

# PARSHAS KORACH

תשפ"ג

Korach is a very critical parsha. The machlokes between Korach and Moshe Rabbeinu is one of the central disputes we have in Klal Yisroel till our time.

The midrash says Korach came to Moshe with challenges of logic and morality against certain halachos of the Torah. Why should a garment made entirely of techeiles be obligated in tzitzis? Why should a room full of sifrei Torah be obligated in mezuzah? It makes no sense.

He made up a fable about a poor woman who had a small field where she planted some wheat to survive on it and make a meager parnossoh from it. Suddenly, Aharon Hakohen shows up to collect his terumoh. A Levi shows up to collect his maaser. Then she has to give away leket, shik'cha and peah. She sees she can't make a parnossoh from this field, so she sells it to buy a sheep. Aharon Hakohen comes again to collect the reishis hazez. She shechts it to at least get some meat! But then Aharon Hakohen comes yet again to collect the zeroah, lechayayim, and kevah. This is justice? This is Torah? Look how unfair it all is! These are very good questions.

But we need to back up. Moshe Rabbeinu is on Har Sinai and Hashem told him that He will talk to Moshe directly and the entire Klal Yisroel will hear the entire conversation. After the Aseres Hadibros, Klal Yisroel came to Moshe and told him that it is just too difficult to hear Hashem speak directly to him. We won't survive if we have to hear Hashem convey all Taryag mitzvos! Since Moshe has already been established as the one whom Hashem communicates with directly, they ask that he speak to Hashem and then he will give it over to them.

More than that. How do we know ourselves that the Torah we have comes from Hashem? We have a direct link of mesorah going back generation after generation testifying that all of Klal Yisroel heard Hashem speak directly to Moshe at Har Sinai.

We have two events in the midbor where people came to Moshe with a halachic dilemma, and Moshe told them to wait a bit while he asks Hashem on the spot what to do. The midrash exclaims how fortunate is Moshe that he could have an audience with Hashem virtually on demand. He didn't have to wait for Hashem to initiate a nevuoh. Moshe had a problem, and he went to ask Hashem what to do!

Then we have the incident at the end of Parshas Behaaloscha. Miriam and Aharon make a critical mistake. They thought that Moshe was a novi just like them – albeit greater – but of the same kind. Hashem Himself corrected Aharon and Miriam and informed them that Moshe Rabbeinu's nevuoh is of an entirely different level than theirs. Hashem speaks to Moshe directly – a conversation while he is fully awake. And it is because Moshe is extremely humble. This means two things.

Moshe Rabbeinu had zero ego. At the end of his life, the Torah identifies Moshe as the eved Hashem – totally subservient.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin lays down a fundamental principle at the very beginning of Pirkei Ovos where the chain of mesorah is listed. He asks, why does the verb of transmission shift back and forth from "kibbel" to "mossur" between different links in the chain?

He answers that Moshe Rabbeinu's kabbolas haTorah from Sinai was of a qualitatively different nature than any subsequent transmission. Moshe was the perfect receptacle for the Torah. Every novi has two different voices speaking simultaneously. There is the communication from Hashem, which is filtered through his own ego. But by Moshe it was the pure d'var Hashem. Only Moshe had achieved such a total purification of his personality that he had no filter of his ego. Therefore, he was the only human being who could authentically communicate Torah to Klal Yisroel.

Rav Meir Simcha in Meshech Chochmoh asks another question. We heard Hashem speak directly to Moshe at Har Sinai and we knew that he was on this level of nevuoh for the Aseres Hadibros. But how do we know

that Moshe continued to be absolutely faithful in transmitting only the d'var Hashem and didn't add anything of his own? What guarantee do we have that Moshe didn't decide to corrupt the transmission willfully? He answers that because Moshe was chosen to convey the Torah after maamad Har Sinai, Hashem saw to it that Moshe Rabbeinu had no free-will to corrupt it. His bechiroh in this regard was removed. There was no yetzer horo to do this. This is why Moshe was the perfect vessel to receive the Torah.

All these events happened in public. The entire Jewish people were held up from travelling further in the desert until Miriam was healed from her tzora'as. Everyone knew that she was punished for speaking against Moshe. So how could Korach even dare to claim that Moshe Rabbeinu made up these halachos?

The answer is that Korach didn't say Moshe was lying. He knew he couldn't flat out deny Moshe Rabbeinu's superior nevuoh. He was saying something much more insidious. He came up with an interesting philosophy in order to make this machlokes. He is claiming that all Klal Yisroel are on the same madreigoh of kedushoh and Moshe has no authority over them. Who gives Moshe Rabbeinu the right to interpret the Torah and assign privileges to various people? It was a philosophy of democracy. Everyone can interpret the Torah according to their own human logic.

The response to Korach's challenge is a fundamental yesod about the Torah. The Torah is not completely open. Hashem gave to Moshe – along with the Torah – a method of understanding and explaining and developing halachos as life and history develops. How can we know what the Torah says about kidney transplants when such an idea didn't exist until a few decades ago? Where does the Torah talk about it? Moshe Rabbeinu not only gave us the content of the Torah – there are also yesodos and internal logic. Sometimes, Chazal say there is no logic – it is a gezeiras hakosuv. The gemara in Bava Basra says the fact that two relatives can't testify together is a gezeiras hakosuv. There is no human logic involved. We have an entire way of understanding Torah which is also part of the mesorah. We bend our mind to the logic of Torah.

Before we say Kriyas Shema, we say two brochos. Kabbolas ol malchus shomayim requires two concepts beforehand. One is to declare that Hashem created everything in the physical world and continues to sustain the natural world. He runs everything. The second brocho says we submit our mind to the logic of the Torah. We ask Hashem to give us understanding and insight into what the Torah is saying. I don't have my own insights and my own ideas. I try to make sure my mind is in tune with the ideas of the Torah. This is required for kabbolas ol malchus shomayim.

When Avrohom Ovinu was commanded to offer up his son as a korbon, it was a complete contradiction to the previous promise Hashem gave him that his legacy will continue through Yitzchok. But Avrohom didn't say a word in protest. After Hashem sends the maloch to stop Avrohom from slaughtering Yitzchok, here Avrohom asks Hashem about all the contradictions – and now he is being told not to offer Yitzchok!

Rav Chaim asked, if Avrohom is willing to challenge Hashem with a contradiction, why didn't Avrohom challenge it right after he was told to slaughter his son? Why did he wait until he was told not to slaughter him? Rav Chaim answered that as long as there was a straightforward contradiction between having Yitzchok being his legacy and offering Yitzchok as a korbon, Avrohom understood that this was not a place for his human mind to understand. This is the Divine decree that must be accepted without question. Hashem runs the world. It is the שני זה זה כתובים המכחישים זה את זה. But once there is a third command which is coming to resolve the contradiction, that means we now have a כתוב השלישי המכריע ביניהם. This is where Hashem gives human beings the opportunity to understand, and this is where Avrohom asks Hashem to

explain the contradiction.

There is an unbelievable midrash which says Lyov was on a very high madreigoh – higher than we can imagine. Had Lyov not failed his test, we would have included Lyov in the first brocho of shemoneh esrei together with the Ovos! So what was Lyov's failure? He had his logical, moral understanding of how the world should run, and the things that Hashem was doing to him did not fit into his understanding. He had strong complaints that Hashem wasn't acting with fair justice.

Hashem appears to Lyov and explains how little Lyov really understands anything in creation – even the minor, insignificant physical truths of the world are hidden from him. The concepts of s'char and onesh are certainly well beyond his human capabilities. But Lyov failed because he could not submit his understanding to the mind of Hashem.

Kabbolas ol malchus means we subordinate our will to Hashem's will. We want something that is assur? It is too bad. We submit our desires and physical urges to Hashem's rules. But it goes further. We submit our minds, our thought processes to the mind of Hashem and the logic of the Torah. Hashem gave us a system of how we learn Torah and how we pasken shailos. There is no democracy. There is a mesorah from generation to generation which teaches us to submit our logic to those who came before us. We don't analyze a piece of Gemara on our own. We look at how Rashi and Tosfos understood the gemara, how the Rambam and the Rambam understood it. We look to them as the authentic interpreters of the gemara. We don't say this Rishon is correct and that Rishon is incorrect based on our own logic and understanding. We receive our way of understanding of Torah from the mesorah going back to Sinai.

Comes along Korach and says no – you have your way of understanding the Torah and I have my way – and both are equally valid. But it doesn't work. There is no such thing.

Korach was quite intelligent – what made him commit such a fatal error in judgment? It was his ego. He wanted to be the nosi of his branch of Shevet Levi and Moshe chose someone else instead of him. As a result, he insisted on everyone being the same – which was really Korach's backhanded way of subverting Moshe's authority and being in charge. This was the same strategy as the first Communists. The philosophy is that everyone is equal, but those who were making sure that everyone else was equal made themselves in charge! They achieved total control.

Korach was at Har Sinai – he heard Hashem talking directly to Moshe. He saw how Miriam was punished for minimizing the nevuah of Moshe Rabbeinu! He saw that Moshe was able to initiate an audience with Hashem at will! So what convinced him that he could argue with Moshe Rabbeinu? The fact is that the human ego blinds a person and then it destroys him.

Chazal say that Rechovom the son of Shlomo Hamelech was not a good king. Yerovom ben Nevot wanted to split off and make a separate kingdom of Yisroel. It was going to be a historic disaster. Hashem tried to avert it by coming to Yerovom in a dream and promised him that if he gives up on this ambition, Hashem will walk together with Yerovom and Dovid Hamelech in Gan Eden. Hashem originally put Yerovom first – before Dovid – in the offer, but Yerovom asked Hashem outright: "who will be first?" Yerovom wanted to hear Hashem state explicitly that he will be ahead of Dovid in Gan Eden. Because of Yerovom's ego, Hashem changed the original offer and said Dovid will be first. And again, because of Yerovom's ego, he refused the offer – just because he will be one little step behind Dovid in Gan Eden. He was willing to destroy Klal Yisroel if he can't be Number One.

Korach said the same thing. If I can't be the nosi, I will tear down Moshe's authority and make an entire revolution in the name of democracy.

As a result, Hashem made an incredible open miracle. Moshe predicted in advance that these people will suffer a completely unnatural demise. Not that everyone will simultaneously have a heart attack. The earth opened up and it swallowed all these people and all their belongings – however far away they were.

Hashem also set up a contest of staffs of all the shevotim to prove that Aharon and his family are the kohanim. Hashem then said to take the staff of Aharon and keep it in the Beis Hamikdash for all time to remind people of the lesson.

Hashem set up a specific social structure for Klal Yisroel. There is Kohen, Levi and Yisroel. As much as non-kohanim would like to say birkas kohanim and do the avodas hakorbonos, it is too bad. This is Hashem's logic. The whole feminist movement was essentially protesting the logic of Hashem and the social structure of His Torah. Women were given all mitzvos lo sa'asei and most mitzvos aseï, but not those that are time bound. That is just the way it is. I don't understand it, but I accept it anyway. A kohen cannot become a doctor and expose himself to tumas meis. But a levi can. Each member of Klal Yisroel has their unique role and we all function together within one unified structure. There is no democracy.

There is a logic of Torah which dictates how we approach everything in life. Korach says he has a different logic. Moshe Rabbeinu got his logic from the Torah and it is a whole integrated system of how it works.

It is interesting that Parshas Korach comes right after Parshas Shlach. There is an entire techeiles movement which makes a campaign every year around Parshas Shlach to push people to wear techeiles. Many years ago, the first one to come up with techeiles was the Radziner Rebbe. He was a massive talmid chochom who wrote classic seforim. An Italian chemist sold him on an idea that techeiles comes from this and this source. He was convinced by it, and he went to all the gedolei Yisroel at the time to convince them as well, but no-one was convinced. He came to the Beis Halevi and the Beis Halevi told him the following yesod to explain why it cannot be accepted. How do we know today what a lulav is, an esrog is, what the five minim of grain are, or what maror is? It all comes from our mesorah. Every cheftzah shel mitzvah needs a mesorah to identify which one we can use. Once Klal Yisroel lost the mesorah of where techeiles comes from and how to manufacture it, we cannot reconstruct it on our own. Logic and research are useless.

When Klal Yisroel came back from Bavel to build Bayis Sheni, they needed a mesorah from the nevi'im who came back with them to pinpoint the exact place of the mizbeach. They couldn't rely on any archaeological evidence that may have existed at the time. Some meforshim explain that the reason why we need Eliyahu Hanovi to come back at the time of Moshiach is because we need his mesorah to tell us the exact location of the mizbeach. We may know where Har Habayis is and where the Kosel Hamaaravi is because we have an unbroken chain of mesorah. But we do not know where the mokom hamizbeach is because we lost the mesorah.

The modern techeiles movement suffers from the same mistake of Korach. Their approach to techeiles is not based on following any mesorah but by figuring it out themselves with their own logic and research. As it turned out, this Italian chemist fooled the Radziner Rebbe and used a chemical to produce the color. Rav Herzog also came up with his own source for techeiles but was he was also disproven over time. Nowadays they claim it is the blood of the Murex snail. They have concrete evidence that this snail was in fact used in ancient times to produce dye for clothing. But that doesn't solve the basic problem of techeiles. Just because they used it for dye doesn't mean it was used for techeiles. Another problem is that you have to first take the blood and let it sit in the sun in order to make the dye turn blue.

There is a danger of someone using the wrong type of techeiles on his tzitzis. He is at risk of losing the mitzvah of daled kanfos altogether. But in today's internet Judaism, everyone feels they have a right to offer an opinion on anything they want to discuss about Torah and Yiddishkeit. We have a mesorah about how to understand the logic of Torah and how to approach Torah and mitzvos.

I heard a podcast of a so-called posek criticizing the Reb Moshe's psak on abortion. He claimed that the mehalech of psak from the past 250 years – from the Vilna Gaon to Rav Chaim Volozhin, till today – is all wrong. Who are you? We have a mesorah how to pasken shailos.

Korach said everyone has an equal say in how to interpret Torah. But Korach was wrong. There is a mesorah about the content and the logic of Torah, how we pasken shailos and how we identify a cheftzah shel mitzvah. This is how we function as Jews. There is no democracy. Yes, we are all kodosh. But Hashem says there is a structure and a logic to the Torah and we have to submit our minds to that structure and that logic.

Hashem said to take that staff of Aharon in the Beis Hamikdash as a symbol to show for all future generations. Because the lessons of Korach need to be learned and applied in every generation.