

PARSHAS KORACH

תש"פ

The Rambam writes that when Moshe Rabbeinu was on Har Sinai, Hashem said: "while I am speaking to you, all Klal Yisroel will overhear Me speaking with you and they will believe that you are an authentic novi forever." It will be such a powerful experience, that it will carry Klal Yisroel's emunoh in the truth of Moshe Rabbeinu's nevuah for all history.

The Meshech Chochmoh at the beginning of Shemos makes an important point. We heard Hashem speak to Moshe for the aseres hadibros, but what about the rest of the Torah? How do we know that all of it came directly from Hashem to Moshe without distortion? He answers that Moshe Rabbeinu must have risen to a point above bechiroh in order to ensure the rest of the Torah was purely Hashem's communication. Klal Yisroel realized this. Otherwise they would not have accepted the rest of the mitzvos.

So how could Korach have deluded himself and so many others into thinking that Moshe made things up in the Torah when the truth was so clear? The answer is that people have a hard time accepting that there are people who are superior human beings. When people see such a person, they can't fathom there is a higher level. They view the world from the perspective of their limited, twisted yetzer horo.

Rashi tells us why the oreiv circled the teivoh and didn't go on the mission that Noach had sent him. He was suspicious that Noach had designs to take his wife for himself! He thought Noach sent him on a suicide mission so that he could claim his wife after he dies. What are Chazal trying to tell us with this story? There is another maamar Chazal which gives us the answer. Despite the fact that during the mabul all the animals were forbidden to mate, and most of them obeyed, two animals couldn't control themselves – the dog and the oreiv. Once we understand that the oreiv was an uncontrollable baal taivoh for his mate, Chazal teach us that the oreiv projected his personal desires onto Noach! Every baal taivoh views the world and views other people through the lens of their taivoh.

Once in Mir Yeshiva a rumor circulated that Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz spoke nivul peh. The rumor spread and spread and Rav Chaim was absent from the yeshiva for two days. Rav Chaim came back to deliver his weekly mussar shmuess which was legendary. He told the story of Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Perachya walking down the street along with oso ho'ish when they passed a beautiful woman. Rabbi Yehoshua made the appropriate brocho upon seeing one of Hashem's beautiful creations. Oso ho'ish made an off-color comment about the woman. Right then and there, Rabbi Yehoshua looked at him and reduced him to a pile of bones.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asked his audience: what was oso ho'ish thinking when he made that comment? Did he really think the holy tanna Rabbi Yehoshua would appreciate such low class remarks? The answer is that when you yourself are a menuval and automatically think in vulgar terms, you naturally think everyone else thinks like you – and you think your rebbe is a menuval as well.

We have Moshe Rabbeinu and we have Korach.

Moshe is on the highest level of nevuah. Hashem deemed him worthy of doing all the nissim – taking Klal Yisroel out of Egypt and leading them through the Wilderness. All of Klal Yisroel heard Hashem speak directly to Moshe Rabbeinu on Har Sinai. In order to appreciate the towering greatness of such a person, you have to be willing to accept that you yourself are not able to measure up to that. You aren't on

that level. It is a humbling experience to realize that some people are greater than you.

Korach's taivoh was kovod. He was a Levi but it wasn't enough – he had to be a Kohen.

All Levi'im went through a process of being inaugurated into the service of the mishkon. One thing they had to do was shave off all the hair on their body. Shaving one's head is a sign of subjugation – humility. The tafkid of a Levi is to be a servant of Hashem. A man with long flowing hair is displaying a certain defiance and independence. It is a sign of gaivoh.

When Korach came back home after being shaved, his wife humiliated him and made him feel like a loser for subordinating himself to Moshe and Aharon. Like many evil ideologies, Korach twisted his jealousy for the kehunoh into something noble and altruistic. He is fighting for all the people! Korach didn't just come out and say he wants power. He said all of Klal Yisroel are kodosh and no-one should be superior. This was a calculated move in order to gather wide, popular support. Then Korach started to attack the logic of various halachos. He tried to show that the Torah given by Moshe is flawed – tzitzis, mezuzah, etc.

The answer to Korach is that Torah has its own internal logic. It is a system with its own concepts and ideas. When we learn Torah we work with our minds and try to understand them as deeply as we can – without imposing our own ideas into the Torah. We cannot force the Torah to make sense on our terms. We are trying to adapt our minds to the internal logic of the Torah. Kabbolas ol malchus shomayim – the concept we are all learning about – encompasses many things: Hashem created the entire universe, directs the world, and gave us the Torah. But we also ask Hashem to help us understand the Torah as part of our accepting His authority. Why? To accept the Torah is to subject my will to the will of Hashem. It is to subject my logic to the logic of the Torah. I can't just think whatever I want to think.

Korach wanted to inspire a revolution of the masses and part of his strategy was to usurp Moshe Rabbeinu's authority. He tried to do this by pointing out that the Torah's logic is not sensible to us. But it doesn't matter. Kabbolas ol malchus shomayim requires that we accept the Torah's authority whether we understand it or not. We daven for Hashem to enlighten us and help us understand His Torah. But we don't impose our logic and free thinking into the Torah. There are rules and limits about what to think and how to think.

The Torah gives us a whole system of thought and we have to subject our minds to it. Korach didn't want any authority over him so he tried to abolish all distinctions in society – no Kohen, Levi, or Yisroel – everyone is equal. This has always been a popular message. People don't like authority and limits to their freedom to do whatever they want and think whatever they want.

What was Moshe's response to this? "Boker." One of the most important Rashis in Chumash explains this response. Just as there is night and day and limits in nature – no-one can change morning to night. So too, Hashem set up absolute rules in the moral realm as well. There is Kohen, Levi and Yisroel. There is man and woman.

The major problem in the modern world is the refusal to accept boundaries. Once the electric light was invented, the world changed. Night is no longer a time to stop working. You can turn night into day and work around the clock. And today we go even further to

try to eliminate boundaries. They have devised plastic surgeries and hormone therapies to turn men into women and women into men. But there are absolutes that cannot be changed. You can fool yourself, but it won't change the reality.

Kabbolas ol malchus shomayim means accepting that there are absolute boundaries in this world – there is muttar and there is assur.

People want to live in a world without absolutes. They want to think whatever they think and then declare this as absolute truth as simple mathematics. But this is all false. Mathematics isn't hefker where you can just make things up as you please. There are men and there are women. There is Kohen, Levi and Yisroel. There are bounds in this world that Hashem put into place and they cannot be broken. Kabbolas ol malchus shomayim means we accept the logic of the Torah which makes things muttar and assur, and we have to work within that logic. They cannot be violated or changed by any human being.

When Moshe and Aharon first confronted Pharaoh they came with the Name of YKVK to demand he let Klal Yisroel go. But Pharaoh dismissed them. Chazal say Pharaoh responded by opening a book with all the officially approved and accredited gods in the world, looked for YKVK and didn't find it there. What are Chazal trying to convey with this incident? In the ancient world, all gods were local and relative. No-one can impose their religion on anyone else and you can pick and choose which religion pleases you the most. Moshe Rabbeinu says to Pharaoh, you don't understand. There is only one true Power in this world and He has absolute authority. He has one set of absolute rules of right and wrong and He chose one nation to be His people. We accepted the absolutes that Hashem set down in this world.

When Avrohom is confronted by Avimelech and is criticized for not telling him who Soroh really was, Avrohom didn't quibble with him. He said something very simple. There is no yiras Elokim in this place and that is why I feared for my life. Of course there is law and order and rules in Gerar. It was a very stable society. But who made those rules? The king? He is a human being. If he wants something badly enough, he can change the rules to legalize whatever he wants. There can only be justice among people if they all agree that there are certain absolutes given by Hashem that can never be violated. Those rules follow Hashem's logic and not human logic. That is kabbolas ol malchus shomayim.

Korach begins with a drive for kovod. What naturally happens is that he sees Moshe Rabbeinu who has more power and authority than he has, and assumes Moshe is also motivated by a drive for kovod. He interpreted everything in terms of the kovod that he was seeking. He came with a popular philosophy in order to bring Moshe down. If I can't be at the top, no-one can be an authority over anyone – total democracy. He comes up with an absurd accusation that Moshe is driven by kovod – even though Hashem Himself testifies that Moshe is the most humble human being on Earth.

Moshe responds with "boker". There are absolutes in this world that no-one can alter. There is Kohen, Levi, and Yisroel. There are boundaries that Hashem set up. There is techeiles in tzitzis no matter of what the garment is made. There is a mezuzah on the doorpost no matter what is inside, and Hashem runs the world with this logic. We accept this logic as kabbolas ol malchus shomayim and we submit to the absolute will of Hashem.

The problem with the United States today is that the universities have

been indoctrinating generations of students in moral relativism and absolute freedom of thought. There are no bounds. Every stupidity has to be given a hearing and be seriously considered. Every crazy non-sense, if packaged in the right way and with the right academic terminology becomes a respectable opinion that everyone jumps to join. Then it is able to tear down all the norms of a functioning society. It destroys the world.

In Germany 1943, if one German shot another German he would be hauled to jail and be condemned by civilized society. But if a German shot a Jew, well, that's different! Jews aren't really human, etc. You change the laws to suit your desires and your philosophy because there are no absolutes.

But Hashem gave us one Torah and one logic, and the rules to teach us how to apply Hashem's logic in every situation. When we say birkas Kriyas Shema as a preparation to kabbolas ol malchus shomayim, we ask Hashem to give us a better understanding of the Torah. Why? Because understanding the logic of the Torah and bending our minds to think in terms of Hashem's logic is the ultimate in kabbolas ol malchus shomayim. When we learn Torah Shebaal Peh, we aren't just taking in information. We are molding our minds to work in harmony with Hashem's mind.

The Baal Hatanya asks a question. If limud haTorah is the greatest form of avodas Hashem and the most central mitzvah to be earn olom haboh, how is learning Bava Basra which deals with laws about how swindlers lie and cheat in beis din going to accomplish that? How is learning about migo and false claims going to help me get close to Hashem? The answer is that by figuring out the logic of Torah Shebaal Peh in certain cases of halacha, I am getting a deeper and deeper insight into the infinite wisdom of the Torah – the thinking process through which Hashem created the world. That is the highest avoda there is.

But it is the collapse of the Western world when people put their thoughts above everything else. There are no bounds for any stupidity as long as it sounds intellectual. All the chaos and lawlessness in Seattle and Minneapolis comes from a lack of boundaries. They are destroying property, burning businesses to the ground, and brutalizing innocent people – all in the name of human rights! This is Korach – the destruction of the world comes from releasing yourself from being bound to absolutes. Korach's punishment was to keep repeating Moshe emes v'Sorasoh emes for eternity.

We accepted the Torah through Moshe Rabbeinu because he was the only one with no ego and no personal agenda, He rose above his bechiroh and deserved to have Hashem speak through him with no interference. But there are people who cannot accept that there are greater people than they are. All they can see are people who have the same problems, failings and issues that they have. They need to bring down all great people to their low level.

What we are seeing now in America is a total disintegration of western ideology – because they embraced moral relativism and rejected all boundaries in thought. In a society where there are no absolutes, and they make up their own morality, there is ultimately only chaos and destruction.

There is one YKVK and there is one Torah. There is one Hashem and one set of absolutes that He gave us. We live with the logic of the Torah, and this is how we think about the world.