poor” ... The poor widow accepted all Moshe’s instructions, in good faith, and turned over all her harvest to him.

She sold her field and bought, instead, two sheep. She assumed that she and her daughters could make clothing from the sheeps’ wool and benefit from their milk and offspring. When the first baby lamb was born, Aharon showed up. “Give me the first born, because the first-born lamb goes to the Kohen” ... She accepted her fate and gave him the first baby lambs... She needed the wool of her sheep to clothe her family, so she started shearing their wool, and Aharon showed up again. “Give me the first of the shearings, because the first of the shearings go to the Kohen” ... She said, I have no energy to stand in the face of this man! I will just slaughter my sheep, so that we can, at least, eat its meat! And then Aharon showed up. “Give me the parts that belong to the Kohen.” She threw her hands up in despair, “Even after I slaughtered my sheep, I couldn’t be rid of Moshe and Aharon!” She said, I will make the meat of my slaughtered sheep holy, to Heaven. Aharon then took all the slaughtered lambs, saying, whatever was chereem goes to the Kohen, and left the poor widow to cry with her two daughters... Korah finished off his story, saying, Moshe and Aharon do everything for themselves, and they blame it all on G-d. (Yalkut Shimoni)

Obviously, this story was entirely fabricated. The mitzvot of Terumah, Maaser, Leket, Shikcha and Peah, etc., are all mitzvot of Eretz Yisrael! Korah was still in the desert! Who was plowing and harvesting while the Jews were in the desert?! How were the people foolish enough to believe Korah’s story?!

Korah was not a fool. He knew that, on a rational level, he had no shot in trying to get the people to be on his side and to question their trust in Moshe. He knew he needed to talk to their emotions. He knew he needed to relate to them. The narratives of our stories that hurt us most, the ones that we bought into and we cannot let go of, are the ones that we relate to, the ones that talk to our emotions. Emotions can take over rational thinking, and our emotions are just the result of the stories that we tell ourselves.

Tony Robbins has an amazing method how to relate to people and talk to their emotions. He calls it BEND WIMP. What are the Beliefs of the people you are trying to relate to? How do they Evaluate success? What are their Needs? What are their Desires? What are their Wounds, the pains they are running away from? What are their Interests; how do they busy themselves, in their free time? Who are their role Models? What would make the people you wish to relate to Proud?

Korah was a Bend Wimp master. Korah, a brilliant man, knew he needed to relate to the people through a story that would take them out of reality and bring them into a world of imagination. Korah knew to focus on the people who felt that they had been wronged, his neighbors from the tribe of Reuven. Reuven’s tribe were most upset that the Leviim got the special benefits, which they felt were rightfully theirs. After all, Reuven was Yaakov’s firstborn. Korah knew that there were at least 250 people, mostly from Reuven’s tribe, who desired to be on the same level of closeness with G-d as Moshe Rabbenu, and were willing to sin for the sake of their spirituality הַחַטָּאִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־שֵׁחַ. He told them a personal story, of someone “he knew” from his neighborhood, and made it sound real.

After he had the Bnei Reuven on his side, Korah was able to move on to addressing the wounds of the rest of the nation: after all, the Levites took the rights from the firstborn of each family. FBLM – FirstBorn Lives Matter. Korah, the first democrat, brought in the factor of identity, “it’s us or them”, כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה בָּלֵם קִדְשֵׁימ וּבְתוֹכְכֶם יִקְהָק וּמִדְּוַע תִּתְנַשְׂאוּ



על־קִהָל יִקְרָא. (Bamidbar 16; 3) Korah added salt to the people's wounds, by mentioning all the presents the Kohen receives. Datan and Aviram added more salt to the wounds by questioning the gain of what the Jews had actually received from Moshe and Aharon. *They took us out of Egypt, an established land of milk and honey, and instead of being brought to the Promised Land, we are all going to die here in the desert.* Korah belittled Moshe in their eyes, starting with the Mitzvah of Kilayim, a mitzvah that makes no sense to mankind. He spoke of a crying widow and orphans who had no husband or father to defend them, and were prime candidates for Moshe and Aharon to pick on.

Korah made it seem as if *this is not about his own jealousy*. This was about a purpose greater than himself; it was לשם שמים. After all, who else would defend the poor widow and her orphans? Who else would save the nation from these heartless leaders? Every fight, every protest, needs an element of לשם שמים to catch on. It is amazing how each person who joined Korah's bandwagon, and the slogan that said, Just Not Moshe, had their own personal agenda. The Firstborn wished they could retrieve the spiritual status they had lost. Datan and Aviram had an old account to settle with Moshe. But they all bought into this nonsensical story, because they all related to it, emotionally.

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

The art of persuasion is one of the most fascinating things in the world. You can persuade someone to think a certain way, to believe a certain way, all dependent on your ability to relate to them, how you portray things and what you embellish and focus on.

Selfie steps to help you uncover your own deeper truth:

1. Go back to the very beginning of every story. (The Torah, is the only story, that actually goes back to the very beginning.) Then, go back a few steps before that. There is always an earlier step that people tend to miss. Make sure you bring it all into the narration.
2. What is the drive of the person who is telling the story, and making it a narrative? What does the storyteller gain by holding onto the story?
3. Try to explore and differentiate between the objective facts of the story, and the subjective narrative. Question every detail of the story, even if it seems unimportant.
4. What other versions of the story are there? Which version has the most facts and honest, unbiased witnesses?

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 (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* (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 Chezkiyah said: "It is written: כְּשׁוֹשָׁנָה*

:בין החוחים כן רעיתי בין הבנות '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?

*לְמַנְצַחַה עַל-שְׁשָׁנִים לְבָנֵי-קָרַח...רָחַשׁ לְבִי דָבָר 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! (נצחתני) This is the meaning of *לְמַנְצַחַה עַל שׁוֹשָׁנִים לְבָנֵי קָרַח* (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*

THE “F” PIRATES

The emotions that control us the most are the emotions that we do not notice. Just awareness of an emotion is more than 50% of the solution. Many times, others can be more aware than we are of the emotions that are inhibiting us, because emotions are blind spots. This is the story of Korah. Despite Korah’s greatness, or rather, because of Korah’s greatness, he made such a grave mistake. The greater the man, the bigger the blind spot.

When coaching students in learning, I am on the lookout for the three F’s. Not the F’s on the report card, but the three F emotions. Fear, Frustration, and Failure. Any fear, such as “I might make a mistake”, or a fear that “I wasted my time studying, if I get less than an 80”, can be classified as a fear and will zap one’s focus. In all areas of performance in life, but especially in learning, the three F’s can “pop the tires” of peak performance. Once the emotion is present, the circuit to the learning brain has been turned Off. And when someone is not able to focus, it is most of the time an emotional issue.

It is not only in school that we need to learn, in which emotions are blind spots. Many people have the mistaken idea that learning ends with the diploma. This is far from the truth. There are many different types of intelligence, such as financial intelligence, intelligence of art and music, and athletic intelligence (how one controls the balance and energy of his body). The most important intelligence, of course, is emotional intelligence. This means how you manage your emotions in order to get where you want to in life.

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.

When someone says something stupid, it does not mean that he is stupid. Most probably, it is because his emotional intelligence was short-wired by some type of emotion. For example, fear of what someone may think, say or do, or fear of failure, triggered by a thought such as “my older brother is more successful”, and mistakenly interpreted as “I am not successful”.

A successful businessman needs to take bold, calculated risks. That’s impossible when a person is overcome with feelings of Fear, Frustration, or Failure. And, as said above, awareness is more than 50 percent of the solution. In this week’s parasha, by noticing how a great man like Korah fell, we can learn how important it is to be aware of one of the most powerful emotions. Jealousy. And we see what jealousy can do when one is not aware of its presence.

There is a common mistake made about Korah; people can interpret the parsha as implying that Korah was just a jealous man looking for power. After learning the commentaries, it will be clear that this was not at all the case. Korah was on a much higher spiritual level than we can even fathom. He carried the Holy Ark, and he was constantly working on his spirituality and totally separated from all physicality. He had Ruah Hakodesh. He was a highly respected man, in a very holy generation. He was not just a ‘simple guy’. This whole fight was, *in his eyes*, לשם שמים, for the sake of Heaven’s Name, and he had just one agenda: there was only one thing that he wanted to do – to bring Ketoret in the Holy of Holies. He



knew what was at stake, that he might lose the battle against Moshe, but he just wanted that chance, and he believed with every bone in his body that he was right. He let his wife instigate the fight, but, as he was striving for spirituality, he never dreamed that the driving force behind his dispute was jealousy of his cousin, Elitzafan. We know that Korah was jealous, only because our Rabbis teach us this. But, Korah, himself, had no idea that this was the case.

The Masters of Mussar teach us that everyone has jealousy. It is just that there are “different strokes for different folks”. People are jealous of others, whom they feel are in the same boat. Or, others who have the same goal and put in similar efforts, but get far better results. This is why jealousy can be stronger in families. So, if you find that you are jealous of someone, it does not mean that you are weak. It means that you are aware. And it means that G-d is putting you to a test, to overcome it, and to recognize that you are not in the same boat with anyone else. *You are in your own boat. And love your boat.*

Our Rabbis teach that if Korah would have fought off his jealousy, he would have become a High Levite. Just as there is a High Priest, a title that Aharon deserved for lovingly accepting the fact that his younger brother, Moshe, was inaugurated to a higher position than he, so, too, Korah could have been uplifted had he accepted his position. (Whenever a person goes through a Nisayon, a test, it is because G-d wants to bring him up a level. The word נסיון means Test, but it also means to be raised up high, נס להתגורס .) Once a person is aware that he has jealousy in him, he is in a much better position to overcome it. Awareness of emotions means that you can now fight them with logic, and not let the emotion rule you.

There is a saying that “The way to Hell is paved with good intentions”. Even Eichmann was murmuring, before he was hung, “I was a good officer. I was carrying out my orders.” Human morale won’t let a person do something wrong without self-justification. This is the lesson from Korah that we need to internalize. That a person’s emotions can blind him into justifying the worst behaviors, habits and actions.

G-D’S CALCULATOR

Korah and his followers filed a complaint against Moshe and Aharon. *“The whole nation is holy, and why should you be raised, self-importantly, from amongst G-d’s community?”* Korah wanted to be just as holy as Moshe and Aharon. Despite Korah’s high position, Korah wanted the highest level of holiness; being a Levi was not enough for Korah. He wanted to be High Priest. Moshe answered Korah’s complaint... *“Isn’t it enough that G-d separated you (as Levite), do you also want to be a Kohen?”*

Moshe’s answer doesn’t seem to add up. Moshe, the holiest of men, who ascended the Heavens to bring down the Torah, built the Tabernacle, and served with his brother Aharon as High Priest can’t tell a Levite to be content with being a Levite. It is like the rich fellow comforting his struggling, destitute friend, *“Cheer up! At least you have bread and you’re not starving!”* The poor friend responds, *“If you were struggling also, I would*

accept your consolation. But, how can you tell me to value bread! Let’s see how happy you would be if all you could afford were the bare minimum! You don’t think twice when you lose fifty dollars, so how can you tell me to be happy when that is all I have to make Shabbat?” How then could Moshe, on his high spiritual plateau, console Korah for being just a Levi?

The answer to this is a big lesson. Moshe was telling Korah that there is an enormous difference between spiritual matters and material ones. True, the more millions the rich fellow makes, the less sleep he loses on small amounts of cash. But in spirituality, in religion, the higher level one achieves does not in any way minimize the importance of the first small steps of spiritual growth. Quite the contrary, the more one values each step of spiritual growth, the more he grows. *Korah, be grateful you’re a Levi, appreciate the*



spiritual level G-d put you on, and then G-d will bring you up to the next level.

Each step on the way to the Beit Medrash has value, even if you get stuck in the rain and decide to turn back home. Just the decision to go to Beit Medrash is enormous. The Evil Inclination cannot convince the determined to stop coming to the Beit Medrash. Instead, he convinces them that they should be doing much more, and what they are doing has little value!

Take out a calculator and do the math. G-D counts our mitzvot more than we count money. Our Rabbis teach us *that the entire Universe was worthwhile for G-d to create, if only once, one Jew would say the words, Baruch Hu Baruch Shemo!...* One Amen is worth a thousand times saying *Baruch Hu Baruch Shemo!* One Amen *Yehe Sheme Rabba* is worth a thousand times saying *Amen!* One word of Torah is worth a thousand times saying Amen *Yehe Sheme Rabba!*

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, *ביתה בנתה בנשים נשיתם*, 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.

YOU CAN’T HAVE THE JOB

וקרח שפיקח היה מה ראה לשטות הזה? אלא, עינו הטעות – ראה שלשלת גדולה עומדת הימנו, שמואל ששקול כמשה משה ואהרן בכהניו ושמואל ‘ (תהלים צט) ואהרן שנאמר עשרים וארבעה משמרות עומדות מבני ... בקוראי שמו

אמר אפשר כל הגדולה... בניו שכולם מתנבאים ברוה”ק הזאת עתידה לעמוד ממני ואני אדום

Korah was a wise man. What did he see that led him to do such foolishness, to argue with Moshe?



His eye confused him. He saw great descendants going forth from him. Shmuel, who was considered of equal importance to that of Moshe and Aharon, as it says in Tehillim, "Moshe and Aharon, in his Priesthood, and Shmuel, upon calling His Name". Etc. Twenty-four families of Kohanim, all of whom prophesized with Ruach Hakodesh. He said, Is it possible that this greatness will come forth from me, and I will remain silent? (Midrash; Rashi)

Why does the Midrash use the words עינו הטעתו , his eye tricked him. Why not simply say, he made a mistake? And why is it in singular form, עינו, his eye, and not עיניו, his eyes?

I believe the answer is the following. When someone is able to see with one eye, he cannot recognize a clear depth of vision. His sight can be only two-dimensional. G-d created us with two eyes, so that we can see 3D, that we can recognize depth. When a driver can see only from one eye, he needs to be careful to properly calculate distances in his field of vision. (Try it. Close one eye, and hold two items as far away from you as you can, one slightly closer than the other. Are you sure you can tell which is closer?) Korach's eye tricked him, keeping him from recognizing how long he needed to wait to go up to the next level of spirituality. He miscalculated how far he was from his spiritual dream.

So many men have fallen short of becoming great simply for not having had the strength to wait, for having mistakenly calculated how much patience they need. But the key to everything great is patience. You get the chicken by waiting for the egg to hatch, not by smashing it open.

In R' Shalom Shwadron's Sefer, שאל אביך ויגדך, I saw the following, amazing story. A certain R Eliezer, Rosh Yeshiva of the Lomza Yeshiva, was looking for a new Mashgiach. He traveled to Radin, to ask the Chafetz Chaim if any of the Avreichim there would be suitable for the job. The Chafetz Chaim pointed out a certain scholar,

praising his abilities in understanding people, and his Fear of Heaven. R Eliezer took note of the name and traveled back to Lomza. This part of the story happened during the last days before Bein Hazmanim.

On Chol Hamoed, though, R Eliezer received a message from the Chafetz Chaim, saying that he took back his endorsement from that specific Avreich to be Mashgiach in the Yeshiva. R Eliezer realized that it must have been something very urgent, if the Chafetz Chaim was willing to write on Chol Hamoed to relay this message. So R Eliezer went running back to Radin, to understand what this Avreich did that caused him to lose the zechut of being Mashgiach in the Yeshiva. This was obviously urgent, because then, Lomza needed to find another candidate to fill the position. What could this man have done that was so severe that made him lose his good reputation?

The Chafetz Chaim explained his stand on the matter. "Not long after you returned home, this scholar came to me, complaining about his Parnassah, his livelihood. A man who is complaining about his livelihood cannot be a good Mashgiach."

What?!? But what is so severe about his having complained to you about his financial state? Why does that mean that he cannot be a good Mashgiach?

"Because if he is complaining about his livelihood, that means he does not have *endless* patience. How can you hire a man to be a Mashgiach in your Yeshiva, if he runs out of patience?"

It is so sad. This man, could have had tremendous merits, helping yeshiva boys find enjoyment in learning Torah. Helping them at this crucial time in their life, to solidify a lifestyle of serving G-d. What an amazing Olam Haba! But he blew it! He just did not have enough patience!!!

THE GOOD WIFE



The beginning of this week's parasha lists the people that Korach convinced to join his battle against Moshe. Datan, Aviram and On Ben Pelet. Our rabbis point out that On B.P. was not mentioned in the pesukim amongst those who were punished along with Korach. The Talmud in Sanhedrin tells us the rest of On's story. (Sanhedrin 110a)

Rav said, On ben Pelet's wife saved him. *She said to him, what do you have to gain in this dispute? Either way, you will be a follower. If Korach wins, you will follow him. If Moshe wins you will be his follower. What exactly do you gain here? ...* With this, she was able to undo her husband's scheme to go against Moshe, our leader. And, when King Solomon wrote in Mishlei *החכמת נשים בנתה ביתה* *the wisdom of women built her house*, he was referring to the wife of On.

This is more than puzzling. The main argument against Moshe was *רב לכם כי כל העדה כולם קדשים* – “You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation is holy, and G-d is in their midst. So, why do you raise yourselves above G-d's community?” This claim was not dealt with by the wife of On. She did not undo this complaint. So, how exactly did she undo her husband's drive? And, how did she deserve to be called a smart woman *just for asking him what he has to gain?*

JUST A REMINDER

Some of the most important things in life – we overlook. Not because they are not important to us, but because it is so obvious that they are important that we think that there is no importance in thinking about them! There are parents who know that spending ten minutes a day with each child is the **only** way to build a healthy relationship, with good communication to survive the teenage years. It is so important and so simple that it just gets forgotten. It is ironic that, many times, parents involved in education forget to keep to the guidelines with their own children.

The answer is that her wisdom was to see what was *really* bothering her husband. She knew that this claim was bogus, and it was more of a power struggle than anything else. She saw that this was not a fight for justice. Rather, honor was the underlying factor. So, she asked the right question. *What honor do you gain?* Your risk is great, and your gain is nil. She did not tell him, “I think you are making a mistake.” Rather, she listened to and recognized the true motivation behind their stated complaints. Her wisdom was displayed here in two things. First, she did not *tell* her husband anything, preach to him or offer advice. She just asked him a very good question. Second, *she knew the right question to ask.* She made no mention of Moshe and the priestly presents, knowing that these had nothing to do with her husband's underlying drive.

From this episode, we can learn two of the most powerful ways to help the people in our lives, the people that are closest to us. First, we have to listen well, extremely well, and notice what is the number one thing that is driving them in the wrong direction. And second, not offer advice too quickly. Giving advice doesn't work anywhere near as effectively as thinking out the right question to get the person to come up with the answer on his/her own.

There is importance in making a specific reminder for these significant but overly obvious things, so that unbidden and undesirable failures will not occur. If a person just says, I know that it is wrong to gossip, so I do not have to take out time for learning the halachot of sh'mirat halashon in my schedule, inevitably, he will gossip. If a person says that he *knows* that anger is such a bad thing and there is no point in his trying to internalize it by reading the Iggeret Haramban (reminder not to get angry) or making some other effort to avoid it, then he will get angry.



This was one of the mistakes of Korach. Korach approached Moshe with the following two questions:

* How can it be that an all blue (*tchelet*), four-cornered garment still needs to have *tzitzit* (*tchelet* strings)?

* How can a room filled with Torah scrolls need a mezuzah on the door, if the Torah scrolls themselves contain the *parshiot* of the mezuzah?

A simple answer to this is exactly what we said before: The strings are there to stick out, as an

extra reminder, no matter how small it may be, that we have to keep to the *mitzvot*. The *Mezuza* on the door reminds us that G-d is with us in the innermost rooms of our homes and our souls. It is a reminder on the door post. Korach believed that if a person is great, and Korach himself was, he does not need a reminder. He does not need to do introspection. Let us learn that although we may be great people, we are all still human. We all make mistakes. We all forget. Without introspection, we can end up making mistakes in what may be the most important things in our lives.

ELIMINATING JEALOUSY

I recently met a man of ninety-five who looked much younger than his age. I was so impressed by his physical and emotional energy that I could not resist asking him to reveal the secret of his longevity. Happy to oblige, the vigorous nonagenarian jumped out of his chair and excitedly started telling me his life principles. One of them had to do with jealousy and envy – highly appropriate for the story of Korach in this week's parashah. The man declared that he would never look enviously at those who had more than he did, but kept focused on those who had less. He explained that this kept him in good shape.

It turns out that the old man's approach is hardly new. King Solomon wrote *רקב עצמות קנאה* – Envy causes rotting of the bones (Mishlei 14:30). The Talmud explains: If one has jealousy or competitiveness in his heart, his bones will “disintegrate”; that is, he will die before his time. This does not refer only to physical death, but to such expressions of emotional malaise as nervous breakdowns and heart conditions, as well.

There is another way of looking at the term *עצמות קנאה* which can offer us additional help in dealing with jealousy. *עצמות* also hints at *עצמיות* – independent and original character. When we are jealous, we are investing our emotional and intellectual energy in thoughts of what the other person has that we are lacking. By doing so, however, we lose out on improving our own original and independent character. As long as we are busy trying to write our own unique life story of success, thoughts of

jealousy will not have room to dance in our brain. But, if we see ourselves as merely part of a group, without a unique identity, we will start measuring our success against that of others. Indeed, the Mishnah in Avot (4:21) says: *הקנאה התאוה והכבוד מוציין את האדם מן העולם* – jealousy, materialistic desires, and the pursuit of honor all take a person out of the world. A common understanding of this Mishna is that these negative traits can cause one to lose one's footing in the “social world” in which he finds himself. The Alter of Kelm explains this quite differently. He says that this mishna is referring to a person's own unique world and identity. By being busy with what *others* have or by constantly pursuing honor and pleasure, a person loses out on his own successes and ignores the goals and ambitions that are important to him. He trades something for nothing: instead of expending his efforts on matters within his reach, he squanders his energy on thoughts that can bear no fruit.

There is yet another source of jealousy, one with which we can deal more effectively once we are aware of it. As one insightful rabbi put it: Jealousy often stems from a feeling that something belonging to me was taken away. Hence the word *קנאה* (jealousy) is very similar to the word *קנין* (ownership). This feeling is common among siblings. One factor that can make sibling jealousy unusually strong is their perceiving themselves as having started off in more or less the same situation or circumstances. Jealousy is much stronger when someone who started off in a similar situation to



ours gets “ahead of the game” or receives easily things that took us great effort to achieve. As long as we feel that we are in the same boat as the object of our jealousy, we will not be able to free ourselves from jealousy.

There is another mishnah in Pirkei Avos (5:5) that can help us defuse feelings of jealousy. There we learn that in the Beit Hamikdash: עומדים צפופים – ומשתחווים רווחים – When the people stood in the courtyard of the Beit Mikdash, they stood crowded together. Amazingly, when they bowed down on their hands and knees, they all had plenty of room. Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner explains that if one believes that his attainments result from his own power and strength – depicted here as standing – he will feel that he should be getting much more for his actions and efforts. This haughtiness prevents him from fully recognizing anyone else’s rights to the world in which he lives. Ultimately, this causes him to feel encroached upon by the other person, whom he perceives as interfering in his world. Furthermore, he comes to feel that what he lacks, but sees in the possession of others, has somehow been taken from him. But when he bows down in the Beit Hamikdash and acknowledges that what he gets is ultimately from G-d, he does not feel that the world is his, but rather that there is room for

everyone and their successes – and that no-one is taking anything away from him.

לא תחמוד בית רעידך וכו' אשת רעך ועבדו ואמתו ושורו וחמרו
וכל אשר לרעך) שמות כ:יד)
“You shall not covet your friend’s house ,wife, servant, maidservant, ox, donkey and all that your friend has.” If the Torah already spelled out a whole list of things belonging to others that we are not to covet, why then does it need to add a seemingly unnecessary repetition: all that your friend has?

The “all” includes their hardships and problems as well. If each person were to put his lot (his burden) in one corner of the room, including all the good things they have in life as well as all their hardships and problems – everyone would retrieve his own pekel (lot), even if he had the opportunity to choose a smaller, lighter one . No-one has it all good. If you are jealous of the good things someone else has in life, keep in mind that you are overlooking the difficulties that go along with them. Indeed, we are sometimes jealous of the other person’s spiritual or monetary wealth, and ask ourselves why we, also, do not have their success. But we fail to take into account all the hours of work, tension, risks, sacrifices etc. that the one we are jealous of went through.

DEFUSING DISPUTES

Of course, having differences of opinion with a spouse is not necessarily a bad thing. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, for example, would have long discussions – even disagreements – with his beloved wife about life values and principles. Through them, he benefited by sharpening and clarifying his own views. After her passing, he mourned her greatly.

If disagreements and disputes can have a positive role to play in Jewish life, how are we to know which ones are productive, and which ones to stay away from? Indeed, how can we turn our differences of opinion and opposite points of view into something that is actually positive and productive? The secret of serenity is to be found in Pirkei Avot:

Any disagreement that is לשם שמים (for the sake of Heaven) will endure – but if it is not לשם שמים , it will not. What is a disagreement that is לשם שמים? – one like that of Hillel and Shamai. What is a disagreement that is not לשם שמים ? – one like that of Korach and all his followers. (5:17)

As the Bartenurah explains, the disagreement between Hillel and Shamai was for the purpose of gaining knowledge of the truth – which they ultimately achieved. In contrast, Korach’s dispute with Moshe was an attempt to attain honor and power. In the end, it backfired, causing the opposite of the desired effect. Awareness of these two very different motives can help us when we analyze any dispute, as we shall soon see.



Korach approached Moshe with the following two questions: How can it be that an all blue (tchelet), four cornered garment still needs to have tzitzit (tchelet strings)? How can a room filled with Torah scrolls need a mezuzah on the door, if the Torah scrolls themselves contain the parshiot of the mezuzah? Korach tried to use the power of these two questions to undermine Moshe's credibility in the eyes of the nation. Let us try to appreciate why Moshe did not feel that he should answer these questions. Moshe understood that they were not really intended as questions, but rather as a re-statement and paraphrasing of Korach's basic argument: " כל העם כולם קדושים ולמה תתנשא על קהל ה' " – all of G-d's Nation are holy, so why are you (Moshe and Aharon) behaving self-importantly over G-d's Nation? The questions about the tzitzit and the mezuzah are expressions of the same perspective: Does a nation where everyone is so high and close to G-d on a personal level need a representative of G-d?

As noted above, there are two types of disagreements. One type of disagreement is where the two parties are arguing to clarify a subject, all the while showing mutual respect and not allowing self-pride to get in the way. This type of disagreement has great value, because it helps us clarify things that are important to us. The more important the subject, the more synergy is created. This is how Shamai and Hillel, who loved each

other very much, would argue heatedly over Torah subjects that they valued more than anything on earth. Today, yeshiva study partners attempt to re-enact these disagreements while in the Beit Medrash – without mixing in any self-pride or personal element. But if the ego is unleashed by one chevruta, the other one may quickly become defensive – and sometimes even offensive.

Korach's questions were more about the validity of Moshe than about the matters Korach was ostensibly addressing. Moshe felt the ulterior motives behind the questions, and realized that if he answered them, other questions would quickly surface in their place. When ego is at stake in a disagreement, the matter being discussed does not endure, because clarification can not be achieved.

Instead of arguing back, Moshe fell on his face. He did not want to be part of this disagreement. Hence, the mishnah we are discussing does not even mention Moshe, but speaks rather about the disagreement (לא לשם שמים) of Korach *and his followers*. Moshe responded to Korach only from a perspective that was purely "לשם שמים" .

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