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Parshas Korach 5778

Posted on June 14, 2018

How and How Not to Use JEALOUSY

By **Rabbi Moshe Krieger**, Yeshivas Bircas HaTorah

In this week's parsha, Korach leads a revolt against the leadership of Moshe and Aharon.

When the confrontation begins, Moshe speaks not only to Korach but to all the bnei levi (whom he saw were joining Korach's rebellion, explains the Ramban): Is it not enough for you that Hashem has drawn you close to Him in His service ... you're asking for kehunah as well?

We can ask, though, was Moshe's accusation relevant to all the members of Korach's delegation? Unlike Korach, who was motivated by jealousy, the others were motivated by a sincere desire to ascend in ruchniyus. If so, how could Moshe tell them to abandon this desire, saying: "Is it not enough for you that Hashem has drawn you close to Him in His service?" Aren't we expected always to grow in ruchniyus and aspire for more?

Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Josef writes (in his sefer, Achas Sha'alti): One certainly should live with aspirations to grow in ruchniyus. The flaw of those who were joining Korach was that they sought to grow in a way that was not dependent on their own free will. If the task delineated for them by Hashem did not include the kehuna, they should have realized that the kehuna was not in their power to achieve. In such cases, a Jew is expected to be happy with what he has. His aspirations can include only what is within his range of free will.

Whatever is in our ability to reach, we are encouraged to pursue it, and even to harness the midda of jealousy to do so. The Sages say that the "jealousy of scholars leads to [greater] wisdom" (Bava Basra 21a). However, the intent is that jealousy motivate us to use our free will to change only what we are capable of changing. If, however, one wanted a certain chavrusa, or to be accepted into a certain yeshiva or kollel; if a rav wanted to lead a prominent kehilla but was hired only in a small one—the outcome must never be despair or jealousy. While we can try to improve our surroundings so they're as conducive to spiritual growth as possible, the results are ultimately in Hashem's hands. He gives each person his portion in

ruchniyus, and a Jew must be happy with this portion. He should grow at his level and in his personal situation, and not descend into negative emotions such as jealousy.

Rav Yechezkel Levinstein points out another way in which we can fall into discontent and despair, even when we seem to have the best intentions. When one is ascending in ruchniyus, his vision can become distorted and he will develop an attitude of dissatisfaction with his present level. This dissatisfaction seems almost natural. When one's eye is ever trained on a still higher level, of course where he is now is not enough! How can he be satisfied with it? No, says Rav Levinstein: even as one seeks to ascend in ruchniyus, he must not lose his appreciation and joy over what he has achieved and where he is right now. He must devote time to feeling happy about the achievements he has already made.

The Mesilas Yesharim (chapter 19) stresses the importance of developing a sense of joy and satisfaction from doing mitzvos, quoting the Midrash (Shocheir Tov 19) that Rav Eivo would say: "When one comes to daven, one should arouse himself to joy over the fact that he is praying to Hashem, Who is beyond compare...!" We too should pause at times throughout the day and think: "How lucky I am that I am learning Hashem's Torah and not wasting time out on the street!"

Every time we complete a tractate of the Talmud we declare: "We rise early to learn Torah and they rise early to empty matters. We toil and they toil, we toil and receive reward, and they toil and do not receive reward!" Why engage in such comparisons, if not to imbue within the completer of the tractate the sense that his lot is the most fortunate on earth? We should live with this, keep it in mind at all times, and as Rav Shimon Green says, the average mindset of a ben Torah should be one of near-ecstasy. Even as we realize that we could be doing more, this happiness should assert itself.

When Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel was still in high school in America, he spent a summer in Eretz Yisrael. His uncle, Rosh Yeshivas Mir Rav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel took great interest in his young nephew and strongly encouraged him to take a year off to study in his yeshiva in Yerushalayim.

R' Nosson Tzvi did so, and stayed there with his uncle. Very early one morning, when R' Eliezer Yehuda thought that Nosson Tzvi was still asleep, he got up and went over to the Shas in the room and began kissing each Maseches. When he came to Bava Kama, which is what the yeshiva was learning that zman, he kissed this Maseches "as if he hadn't seen it in years," Rav Nosson Tzvi would later recall.

Rav Nosson Tzvi then observed the exceptional simcha with which his uncle blessed the birkos HaTorah and then sat down to learn with fervor. These expressions of simcha, made while Rav Eliezer Yehuda thought that no one was watching, remained with Rav Nosson Tzvi after he returned to America. He knew that he would return at some point to Eretz Yisrael, after having seen how joyous a life one could have by dedication to Torah.

May we feel simcha in our learning and avodas Hashem!

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Parshas Korach 5777

Posted on June 22, 2017

Rabbi Krieger's Parsha Sheet

Hashem's Revelation at the Time of Korach

In Parshas Korach, we learn of a rebellion waged by Korach and others against Moshe Rabbeinu. After Moshe saw that he would not convince the rebels to stop, he prayed that Hashem not accept Korach's claim. He then announced that if Korach and his men would die an unnatural death, and if something unprecedented in history were to be created, this would show that they had sinned against Hashem.

Until now, we have seen Moshe pray that Hashem forgive the sins of Klal Yisrael. Why on this occasion did Moshe request the opposite, and in such strong terms? Also, why did Hashem decree such a harsh punishment, that the land underneath Korach and his group opened up and swallowed them alive? There are many severe sins, such as idolatry and murder, but they are

punished with one of the four forms of execution done by beis din. Why was Korach's sin treated more severely than these?

Furthermore, the Sages (Avos 5:6) teach that the "mouth of the land" that swallowed up Korach and his rebels was created at the very beginning of the world. Why was such a special creation necessary to punish Korach?

Rav Gedalia Shor answers that Korach's rebellion demanded such a response because it threatened to undo one of the most basic tenets of our emuna — the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai to Moshe Rabbeinu.

At Matan Torah, Hashem said the first two of the Ten Commandments to all of Klal Yisrael. Afterwards, the people told Moshe that if they would continue at this level of prophecy, they would die. Therefore, they asked Moshe to receive the rest of the Torah himself and bring it to them. From that time on, Moshe Rabbeinu was Hashem's representative in bringing the rest of the Torah to this world. Now, Korach was claiming that Moshe Rabbeinu had decided on his own to appoint Elizafan ben Uziel as head of the Tribe of Kehas. If Korach could claim that, he could also claim that Moshe had tampered with the mitzvos of the Torah. Hashem had to show that everything in Torah is totally from Him, and that nothing came from Moshe.

Had Korach and his men been executed by beis din, or even if they would all have suddenly dropped dead, there would still have been room for others to claim: "This was certainly a sin, but it could be that Moshe did alter parts of the Torah." Therefore, Hashem made a second form of Divine revelation — an unnatural punishment for those who cast doubts on the authenticity of the Torah. This "mouth of the land" had been waiting since the beginning of time to fulfill this critical purpose — to remind all of Klal Yisrael that Moshe was only a messenger, bringing Hashem's Torah to the Jews, and not, chalila, that he had altered anything in it.

Rav Shor cites an episode in Bava Basra (74a) to demonstrate the point that the authenticity of Torah was at the heart of Korach's rebellion: An Arab merchant was leading a sage of the Talmud through the Sinai Desert. He pointed out to the sage two pillars of smoke rising from a hole, telling him that this was the entrance to Gehinnom and that soon, he would be able to hear Korach and his group as they rise to the surface, which happens once every thirty days.

The sage leaned close to the hole, and as Korach came to the surface, he heard Korach say: "Moshe is true and his Torah is true..." Korach was trying to do teshuva, but it was too late. For us, however, Korach's words reveal what in fact his sin was — that in his lifetime, Korach had claimed that Moshe's Torah was not true.

This is an important principle. We must know that every word of Torah, whether in the written or oral Torah, comes from Hashem. The only way we can begin learning Torah properly is if we know that it comes from Hashem, and that it is true and has kedusha. Great Rabbanim would say, before learning, "Zogt der Ribbono Shel Olam..." Even if they were learning Gemara, and were about to quote the words of a sage from the Talmud, they knew that this was the Torah of Hashem, and therefore declared: "So says G-d..."

The Slonimer Rebbe would add that included in the revelation at Sinai was that Moshe Rabbeinu was the Rebbe of Klal Yisrael. The sages (Sanhedrin 110a) state that Korach, by arguing against Moshe Rabbeinu, was arguing against Hashem, and that this applies to any talmid. If a talmid goes against his rebbe, he is going against Hashem. Even if his argument is not verbalized, merely thinking against one's rebbe is as if he thinks against Hashem.

This sounds a bit frightening. We understand why we must not argue against a great rebbe and certainly not Moshe Rabbeinu, but if my Rav, Rosh Yeshiva or magid shiur says something and I don't obey it completely, or I just think to myself about not obeying him—is that called rebelling against G-d? Is every rav at that level?

The reason this question arises, explains the Slonimer Rebbe, is because we view our Rav, Rosh Yeshiva or magid shiur, as a person we come to with

questions, or to hear shiurim. What we should understand is that this is the person who enables us to achieve deveikus in Hashem. He is your rebbe, and whatever deveikus you can achieve is only through him. The way to do so is to nullify yourself before him (see Kesubos 111b). Conversely, the extent to which we view ourselves as being removed from our rebbe, to that same extent we have removed ourselves from Hashem.

Rav Avraham Chaim Brim was a talmid chacham of great stature, but he viewed himself as a talmid of numerous rebbes, among them Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, the Chazon Ish, the Brisker Rav, the Boyanner Rebbe and the Husyatiner Rebbe.

"In my eyes, each of them was like an angel in the guise of a human being," Rav Brim would say. He noted that in addition to the clarity and insights in Torah he gained from each of these great men, their entire being was a lesson in closeness to Hashem, and from each of them, he felt that he had gained certain aspects of his own avodas Hashem.

May we cling to our rebbeim and get closer to Hashem!

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Thu, Jun 14, 2018 at 4:04 PM subject: Rav Frand - Why is This Sin Different? / Holy, but Still Integrated

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1037 – Should A Chosson Come to Shul During Sheva Brachos? Good Shabbos!

Why is This Sin Different than All Other Sins? The Torah says that Korach and his entire congregation were swallowed up by the ground. "They, their wives, and their children..." Rashi notes, regarding the fact that even the children were killed, "Come and see how difficult machlokes [argumentation] is. An earthly court does not punish an individual until the age of Bar/Bas Mitzvah (13/12). The Heavenly Court does not punish a person until the age of twenty years. However, by machlokes, even infants were swept away in the punishment of Korach and his congregation." [Rashi to Bamidbar 16:27]

The Maharal asks the obvious question: "Why is this sin different than all other sins?" By machlokes, the Heavenly Court does not discriminate by age. No matter what the age, a person caught up in divisive argumentativeness is liable to be punished. The Maharal writes, "You must know the main reason for this: Normally a minor is not punished because the Holy One does not punish a minor. But by machlokes, the essence of gehinnom [Hell] clings to machlokes." Machlokes and gehinnom are inextricably bound up with each other. Gehinnom is part and parcel of machlokes, and machlokes is part and parcel of Gehinnom.

"The reason this is true is because both gehinnom and machlokes were created on the second day of Creation." (The machlokes [Division] created on the second day involved G-d's splitting and separating the waters into the Upper Waters and the Lower Waters. This is the best possible type of "machlokes," yet it still involves division.) So gehinnom and machlokes are "hand and glove" in lockstep with one another.

Now, I do not fully understand what these words mean. I do not understand the why, but I understand the what. The what is that gehinnom and machlokes are two sides of the same coin. That is why even infants meet their demise when they are exposed to machlokes. It is not a case of punishing the child. It is a reality. It is similar to what happens if a child, Heaven forbid, sticks his finger into a fire. He will get burned, even though he is innocent. It is not a punishment. Rather, it is the nature of fire to burn. Similarly, if a child, Heaven forbid, will swallow poison, he will be poisoned. However, it is not a punishment. It is just the nature of poison.

Here too, Hashem is not punishing the child, but nonetheless, finding oneself in proximity to machlokes inevitably leads to tragedy and punishment. The Maharal gives an analogy: It is as if someone says, "I will

not kill you, but if you kill yourself, you cannot blame me for that. I will not be responsible for that.” The same, says the Maharal, happens with machlokes. If children are associated with machlokes — through their parents — they may be killed, albeit it will not be a punishment from G-d. It will be the inevitable consequence of machlokes.

There is such a concept as “the natural laws of ruchniyus [spirituality].” One of the natural laws of ruchniyus is that somebody caught up in machlokes winds up in gehinnom. I am sure all of us are familiar with the destructive powers of machlokes. There is not any family, there are not any institutions, there are not any organizations, and there is nothing in the world that will be saved from the fire and the destructive power of machlokes. All too often, we see how it destroys families. Brothers do not talk to sisters. Parents do not talk to children. We see what machlokes can do to institutions. We see what it can do to a shul, what it can do to a community, and what it can do to a Yeshiva. Nothing is immune to the ravages of machlokes. Therefore, at all costs, we must attempt to avoid machlokes — literally — like the plague.

I admit that I do not understand the full depth of the Maharal’s equation “gehinnom = machlokes“, but it is a spiritual reality. Therefore, despite the fact that the children of the parents associated with the machlokes of Korach’s rebellion were innocent, they were caught up by this incident of the ground swallowing the perpetrators. It was not a punishment. It was the natural consequence of machlokes.

Holy, but Still “In the Midst of the Children of Israel”

The Ribono shel Olam promises Aaron, “I am your portion and your inheritance in the midst of the Children of Israel” [Bamidbar 18:20]. The Chasam Sofer writes that normally the more spiritual a person is, the more he is removed from this world, and from the people who inhabit this world. When we think of a person who is extremely holy, we think of someone who is “above it all.” However, the Chasam Sofer writes that the Almighty’s promise to Aaron was that in spite of the fact that he was the Kohen Gadol [High Priest] — the man who went into the Kodesh Hakodashim [Holy of Holies] on Yom Kippur — nevertheless, “I am your portion and your inheritance in the midst of the Children of Israel.” You will have the ability — no matter how holy you are — to remain “in the midst of the Jewish people” — a man of the people.

This was indeed the characteristic trait of Aaron. He was “a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace.” The Torah says (in next week’s parsha) that when Aaron died, “the entire House of Israel (Kol Beis Yisrael) wept for him” [Bamidbar 20:29]. This is something that is not mentioned even upon the death of Moshe Rabbeinu. Aaron was beloved by the people.

Usually, being extremely holy and being extremely beloved do not go together. A person who excels in holiness usually is in a world by himself. This blessing of “I am your portion and your inheritance in the midst of the Children of Israel” bestowed upon Aaron a unique trait. He was able to cling to the Almighty, and at the same time he would remain a beloved man of the people.

Someone commented that in our day and age, there was an analogy to this in the personage of Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt”l. Rav Moshe was not only a world-class genius, the posek for his generation, the “Chief Rabbi of the entire Diaspora” (Rabban shel kol bnei haGolah), but he was also a person with whom people felt they had a relationship. They did not look at him as someone who was in a world by himself.

I will never forget seeing the mix of people who were at his funeral (March 1986) — both “Yeshivishe people” and “non-Yeshivishe people,” men, women, and children. The whole spectrum of Orthodoxy was at that levaya because everybody felt a connection with Rav Moshe, despite the fact that he was such a holy person. He was also a person who was me’urav bein haBriyos [integrated with society].

I saw a story in the sefer “Aleinu L’Shabeach.” The author writes that someone started working in Rav Moshe’s Yeshiva — Mesivta Tiferes

Jerusalem (MTJ) — and he noticed that every few weeks a woman would come knock on the door of Rav Moshe’s office, she would spend a few minutes in his office, and then walk out. This happened on a regular basis. The employee kept wondering: What is this woman’s connection to Rav Moshe Feinstein? Does she have shaylos [questions] for him every few weeks?

One time, the employee built up the courage and asked the woman, “Tell me, what brings you so frequently to see Rav Moshe Feinstein?” He relates that the woman was from Russia and she had a son who was still in Russia. The son wrote his mother letters in Yiddish. The woman was illiterate and could not read the letters, so she came to Rav Moshe and he read the letters to her.

Can you imagine that? The Gadol Hador sits and reads these personal letters, so that a mother could keep in touch with her child. That is a magnificent thing. I never learned in MTJ, but I heard that Rav Moshe used to say a Shiur Kelali [Torah lecture for the student body of the Yeshiva] on Friday mornings. Every week, a woman would come to the Yeshiva at that hour, open the door at the back of the Beis Medrash and yell out (in Yiddish), “Rebbe, what time is candle lighting tonight?” Clearly, it is not necessary to seek out the greatest Rabbinic sage of the generation to find out the appropriate time for licht bentchen [Reciting the blessings over the Shabbos candles].

If this would happen to me, perhaps the first time I would answer, “licht bentchen is at such-and-such a time.” If it happened more than once, I would post someone at the door and instruct the person that when this woman shows up, he should tell her the time of licht bentchen. She does not need to stick her head into our Beis Medrash in the middle of a Shiur Kelali to ask when time candle lighting is! Clearly, I am not Rav Moshe Feinstein. But that was Rav Moshe Feinstein. He answered her even though it was not appropriate according to the honor due him, and even though it was in the middle of the shiur, and even though it probably disturbed the shiur. This illustrates his patience and his attribute of being integrated with and close to the masses. That is this quality promised to Aaron, “I will be your portion and your inheritance...” You will cling to Me, and yet still have the capacity to be “in the midst of the Children of Israel.”

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

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The First Populist

Korach

Jun 10, 2018

by **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

The story of Korach has much to teach us about one of the most disturbing phenomena of our time: the rise of populism in contemporary politics. Korach was a populist, one of the first in recorded history - and populism has re-emerged in the West, as it did in the 1930s, posing great danger to the future of freedom.

Populism is the politics of anger.[1] It makes its appearance when there is widespread discontent with political leaders, when people feel that heads of

institutions are working in their own interest rather than that of the general public, when there is a widespread loss of trust and a breakdown of the sense of the common good.

People come to feel that the distribution of rewards is unfair: a few gain disproportionately and the many stay static or lose. There is also a feeling that the country they once knew has been taken away from them, whether because of the undermining of traditional values or because of large scale immigration.

Discontent takes the form of the rejection of current political and cultural elites. Populist politicians claim that they, and they alone, are the true voice of the people. The others, the existing leaders, are sharing out the rewards among themselves, indifferent to the suffering of the masses. Populists stir up resentment against the establishment. They are deliberately divisive and confrontational. They promise strong leadership that will give the people back what has been taken from them.

In 2017, support for populist parties throughout Europe was running at around 35 per cent, the highest level since the late 1930s. Parties of the Far Right gained power in Poland and Hungary, and made a strong showing in Austria, France and Holland. In Southern Europe, in countries like Spain and Greece, populism tends to be of the Left. Regardless of what form it takes, when populism is on the rise, tyranny is around the corner.[2] Human rights are dispensed with. The public grants the strong leader exceptional powers: so it was in the 1930s with Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. People are willing to sacrifice their freedom for the promised utopia, and to tolerate great evils against whichever scapegoat the leader chooses to blame for the nation's problems.

The Korach rebellion was a populist movement, and Korach himself an archetypal populist leader. Listen carefully to what he said about Moses and Aaron: "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3).

These are classic populist claims. First, implies Korach, the establishment (Moses and Aaron) is corrupt. Moses has been guilty of nepotism in appointing his own brother as High Priest. He has kept the leadership roles within his immediate family instead of sharing them out more widely. Second, Korach presents himself as the people's champion. The whole community, he says, is holy. There is nothing special about you, Moses and Aaron. We have all seen God's miracles and heard His voice. We all helped build His Sanctuary. Korach is posing as the democrat so that he can become the autocrat.

Next, he and his fellow rebels mount an impressive campaign of fake news - anticipating events of our own time. We can infer this indirectly. When Moses says to God, "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them" (Num. 16:15), it is clear that he has been accused of just that: exploiting his office for personal gain. When he says, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my own idea" (Num. 16:28) it is equally clear that he has been accused of representing his own decisions as the will and word of God.

Most blatant is the post-truth claim of Dathan and Aviram: "Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you want to lord it over us!" (Num. 16:13). This is the most callous speech in the Torah. It combines false nostalgia for Egypt (a "land flowing with milk and honey"!), blaming Moses for the report of the spies, and accusing him of holding on to leadership for his own personal prestige - all three, outrageous lies.

Ramban was undoubtedly correct[3] when he says that such a challenge to Moses' leadership would have been impossible at any earlier point. Only in the aftermath of the episode of the spies, when the people realised that they would not see the Promised Land in their lifetime, could discontent be stirred by Korach and his assorted fellow-travellers. They felt they had nothing to lose. Populism is the politics of disappointment, resentment and fear.

For once in his life, Moses acted autocratically, putting God, as it were, to the test:

"This is how you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works; it has not been of my own accord: If these people die a natural death, or if a natural fate comes on them, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord." (Num. 16:28-30).

This dramatic effort at conflict resolution by the use of force (in this case, a miracle) failed completely. The ground did indeed open up and swallow Korach and his fellow rebels, but the people, despite their terror, were unimpressed. "On the next day, however, the whole congregation of the Israelites rebelled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the Lord'" (Num. 17:6). Jews have always resisted autocratic leaders.

What is even more striking is the way the sages framed the conflict. Instead of seeing it as a black-and-white contrast between rebellion and obedience, they insisted on the validity of argument in the public domain. They said that what was wrong with Korach and his fellows was not that they argued with Moses and Aaron, but that they did so "not for the sake of Heaven." The schools of Hillel and Shammai, however, argued for the sake of Heaven, and thus their argument had enduring value.[4] Judaism, as I argued in Covenant and Conversation Shemot this year, is unique in the fact that virtually all of its canonical texts are anthologies of arguments.

What matters in Judaism is why the argument was undertaken and how it was conducted. An argument not for the sake of Heaven is one that is undertaken for the sake of victory. An argument for the sake of Heaven is undertaken for the sake of truth. When the aim is victory, as it was in the case of Korach, both sides are diminished. Korach died, and Moses' authority was tarnished. But when the aim is truth, both sides gain. To be defeated by the truth is the only defeat that is also a victory. As R. Shimon ha-Amsoni said: "Just as I received reward for the exposition, so I will receive reward for the retraction." [5]

In his excellent short book, *What is Populism?*, Jan-Werner Muller argues that the best indicator of populist politics is its delegitimation of other voices. Populists claim that "they and they alone represent the people." Anyone who disagrees with them is "essentially illegitimate." Once in power, they silence dissent. That is why the silencing of unpopular views in university campuses today, in the form of "safe space," "trigger warnings," and "micro-aggressions," is so dangerous. When academic freedom dies, the death of other freedoms follows.

Hence the power of Judaism's defence against populism in the form of its insistence on the legitimacy of "argument for the sake of Heaven." Judaism does not silence dissent: to the contrary, it dignifies it. This was institutionalised in the biblical era in the form of the prophets who spoke truth to power. In the rabbinic era it lived in the culture of argument evident on every page of the Mishnah, Gemara and their commentaries. In the contemporary State of Israel, argumentativeness is part of the very texture of its democratic freedom, in the strongest possible contrast to much of the rest of the Middle East.

Hence the life-changing idea: If you seek to learn, grow, pursue truth and find freedom, seek places that welcome argument and respect dissenting views. Stay far from people, places and political parties that don't. Though they claim to be friends of the people, they are in fact the enemies of freedom.

NOTES:

1. The best recent treatment is Jan-Werner Muller's short book, *What is populism?*, Penguin, 2017. See also the important paper, *Populism: the phenomenon*, Bridgewater associates, 22 March 2017. 2. See James Snyder, *On Tyranny: 20 lessons from the 20th century*, Bodley Head, 2017. 3.

Ramban, Commentary to Num. 16:1. 4. Mishneh Avot 5:20. 5. Pesachim 22b.

from: torahweb@torahweb.org to: weeklydt@torahweb.org date: Wed, Jun 13, 2018 at 8:43 PM

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
Guarding Precious Treasures

Following the events of the Korach episode, the Torah clearly delineates the role of the Kohanim and Leviim. Although they participated in different ways in the service of the Mishkan, they are both given the mitzvah of Shemiras HaMikdash - the guarding of the Mishkan, and in subsequent years, the Beis HaMikdash. There are two reasons for this mitzvah. Rashi (Bamidbar 18:2) focuses on the practical goal of guarding the Mishkan in order to prevent a non-Kohen from entering. By contrast, the Rambam (Hilchos Beis Habechira 8:1) highlights that guarding is not for any practical concern, but rather, it is an expression of honor for the location. The Rambam compares this to a palace that is guarded simply as a sign of respect.

Shemira - guarding - plays an important role in many areas of mitzvah observance. There is an obligation to institute safeguards to protect the mitzvos. This requirement is derived from the wording of the Torah, "You should guard my precepts" (Vayikra 18:30). Guarding the mitzvos by instituting rabbinic prohibitions accomplishes two things. On a practical level, it prevents one from violating a Torah prohibition. By not moving a pencil on Shabbos, one will most likely not come to write. But rabbinic restrictions also accomplish another goal. By observing these additional protective measures, we demonstrate our reverence for the Torah laws. Just as the palace of the king must be guarded as an indication of honor and respect, so too, do the mitzvos warrant our recognition of their significance.

Although all of the mitzvos require protection, the mitzvah of Shabbos is unique in that Shabbos observance is described as "guarding the Shabbos." In the realm of hilchos Shabbos, there are numerous rabbinic prohibitions. These serve not only to prevent actual Shabbos violation, they also serve to elevate the significance of Shabbos in our eyes. It is precisely because Shabbos is such a precious treasure that we must guard it by meticulously observing every rabbinic safeguard.

The Torah speaks numerous times about guarding and performing the mitzvos. Chazal interpret guarding as referring to talmud Torah. Studying Torah serves a dual function as a guard for Torah observance. First, Torah study lends to practice in a direct manner; one who is not knowledgeable about the intricacies of mitzvah observance will not be able to properly perform the mitzvos. Torah study also indicates our appreciation of the mitzvos. Chazal compare the words of Torah to a King's decree. One who analyzes and reviews every nuance of the King's word is showing the proper reverence for the King. Similarly, our involvement in Torah study is an expression of honor and respect for Hashem's Word. By studying Torah, we are guarding our most precious treasure.

We have been entrusted by Hashem with many gifts. Mikdash, Shabbos, Torah and mitzvos must be guarded as they are our most sacred possessions. By according them the utmost honor and respect, we show true reverence for Hashem Who bestowed these treasures upon us.

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More divrei Torah on Parshas Korach

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from: Rabbi Berel Wein <genesis@torah.org> to: rabbiwein@torah.org
date: Wed, Jun 13, 2018 at 12:53 PM subject: Rabbi Wein - When Moshe Got Angry

Parshas Korach When Moshe Got Angry

In one of his more surprising and controversial statements, Maimonides posits that our great teacher and leader Moshe was subject to becoming angry at certain occasions during his 40-year leadership of the Jewish people. Being a leader, constantly in the public eye and subject to the human inclination to criticize leadership, no matter how able and enlightened it truly is, certainly can bring one to moments of deep frustration, agitation and anger.

In recounting the unwarranted rebellion and complaints of Korach and his followers against Moshe and Aharon, it is apparent that Moshe has become emotionally angry at what is happening. He asks of God to create, so to speak, a supernatural punishment for Korach and his followers. Perhaps it is the cumulative effect of the carping and negativity, the rebellions and sins that have marked the Jewish sojourn in Sinai that has finally sapped the patience and fortitude of Moshe. There is no question that Korach and his group deserved this punishment, for we see that God, so to speak, concurred in bringing about their eventual fate. It is somewhat noteworthy to realize that Moshe who defended the Jewish people and prayed for the mitigation of their punishment when they sinned, though decisions were very severe in this instance, reacts in such a harsh and unforgiving manner. Even though Maimonides lists anger as being one of the two traits that one should go to an extreme to avoid, this week's Torah reading is an example of the justifiable anger of Moshe. Moshe is able to counter and even tolerate the sins of the Jewish people that stem from human weaknesses and desires. Most of the rebellions that appear in the Torah are of this nature. People complain and chafe under rules of diet, sexual probity and internal discipline. However, when there is a rebellion against Godly order in society, when God's will is reduced to political machinations and personal ambition, then the entire structure of Jewish life and the eternity of Israel is threatened.

Moshe, in his leadership role, correctly identifies that neither he nor his brother are the real targets of the rebellion of Korach and his followers. It is rather the entire value system and societal arrangement that God has ordained for the Jewish people to follow that is being attacked and undermined. If the basic structure of Jewish society crumbles, then there will be no chance of survival as a holy people and a kingdom of priests. It is this realization, subtle as it may be and unpopular in the eyes of the masses, that kindles the frustration and anger of Moshe and forces him to ask that Korach and his followers become an example for all generations, for substituting God's will and wisdom with human political correctness and ambition. It is a painful lesson that this week's Torah reading teaches us, about the dangers of altering Jewish societal norms and leadership qualifications. But it is an important lesson for our times as well. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:
Davening for Woman

Q: As a woman, is it preferable for me to Daven at the Kotel where it is difficult for me to concentrate or at home where it is quiet?

A: At home where it is quiet.

Canceling Soccer Game

Q: How should we relate to the soccer team from Argentina canceling their game (which was supposed to take place in Yerushalayim) on account of threats they received?

A: Competitive sports are nonsense. B. It was supposed to take place with severe desecration of Shabbat.

Tefillin in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei

Q: Is it permissible to look in a mirror during the Shemoneh Esrei to make sure that my head Tefillin are in the correct spot?

A: No. 1. One fulfills the Mitzvah of putting on Tefillin if it is in the correct spot on one's head for the amount of time it takes to walk 4 Amot (6 feet). 2. Even if it moves a little to the side, one still fulfills his obligation. 3. One should not be involved in other activities in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei.

Son Who is Distant from Torah

Q: Our 18-year-old son is distant from Torah and returned home with an earring. As his mother, do I need to tell him that he should not return home until he removes the earring?

A: Your son is worth more than a text message. If you want, you may call my wife. In general, issues such as these are not solved through coercion but through trust.

First-Born Goat

[There is a Torah Mitzvah to give a first-born Kosher animal to a Cohain. The Cohain sacrifices it in the Beit Ha-Mikdash and eats the meat with his family members in Yerushalayim. If the animal has a blemish, it cannot be sacrificed but it is still Kosher, and the Cohain may eat it as "non-holy" meat. After the destruction of the Beit Ha-Mikdash, the only permissible way to eat its meat is if it has a blemish (as there is no possibility to sacrifice it). At the same time, it is forbidden to intentionally cause a blemish on a first-born.. As a result, when there is a first-born animal, the Cohanim must care for the first-born animal for a long period of time until a blemish somehow develops. Since there is a fear that a Cohain will cause a blemish because of the hardship of caring for the animals, our Rabbis made a decree that if he does so it is forbidden to slaughter the animal. There is also a fear that during our time people will shear the animal for its wool or work him, even though it is forbidden to get any benefit from the animal. The Rabbis therefore suggest that before the animal is born, one makes an agreement of joint-ownership with a non-Jew, which exempts one from the Mitzvah of the first-born animal and the need to give it to a Cohain.]

Q: A first-born goat was born on our Yishuv. Before it was born a partnership was not made with a non-Jew. While it is forbidden by Halachah to cause the animal to have a blemish, the laws of the State of Israel require one to make a hole in the animal's ear and place a number in it. Does this count as a blemish to permit the animal?

A: 1. Placing a number in the ear is only a small hole.. One needs a significant blemish to permit the first-born. 2. I have not lived on a Kibbutz for nearly 40 years, so you should ask the Rav of a Kibbutz or a Moshav who answers such questions all the time (It once happened with Ha-Rav Reuven Ha-Cohain Katz, when he served as the Rav of Petach Tikvah, that there was a knock on the door of his house and when he opened it, he saw a goat tied to the door with a silver sign engraved: "A present for a Cohain, a first-born, for the honorable Chief Rabbi". Rav Katz was unable to figure out what to do with the goat, so he rented a field in the courtyard of Yeshivat Lomza in Petach Tikvah, and care for the goat for a few years until the goat died. Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef related his story. And see the book "Ma'aseh Ish" [volume 7, pp. 68-69] that in the Yishuv Bnei Re'em, where Ha-Rav Nachman Kahane of Spinka was serving as the Rav, a first-born animal was born and the owner forgot to make a partnership with a non-Jew. Rav Kahane traveled to Yerushalayim to ask Gedolei Yerushalayim for all the details relating to the issue. He met Ha-Rav Amram Blau, who told him to go to Bnei Brak and ask the Chazon Ish, who was not yet well-known. The Chazon Ish wrote him 28 Halachot explaining all of the details).

Divorced Rabbi

Q: Is there a problem to learn Torah with a divorced Rabbi?

A: No. If he is a good person. And one should not learn Torah with a married Rabbi if he is not a good person.

Name from Tanach

Q: Is there an obligation to give a child a name from the Tanach?

A: No. After all there is Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Tarfon. But you should name him/her with a Jewish name and not a non-Jewish name. When will it be Permissible to Ascend to Har Ha-Bayit

Q: Maran Ha-Rav Kook and Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah forbid ascending to the Temple Mount. When will it be permissible for all of Am Yisrael to ascend?

A: In order to build the Beit Ha-Mikdash. The spot is therefore called "The Temple Mount", the mountain of the Temple and not for another purpose. Dream Chaser

Q: There is a Native-American piece of jewelry called a dream catcher. Can one buy one?

A: It is nonsense. The source is from Native-Americans and adopted by the New Age movement.

Guests or Torah Learning

Q: When guests come to visit my parents, do I have to sit and talk to them or can I go and learn Torah?

A: Talk for a short time and then go and learn.

Yearning for Prayer

Q: What can I do so I have a yearning to Daven?

A: Read Mesilat Yesharim many times.

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Korach: The Secret of the Incense

Rav Kook Torah

"Aaron took [the fire-pan] as Moses had told him... He put the incense in it, and it atoned for the people. He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked." (Num. 17:12-13)

From where did Moses learn the secret power of incense to arrest plagues?

The Gift of the Angel of Death

According to the Midrash (Shabbat 89a), when Moses went up to accept the Torah, the angels bestowed him with various presents. "You ascended on high, taking a captive [the Torah], receiving gifts among men" (Psalms 68:19). Even the Angel of Death presented Moses with a gift: the secret of the incense.

What is special about incense that it has the power to stay death? And why not take advantage of this capability to permanently rescind death?

Binding Together All Forces

All forces in the world, even the forces of death and destruction, contribute to the development and perfection of the universe. When all the realms and their forces, both spiritual and physical, draw together, each one provides a unique function. From this standpoint, the force of death also serves as a force of life.

The unique character of the incense reflects this message of harmony and inter-connectivity. The Hebrew word for incense, ketoret, is related to the word kasher, meaning a 'bind' or 'knot.' The incense unites together the core essence of all forces - life, matter, and spirit - according to the extraordinary recipe that God prescribed in the Torah.

The ability to overcome destructive forces, at a time when they rule freely and have not yet been converted into constructive and preserving forces, was an exceptional phenomenon. This hidden knowledge was granted only to Moses. This gift from the Angel of Death demonstrated the surrender of the forces of death to the pure splendor illuminating that faithful messenger, as he revealed the light of the Torah of life.

What is the root of the incense's secret power? The ketoret also encompasses the forces of destruction, so that they may contribute to building and perfecting the universe. Thus, we find that the ketoret bound together many

fragrances, including galbanum (chelbenah), which was an essential ingredient, despite its pungent, unpleasant odor. In this way, these forces fulfill their ultimate purpose, to build and complete. True realization of this transformation, however, will only occur in the distant future, as the path for sweetening the bitterness of the universe is hidden deeply within the divine secrets of Creation.

Only as a temporary measure for the need of that hour, the harmonious quality of the incense was able to stay the power of death. The secret given to Moses demonstrated the comprehensiveness of the Torah, and the unique splendor of those who study Torah - the source of peace, life, and rectification for all worlds and their myriad inhabitants.

From: Yeshiva.org.il <subscribe@yeshiva.org.il> via activetrail.com date: Wed, Jun 13, 2018

The Halachos of Pidyon Haben

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

This week's parsha includes the mitzvah of pidyon haben, redeeming the bechor, the firstborn, if it is a boy. The mitzvah is performed optimally when the baby turns a month old, by giving a kohein five sela'im of silver, equal to about 96 grams of silver (Chazon Ish).

The dollar value of the five sela'im varies, depending on the market price of silver. Some people have the custom of giving the kohein six coins, in case one of the coins is defective and does not contain enough silver. The truth is that one has to research how much silver content there is in the coins. Old US silver dollars did have enough silver, but most coins today have little metallic value. We will talk more about this shortly.

WHO IS REQUIRED TO REDEEM THE BECHOR?

The obligation rests on the father of a boy who is the firstborn of his mother and was born through natural delivery. If the father is a kohein or a levi, or if the mother is the daughter of a kohein or a levi, there is no mitzvah of pidyon haben. Usually, the question of whether one's mother is a bas kohein or levi does not affect a person's halachic status; however, since pidyon haben is dependent on the boy being the firstborn of his mother, her yichus is taken into consideration (Bechoros 47a).

There is an interesting phenomenon that relates to the difference between the daughter of a kohein and the daughter of a levi. If a boy is born of a non-Jewish father and a bas kohein, there is a requirement for this child, upon becoming an adult, to perform a pidyon haben. Why is this true? Because his mother was together with a non-Jew, she loses her sanctity as a bas kohein - for example, she will never again be able to eat terumah. Therefore, her son is included in the mitzvah of pidyon haben. However, neither parent is obligated to perform the mitzvah for the child; the father, because he is not Jewish, and the mother, because there is no requirement for Mom to perform pidyon haben. Therefore, upon becoming an adult, this child should perform the mitzvah himself.

The halacha is different regarding a boy who is born of a non-Jewish father and a bas levi. Although Mom was involved in a prohibited relationship, this did not affect her yichus, since she loses no halachic rights as a result. Therefore, in this situation the child is exempt from the mitzvah of pidyon haben.

Incidentally, there are poskim who rule that the grandson of a non-Jewish father and a bas levi is also excluded from pidyon haben. This means that the son of a non-Jewish father and a bas levi does not have a mitzvah to redeem his son. Since this man is Jewish from birth but does not have a Jewish father, his yichus follows his mother, who is the daughter of a levi. Since the bas levi's son's only Jewish yichus is as a descendant of Levi, these authorities contend that he has no obligation to perform pidyon haben. (See Shu't Maharam Shick, Yoreh De'ah #299 who disagrees with this ruling.) My impression is that the accepted practice in this situation is to perform an act of pidyon haben without a brocha; after which the kohein returns the money.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A KOHEIN MARRIED A DIVORCEE?

If a kohein married a divorcee or any other woman prohibited to a kohein, the children of this union are challalim, which means that they have become defiled and therefore lose their status as kohanim. The daughters may not marry kohanim, and the firstborn son born to a kohein from this woman needs to be redeemed, just like any yisroel. Furthermore, his son's son will also require pidyon haben, like any other yisroel.

WHAT IS THE HALACHA OF A BECHOR BORN THROUGH CAESARIAN SECTION?

Switching sub-topics, only a naturally-born child has the status of a bechor for pidyon haben purposes. There is no mitzvah of pidyon haben if the boy was delivered through caesarian section. His younger brother is also not considered firstborn, even if he is born through natural delivery. Similarly, a boy born after a miscarriage is not a bechor for purposes of the mitzvah of pidyon haben (Bechoros 46a). This last halacha depends on

how far advanced the terminated pregnancy was, a topic that we will leave for a different time.

WHAT HAPPENS IF NO ONE REDEEMS THE BECHOR?

If the father cannot or does not redeem the bechor, other people can redeem him, but are not required to do so. However, if no one redeemed the bechor as a child, he is required to redeem himself when he reaches adulthood (Kiddushin 29a).

Many men who are not from an observant background did not have a pidyon haben. At a pidyon haben that I once performed (I am a kohein), the grandfather of the newly redeemed baby came over to me, saying, "You know, I am also firstborn and a baal teshuvah. I can't imagine anyone made a pidyon haben for me." And so, two pidyonim were performed on the same day, one for the grandson and one for the grandfather!

WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE?

As opposed to other mitzvos, such as bris milah and a wedding, where the mitzvah is performed first and then the festive meal is eaten, pidyon haben is performed during the meal, in order to call attention to the mitzvah. (In some Yerushalmi circles, they actually perform the pidyon first, and then begin the seudah.)

The usual procedure is as follows: After the assembled have made hamotzi and taken their seats, the father brings the bechor to the kohein, who is seated at a place of honor. The custom is to bring the bechor on a large, silver platter. Many have the custom of placing sugar cubes, cloves of garlic, and jewelry on the platter. The father declares to the kohein that the baby is firstborn and must be redeemed.

The kohein then responds with the famous and enigmatic question: "Mai ba'is tefei?" Which do you prefer? Would you rather have your child or the five sela'im of pidyon?

The father responds that he would prefer his son, and that he is prepared to perform the redemption. He then recites the bracha on the mitzvah and the bracha of shehechiyanu, and places the coins into the kohein's right hand. The kohein waves the coins over the head of the bechor while blessing him. Then, the kohein recites the birchas kohanim and other words of blessing over the head of the bechor. The procedure is completed by the kohein reciting a bracha on a cup of wine and drinking it.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN THE KOHEIN SAYS "MAI BA'IS TEFEI?" -- DOES THE FATHER REALLY HAVE A CHOICE?

The wording of the kohein's question, "Which do you prefer?" -- implying that the father has a choice -- is extremely strange. Halachically, there is no choice or option. The father has a mitzvah to fulfill, which he is required to observe. So, why does the kohein suggest to the father that he has a choice?

The text of our pidyon haben ceremony goes back 1,000 years, and, since that time, probably tens of thousands of interpretations have been suggested for this question. Think of your own answer to this question, and you'll have something to share with others the next time you attend a pidyon haben!

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE PLACE GARLIC CLOVES AND SUGAR CUBES ON THE PLATTER THAT HOLDS THE BABY?

There are many customs that have developed around the mitzvah of pidyon haben. Some people place pieces of garlic, sugar cubes, or candies alongside the bechor when he is brought in for the pidyon. The sugar cubes show that the mitzvos are sweet, and garlic is a symbol of and segulah for fertility. Some say that when participants take home the sugar and the garlic and use them for cooking their own meals at home, they increase the numbers of people who "participated" in the pidyon haben meal, all of whom will be blessed by this.

WHEN IS THE PIDYON PERFORMED? WHY IS THE MINHAG TO PERFORM PIDYON HABEN IN THE AFTERNOON?

The Torah says that the mitzvah is to redeem the bechor when he turns a month old.

How does one determine that a child is a month old? Although we are accustomed to thinking of a Jewish month as being either 29 or 30 days long, these are actually calendar calculations that deal only with complete days. Technically, a month is the amount of time it takes the moon to revolve around the earth, which varies slightly from month to month, but is always a bit more than 29½ days.

HOW LONG IS A MONTH? There is a dispute in halacha as to how one determines that a bechor is a month old. One opinion follows the day-count method and rules that the pidyon haben should take place on the 31 st day after the boy was born, counting his day of birth as day one (Magen Avraham 339:8).

Others rule that a month for pidyon haben is determined by the astronomical method, meaning the same amount of time that transpires from one new moon to the next. Since the time that transpires from one new moon to the next is estimated at 29 days, 12 hours and 793/1080 of an hour (usually called 793 chalakim), the time for pidyon haben begins when the bechor is exactly 29 days, 12 hours and 793 chalakim old (Shach, Yoreh De'ah 305:12). Common practice is to perform a pidyon haben after both opinions have been fulfilled.

By the morning of the 31 st day, the bechor is usually 29 days, 12 hours and 793 chalakim old. However, if the bechor was born shortly before sunset on a long summer day, daybreak on the morning of the 31 st day is less than 29 days, 12 hours and 793

chalakim since his birth. In this situation, one should wait to perform the pidyon until he is 29 days, 12 hours and 793 chalakim after birth (Pischei Tshuvah 305:17). For this reason, it is a common custom to schedule a pidyon haben on the afternoon of the 31 st day, which is always an appropriate time according to both opinions.

When the earliest time to perform the pidyon is on an erev Shabbos or erev Yom Tov, the pidyon should be scheduled in the morning (Mishnah Berurah 249:13). In the rare case that it is not yet 29 days, 12 hours and 793 chalakim after birth, one should calculate when the 29 days, 12 hours and 793 chalakim after birth falls out and schedule the pidyon then.

When the 31 st falls on Shabbos or Yom Tov, the pidyon should be scheduled for Motza'ei Shabbos or Motza'ei Yom Tov (Shu"t Noda Biyehuda Tenina, Yoreh De'ah #187).

WHAT DOES ONE DO IF THE THIRTY-FIRST DAY FALLS ON A FAST DAY?

There are two practices mentioned by the poskim. One approach is to perform the pidyon during the fast day, so as not to delay the opportunity to observe the mitzvah, and conduct the festive meal at night after the fast is over. The other approach is to delay the pidyon until the night after the fast, and then perform the pidyon during the meal (Shach, Yoreh De'ah 305:12).

CAN ONE PERFORM THE MITZVAH OF PIDYON HABEN BY GIVING THE KOHEIN A BOND?

One does not fulfill the mitzvah of pidyon haben if one gives the kohein a bond (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 305: 3,4). The yisroel must give the kohein something that has inherent value, such as merchandise. A check is an order of payment instructing the bank to release funds, but itself has no inherent value. Therefore, a check is not equal to cash and is not valid for pidyon haben.

It should be noted that according to many prominent poskim, paper money should not be used for pidyon haben because they also do not have inherent value (see Shu"t Chasam Sofer; Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh De'ah 305:18; Shu"t Oneg Yom Tov, Yoreh De'ah #102). Since our coins today are not valued by their metal content, it would seem that they should also not be used for pidyon haben.

Usually the pidyon haben is performed with silver coins. These coins are supplied either by the father or by the kohein, in which case he sells them to the father before the pidyon. It is halachically acceptable for the father to pay for the coins by check when he buys them from the kohein.

I was once given by the father small pieces of silver. He had purchased the exact amount of silver necessary, probably from a jeweler, for pidyon haben and that is what he gave me. Although I have had this happen only once, I am told that in certain communities this is a common method.

On another occasion, I was asked, in advance, if I would afterwards sell back to the family the silver dollars that they were giving me. It turned out that the coins used had been used by the great-great-grandfather of the baby when he performed pidyon haben on his son, and these exact coins had been used for every generation in between!

CAN ONE FULFILL THE MITZVAH BY BUYING THE KOHEIN A PRESENT

Yes, as long as the present is worth at least the value of five sela'im (96 grams of silver). However, the prevalent custom is to give the kohein silver coins, as mentioned above.

MAY THE KOHEIN RETURN THE MONEY TO THE FATHER OF THE BECHOR?

The kohein may return the money. However, this should not be his regular practice, since it might cause a loss of revenue to other kohanim, because yisraelim may stop using them for pidyon haben (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 305:8). There are some poskim who contend that today the money should be returned, since the kohein cannot prove that he is a kohein (Shu"t Yaavetz #155). However, the accepted practice is that the kohein does not return the money (Pischei Tshuvah 305:12, quoting Chasam Sofer).

ONCE THE FATHER ASKED A KOHEIN TO BE THE KOHEIN AT HIS SON'S PIDYON HABEN, MAY HE SUBSEQUENTLY CHANGE HIS MIND AND USE A DIFFERENT KOHEIN?

Once the father has asked one kohein to "officiate" at the pidyon haben, he should not ask another kohein. However, if he gave the redemption money to a different kohein, the pidyon is valid (Rema, Yoreh De'ah 305:4).

MAY THE FATHER OF THE BECHOR DIVIDE THE MONEY FOR PIDYON HABEN BETWEEN TWO OR MORE KOHANIM?

It is preferable not to do this, but if he did so, the pidyon is valid (Pischei Tshuvah 305:10, quoting Chasam Sofer).

A RATIONALE FOR THE MITZVAH

It behooves us to consider the reason for the mitzvah of pidyon haben. Following the smiting of the firstborn in Egypt, all firstborn boys had a certain kedusha, which should have entitled them to a role of service in the Beis Hamikdash.

However, because the bechorim were involved in worshipping the Eigel Hazahav, the Golden Calf, they lost their unique status and could no longer perform any special role

in the Beis Hamikdash. Therefore, the bechor must undergo a redemption ceremony to make amends -- which is to pay the kohein as a means of "redeeming" his former kedusha.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Korach

פרשת קרח תשע"ה

וישלח משה לקרא לדתן ולאבירם בני אליאב ויאמרו לא נעלה

Moshe sent forth to summon Dathan and Aviram, bnei Eliav, but they said, "We shall not go up!" (16:12)

Two words: discord and disagreement, both begin with the same letter – "D," but the words could otherwise not be further apart. Discord is the result of a disagreement in which one or both factions take it personally. Our parsha presents a classic case in which one side made every attempt to ameliorate a disagreement but did not succeed, since the other side was insistent on taking it to the next level.

When Korach rebelled against Moshe Rabbeinu, he was joined by Dathan and Aviram, Moshe's nemeses. Our leader did everything to appease them to the point that he sent a messenger to Dathan and Aviram, inviting them to come speak with him. They refused. Undeterred, Moshe went to them to make a final plea for peace. Korach was intractable, but, perhaps his followers, individuals who would continue to remain followers (as opposed to achieving any leadership for themselves), stood firm in their rebellion. Their obstinacy was their downfall.

Moshe could have easily ignored Dathan and Aviram. These men had been bothersome to him from their first meeting in Egypt, when Moshe attempted to put a stop to their squabbling with one another. Nonetheless, Moshe did everything to placate them. If it would engender peace, then it would be worth the personal denigration.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, observes that while it is highly commendable that one attempt to emulate Moshe's behavior, the ability to disagree without arguing on a personal level is no easy task. It is not uncommon that when two people (or more) disagree, their difference of opinion quickly snowballs into hostilities which bring about an end to a relationship that had been cultivated over a period of years. Their differences have now become personal. One might question how a close relationship that had been nourished over years could so quickly become a thing of the past. When personal feelings are hurt, people respond atypically.

A Torah disagreement that led to the founding of a second yeshiva occurred when Horav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, zl, disagreed with Horav Nossen Tzvi Finkel, zl, (the Alter m'Slabodka) concerning the study of Mussar, ethical character refinement. Rav Baruch Ber felt that Mussar should be derived from full-time Torah study. He saw no need to set aside time for a Mussar seder. Rav Nossen Tzvi, being a disciple of Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, the founder of the Mussar movement, was of the opinion that the average Jew needed to complement his Torah study with specific time set aside for the purposeful study of Mussar. As a result of their disagreement l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, the Alter left Knesses Bais Yitzchak (Rav Baruch Ber's yeshiva) and establish his own yeshiva, Knesses Bais Yisrael. Rav Baruch Ber did not take offense. In fact, he took one of the Alter's primary students as a son-in-law. They had a dispute, but their disagreement was not personal.

Rav Wolbe cites a well-known vignette concerning Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl, who stated at his rebbeztzin's funeral that he and his rebbeztzin had lived in harmony throughout their entire marriage. Therefore, he felt he had no need to ask forgiveness of her neshamah. Sometime later, Rav Shlomo Zalman met one of his recently married students. He questioned him on how his marriage was going. The response was overly positive. "Things are great, my wife and I never argue," the young man replied. Rav

Shlomo Zalman asked if they were both well. When the student responded in the affirmative, Rav Shlomo Zalman looked pensive. “Rebbe, what is wrong? We are both healthy. We never argue. What more can we ask for?”

Rav Shlomo Zalman explained that it is not normal for a husband and wife not to have disagreements. (Two people; two varied mindsets; often two different backgrounds.) It is not unusual that arguments will ensue. “But did the Rebbe not say at the rebbetzin’s funeral that he did not have to ask his wife for forgiveness?”

“Absolutely,” replied Rav Shlomo Zalman. “Our disagreements did not impact our personal relationship. Thus, there was no reason to beg forgiveness.”

There is no such thing as a life without disagreement. Our focus must be to see to it that the differences of opinion we have with others never become personal, never reach the point of discord.

ויקם משה וילך אל דתן ואבירם

So Moshe stood up and went to Dassan and Aviram. (16:25)

Why did Moshe Rabbeinu denigrate himself to go to such miscreants as Dassan and Aviram? He was the quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael, the Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael, the nation’s Rebbe. They were nothing. Yet, he went to them. Why? Chazal (Sanhedrin 110a) derive from here that one does not sustain a dispute. If he can diffuse a controversy from growing, spreading, he should do everything possible to extinguish the flames of discord. Furthermore, one who supports a machlokes, controversy, transgresses the prohibition of V’lo yiheyeh k’Korach v’chaadaso, “that he not be like Korach and his assembly” (Bamidbar 17:5). Simply speaking, the Torah is admonishing us to distance ourselves from a machlokes. There are those, however, who interpret this pasuk not as a prohibition, but rather, as a promise that there will never again be such a controversy within the Jewish People. What a wonderful guarantee, but is it realistic? Can we say that we are no longer plagued by discord, that dispute and controversy are relics of the past? Apparently not. What then is the meaning of the words, “that he not be like Korach and his assembly”?

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, explains that the Korach controversy was unique. It was a singular form of dispute which no longer exists. The Korach dispute had one side that was kulo emes, absolute truth. The level of veracity exhibited by Moshe and Aharon, the intensity of their Divine mission, was at every juncture and every phase one hundred percent true and just. The other side, represented by the demagogue Korach and his henchmen, was completely false. There was no shred of truth either in anything they said, nor in anything they stood for. We will never again experience this form of machlokes in which both sides are absolute – truth versus falsehood. Today there is a shred of truth in every controversy. It may be miniscule; it may be self-serving, but there will always be some level of veracity.

Sadly, the need for some people to take sides – to look for every opportunity to debate, dispute, argue about anything and everything – is a disease that continues to wreak havoc on Jewish communities, organizations and families throughout the world. No area or venue is free of this malignancy that ferments and metastasizes, victimizing innocent people who either get in the way or are influenced to the point of joining in the fray. In any event, at the end of the day they are no longer the same. The relationships they once had are now history. The disputants who initiated the dispute have long ago made peace and moved on, while the fools that joined the debacle are left to pick up the pieces. Their lives and friendships might not be shattered, but they are certainly no longer the same.

When confronting an incendiary situation, one that quickly conflagrates into a full-scale machlokes, walking away is probably the only option. It is not a sign of weakness; rather, it is an indicator of self-respect and self-confidence. It shows that one knows better than to involve himself in something from which he will not emerge unscathed. It is often difficult to step back and disengage, but it saves us and our families from so much trauma.

Anger precipitates conflict. Someone hurts us, and we respond in turn. If we would use the energy we expend for disagreement and revenge to acquiesce and move on, we would be much happier people. It is easy to seek avenues for responding to those who annoy us, but it takes maturity and reason to overcome our yetzer hora, evil inclination, to “get him back.” Alas, these are rare characteristics. For the most part, those who cause us pain are themselves hurting, and this is how they soothe their own self-loathing: by taking it out on others.

So much can be achieved by swallowing our anger and pain, putting on a smile, or at least ignoring the hurt and moving on. The following inspirational story (related by Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita) was related years ago in these pages. It is well worth repeating.

It was a warm Shabbos afternoon, and a secular Israeli whose only understanding of Shabbos consisted of an awareness that on Shabbos there was much less traffic, allowing for a day of hassle-free driving, was taking a drive through a religious neighborhood. Even the most careful driver must exert extra vigilance when driving through an area where there are children. Being that there was no traffic to speak of, this man was less than vigilant. Therefore, when a young child ran out in the street which usually served on Shabbos as a large playground, the driver saw the child too late, and the child sustained serious injuries upon impact. The child was transported to the hospital, where the prognosis was hopeful, but guarded. It would be some time before the child would be running around again, but, Baruch Hashem, he would one day be whole.

The driver was not cited, since it had been an accident. He was, however, filled with guilt and remorse. Finally, he gathered enough courage to go to the home of the child to speak with the parents. He fully expected to be greeted with a hailstorm of anger, accusations and blame; thus, he was very surprised when the mother opened the door with a smile on her face. He was welcomed into their home and invited to sit at the table. He began with a sincere apology, knowing full well that apologies would not ameliorate the situation. He was shocked when the father said that, as faithful Jews, they believed that everything that occurs is by Divine decree. They believed that their child was to be a victim, and he, the driver, was Hashem’s agent.

The driver could not believe what he was hearing. The parents were not holding him responsible. He still felt that he must do something as an act of penance. “Is there anything I can do for you? I feel miserable. This has never happened to me. I cannot get the image and sound of the impact out of my mind. Please, let me do something,” the driver pleaded with the parents, almost hoping that if he would have the door slammed in his face, be screamed at and have epitaphs hurled at him – he would feel better.

“Yes, there is something that we would appreciate that you would do,” the mother began. “Sure, sure anything,” the driver said. “We would like you to become Shabbos observant. The accident happened as a result of chillul Shabbos. It would be a great z’chus, merit, for our child’s recovery if you would undertake to alter your secular lifestyle and begin to observe Shabbos.” The man agreed, knowing that while it would not be easy, he was still getting off with a very light “sentence.”

One thing leads to another when Shabbos leads the way. Soon his family became Shabbos observant, with kashrus and total observance following. Today, they are a fully Torah observant family with the father a changed person, all because the child’s parents, who had every right to be angry, understood that acrimony would not heal their child. Instead of controversy and vitriol, they reached out with love and friendship, thus helping not only their child, but also playing a critical role in bringing a Jewish family back to religious observance.

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