

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת קרח

**ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן
“Korach son of Yitzhar son of Kehas son of Levi took [himself] and Dasan and Aviram
sons of Eliav and On son of Peles, sons of [the tribe of] Reuven” (16:1)**

On ben Peles was dissuaded from joining Korach by his wife. She convinced him that in the end the leader would be either Korach or Moshe and that there was no point in On fighting against Moshe, as he had nothing to gain by it. However, when she saw that her logic was not convincing him, she decided to take the matter into her own hands. She gave On food and drink so that he would become tired and he went to sleep. When Korach came to pick him up for the big showdown with Aharon, she sat at the entrance to her tent with her hair uncovered. Korach went away when he saw that she was acting immodestly. Because of her plan, she saved her husband from death. We must learn from her to always use our ingenuity and creativity to develop strategic plans to avoid doing evil and to protect others from harm.

There is another lesson to take away from this story. It is human nature for a person to be influenced by others throughout his life, whether family, friends, colleagues or community. One must be very careful to discern which influences are for his benefit and which are to his detriment. On ben Peles fell under the influences of Korach and his wife. In the end, he recognized that his wife was correct and that he should have distanced himself from Korach. Chazal say that his name was On, from the word "onen" (mourner), because he spent the remainder of his life mourning the fact that he had been swayed by Korach's incitement and had been a part of his cohort.

**ויקם משה וילך אל דתן ואבירם וילכו אחריו זקני ישראל
“Moshe stood up and went to Dasan and Aviram, and the elders of Israel followed
him” (16:25)**

Despite the fact that Dasan and Aviram had attacked him, Moshe invited them to talk with him and to resolve their argument. Rashi comments that this teaches us that we must not continue arguments and instead must seek to put them to an end. They responded that they would not come, even if he threatened to blind them. Moshe then proceeded to go and approach them in order to make peace. Nevertheless, they still remained uninterested in talking. The Torah Temima writes that although there is a disagreement whether or not a rabbi is permitted to forgo his honor, everyone agrees that he must forgo his honor in order to end arguments. We learn this from Moshe, who went out to go see Dasan and Aviram, even though it was beneath him to go find them. This is why Aharon was called a “rodeif shalom,” a “pursuer of peace.” He did not wait for peace to come to him. He ran after it and chased it until he had successfully achieved peace.

From this we can learn the importance of peace. This also applies in a marriage. When a couple gets into a fight, they should chase after peace and not fight any more. Each one should want to be the peacemaker. Even if it involves making a concession, one must run after peace and harmony in the home.

**וידבר אל העדה לאמר סורו נא מעל אהלי האנשים הרשעים האלה ואל תגעו בכל אשר
להם פן תספו בכל חטאתם
“He spoke to the assembly saying: Turn away now from near the tents of these wicked men**

and do not touch anything of theirs, lest you perish because of all their sins” (16:26)

The midrash says that there are four types of people who are classified as reshaim: One who raises his hand against his fellow in order to hit him, one who acts brazenly in front of an important person, one who propagates arguments and one who borrows without paying back. The midrash continues and says that the word "machlokes" stands for makah (plague), charon (anger), likui (smiting), kelala (curse), toeiva (abomination). These are the results of machlokes. We have to realize what machlokes actually does to us and how terrible it truly is. It must be avoided at all costs.

זכרון לבני ישראל למען אשר לא יקרב איש זר אשר לא מזרע אהרן הוא להקטיר קטרת לפני ה' ולא יהיה כקרח וכעדתו כאשר דבר ה' ביד משה לו
“As a reminder to the Children of Israel, so that no alien who is not of the offspring of Aharon shall draw near to bring up the smoke of incense before Hashem, that he not be like Korach and his assembly, as Hashem spoke about him through Moshe” (17:5)

The Torah warns us not to be like Korach and his cohorts. In fact, Chazal tell us that, based on this posuk, whoever is involved in an argument transgresses the mitzva in the Torah not to be like Korach. Whether this is a biblical commandment or not is the subject of a dispute among the Rishonim.

The simple explanation of the posuk is that one should not argue against the privileges of the Kohanim as Korach did. It can also mean not to start fights in general and not to participate in arguments. It is not enough to eschew fights but one must stay far away from them and never even come close to being party to one. This is hinted to in the name of the parsha, Korach, which contains the same letters as the word "rachok," distant. One must keep his distance from anything close to an argument. This is why Avraham asked Lot to move away from him at the first sign of trouble between their shepherds. He knew that the situation between them would deteriorate rapidly if he did not stop it. He saw a disagreement coming and he wanted to split up before it actually materialized.

Similarly, we find that the Torah commands, "Midvar sheker tirschak," "stay far away from falsehood." It is not enough to avoid lies, but one must not even give the impression of anything other than the truth. One should not tell half-truths in order to deceive others. The Torah does not say "do not lie." It says "stay far away from falsehood."

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (5:17) says that any argument that is for the sake of Heaven, such as that of Hillel and Shammai, will be everlasting and any argument that is not for the sake of Heaven, such as that of Korach, will not last. R' Ovadia MiBartenura explains that the Mishna is teaching us that any argument which does not have a higher purpose involved is not meant to uncover the truth and is only for ulterior motives. Hillel and Shammai were seeking the truth. Korach and his group were not seeking the truth, only grandeur and prestige. This is important to remember when we find ourselves engaged in an argument, even if we feel that it is for the right reasons. When people are arguing over a gemara, they should remember that the goal of the argument is to discover the truth. Then their argument will accomplish something. Similarly, in a marriage, if both spouses mean well and want the truth and what is best for both of them, any discussion between a husband and wife will lead to something good and purposeful.

Because of this, it is not always a good idea to engage a missionary or a heretic in a debate. This is usually not a debate for the sake of Heaven, as they have no interest in hearing what we have to say, only in talking to us. The Lekach Tov comments on the Mishna in Avos that exhorts us to "know what to answer to an apikores" that one needs to know how to answer for himself to

prevent himself from being influenced by a heretic. It is not always important to have a discussion with them because often nothing will come of it. However, one must know the answers for himself so that he will remain firm in his emunah no matter what he hears.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Written by Michael Gutmann