

# PARSHAS KORACH

תשפ"א

Korach decided to dispute the kehunoh. He gathered a group of very distinguished people to complain to Moshe that he had taken too much greatness for himself. They argued that all Jews heard Hashem speak at Har Sinai and why are you superior to us? If you took the malchus, you should not have also taken the kehunoh for your brother.

This is an unbelievable complaint. For although they all heard the aseres hadibros from Hashem, they didn't hear any of the other mitzvos! Hashem gave all those mitzvos only to Moshe to convey to Klal Yisroel. Even the aseres hadibros themselves weren't directly addressing Klal Yisroel. They only overheard Hashem speaking to Moshe. From that overhearing, they realized they couldn't receive such direct communication themselves and that Hashem appointed Moshe to communicate Torah to Klal Yisroel. So they were quite aware that their nevuoh was very much inferior to Moshe Rabbeinu's!

We learned in Parshas Behaaloscha that Moshe Rabbeinu was uniquely great because of his ability to call for a direct verbal communication from Hashem whenever he wanted. Later in the parsha, Hashem told Miriam and Aharon and the rest of Klal Yisroel that Moshe Rabbeinu's level of nevuoh is completely different than any other novi.

Hashem made this completely clear.

So how could these people question Moshe's authority?

Korach and his followers devised an entire philosophy. There should be total democracy. No human being should have the right to assign different levels of importance and rank among Klal Yisroel. Every Jew rose to an incredible level of nevuoh at Har Sinai.

Rashi explains further that Korach made a number of logical arguments against the halachos that Moshe was teaching them. Why should a garment of pure techeiles need tzitzis? Rashi in the end of Parshas Shlach told us, the string of techeiles is a reminder of the color of the sea and the sky, and ultimately the kisei hakavod. So, Korach argued, a whole garment made of techeiles surely doesn't need the additional reminder of a single string of techeiles! Similarly, a house full of sform shouldn't need a mezuzoh. Why? The Rambam explains, the point of a mezuzoh is to be mindful of Hashem throughout your day – whenever you enter or exit a room. So a room full of sifrei kodesh shouldn't need the reminder of a small mezuzoh!

These people are preaching common-sense logic and they are preaching democracy. It sounds wonderful.

Where is Korach really coming from? Chazal tell us Korach is being encouraged by his wife who told him he should have really been promoted to being the nosi of the shevet. Moshe is cheating him out of his proper kovod! Once you have a vested interest, you find yourself concocting an entire philosophy to justify your interests.

The problem they had with Moshe was really a basic problem with authority. In a democracy, there is no absolute authority figure.

There is an interesting statement of Chazal. Why did Hashem set up the Torah's system of government with a monarch as the top authority? Why not a democracy? Chazal tell us that Hashem wanted Klal Yisroel to have a human model on Earth to the kingship of Hashem. If you don't experience the absolute authority of a human king, you won't appreciate the absolute power and authority that Hashem has. You can't relate to Hashem properly.

This is one of the weaknesses of living in a democracy. There is no

authority figure. No-one has to accept anything anyone has to say. You can just come up with a convincing argument to justify doing whatever you want. It is why people today think they can become instant experts on any topic in Judaism just by doing an internet search on some keywords and read some random article on-line. They never have to open a sefer in their life, and suddenly, they think they have a valid opinion that should be taken seriously. Reform Judaism was also born from the idea that anybody can decide what Judaism means to him and there is no need to listen to any authority. They destroyed Yiddishkeit because of this approach.

The truth is that a society can only function according to the Torah when there is an authority figure. Every Torah society needs an authority figure in order to function the way it should. The Mishna in Ovos says, "Asei lechoh rav" – make an authority figure for yourself – someone who you are bound to follow. The meforshim explain that this is necessary for everyone. Even if you are a great person, you have to make someone lower than yourself an authority over you. If you are your own authority, then you will be led astray by your own self-interests and never be corrected. You will inevitably come up with all kinds of arguments and logic which will allow you to convince yourself you are always right. You will claim like Korach, that we are all on a high level. We all heard Hashem speak at Har Sinai and no-one can tell anyone else what to do.

Another point is to realize that when you approach the halachos of the Torah, you need to accept that the Torah has its own intrinsic logic and it is not subject to human logic. Learning Torah means subjecting your mind to the logic of the Torah and not twisting the Torah to fit your logic.

Recently, a left-wing rabbinical school was about to have a chag hasemichoh for its graduates, but it was marred by the announcement by one of the musmachim that he was engaged to another man. So the school couldn't give him semichoh. In response, two left-wing rabbis in Eretz Yisroel wrote a "teshuvoh" explaining with all kinds of twisted lomdus how they could give semichoh to such a person. The result was that these rabbis' names were all over the media being hailed as the most sensitive and accepting, liberal Orthodox rabbis in the world. They obviously had an agenda of getting their names all over the Jewish newspapers, and they used their own twisted logic to arrive at the result they wanted.

Similarly in the early 50's, the Conservative rabbinate wanted to pretend to show how loyal to halacha they were. So they wrote long teshuvos with convoluted logic to explain how driving to shul on Shabbos is permitted.

There is the divine logic of the Torah and a concept of authority. You have to subject your mind and your behavior to someone else who does not share your self-interests.

Hashem made it so clear at maamad Har Sinai that He communicated the mitzvos to Moshe specifically. In front of 3 million Jews, Hashem declared that Moshe is the appointed messenger to convey the Torah to Klal Yisroel. This event was designed to guarantee that we would never doubt and question the authenticity of Moshe's nevuoh.

The Rambam was accused of not believing in literal techiyas hameisim based on what he wrote in Mishneh Torah. He wrote a long letter in response that no matter what I write, it wouldn't help. If you really wanted to, you can use pesukim in the Torah to justify all kinds of

kefiroh. There is a midrash which describes the conversation between Moshe and Hashem when Moshe was instructed to write the words "naaseh odom" in the Torah. Moshe objected that minim will use this phrase as a proof to the trinity! Hashem answered that there are many valuable lessons to be learned from this phrase – exactly the way it is written – and if people want to distort it, let them distort it. Hashem told Moshe that one cannot write something that cannot be distorted. The Rambam says, if Hashem couldn't write a Torah that couldn't be twisted, I certainly can't write a sefer that couldn't be twisted.

That is the story of Korach. He began with jealousy of Moshe's authority, and in order to justify it, he came up with a logic and a beautiful philosophy of democracy – that all Klal Yisroel are equal and no-one has authority over anyone else. But the Torah has its own logic which goes according to how Hashem's ideas of how Torah society has to be run.

At its core, it was a problem of being mekabel ol malchus shomayim.

The beginning of kabbolas ol malchus shomayim in our davening starts by describing how Hashem created the world with very definite rules and laws of nature. There is an intrinsic logic to the laws of physics and chemistry. The study of nature involves trying to figure out what are these unbreakable rules that Hashem embedded into the forces of nature. The next brocho of krias shma is about Torah. There is a parallel between the two. The Torah also has its rules and its logic which we cannot change. Hashem created a whole logical system that we have to bend our minds to try to understand. We describe all these systems of logic and rules implanted into the world that we cannot change. Whether it is natural law or Torah law, there is a deep built-in logic which we cannot change with democracy.

This is the tragedy of Korach. He believed that he could change the rules of the Torah's authority through democracy. He convinced himself that he was right to the extent that he put his life on the line. Moshe Rabbeinu set up a contest to see who is the real Kohen Godol. Then Moshe Rabbeinu says another thing. He will prove that his nevuah is genuine if all these people die an unnatural death by the earth swallowing them up. He predicts an open miracle which was supposed to remove all doubts. The earth opens up to swallow Korach and Doston and Avirom and a fire comes down to consume the 250 people with ketores. You would think the problem is solved.

The miracle happened. But instead of the people accepting the truth, they start to complain that Moshe is causing the people to die! Hashem was protecting his honor and you used your relationship with Hashem

to kill Jews!

In response to this, Hashem lost His middas rachamim. After all He has done to show them the truth, they still complain. There was a plague which suddenly killed many Jews. Moshe tells Aharon to quickly run and take the ketores to stop the plague. We see, contrary to what Klal Yisroel accused them of, Moshe and Aharon care about saving Jews. They don't get fed up with Klal Yisroel complaining.

Hashem made another special miracle with Aharon's staff and instructed that it be placed in the Mishkon for all history – to remind everyone never to be like Korach and his followers.

But people like Korach and his followers are around us all the time. They always make the same tragic mistakes. People just don't like authority figures.

When the religious kibbutz movement began, they had a policy that there can be no rov. Everyone was equal and there can be no authority. But this was never true in the history of Klal Yisroel. Every Jewish community had a rov who was the authority figure to make sure the community was run according to Torah. But when you come up with all kinds of philosophies not based on Torah, you can't have an authority figure because it is all man-made. There is no authority of the Torah behind it.

Nowadays when a community interviews a rabbi for a rabbinic position, he is always asked a long list of questions: how he will pasken on this and that and the other thing. They have to make sure he will pasken the right way in all of these issues in order to determine if the community can accept him. So who is the authority? The rov? Or the community who just needs some token rabbi to rubber-stamp all their preferences? That is not the way it works.

Until modern times, every community understood the rov was chosen because of his greatness in Torah knowledge and expertise in halacha, and they accepted his guidance and psak without question – whatever it may be. His psakim weren't pre-screened in advance. The idea that every Jew is equal simply does not have a place in Yiddishkeit. Of course every Jew is very special and precious in Hashem's eyes. But there has to be an authority who leads the community according to Torah.

Because people have their ego issues, they come up with philosophies to justify doing things the way they want. To avoid this trap, a special staff of Aharon was placed in the Mishkon to teach us these important lessons.