

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת קרח

ויפלו על פניהם ויאמרו קל אלקי הרוחת לכל בשר האיש אחד יחטא ועל כל העדה תקצף

“They fell on their faces and they said: Hashem, G-d of spirits of all flesh, should one man sin and you become angry at the whole community?” (16:22)

Rabbeinu Bechaye notes that this posuk is the source for our practice of falling on our faces when saying Tachanun. Since Moshe prayed in this manner, we do so as well. He writes that there are three ideas represented by falling on our faces. We cover our faces to express the fact that Hashem is present when we pray and we cover our faces in fear and because we are ashamed of our sins. We also show humility because becoming humble is one of the first steps in the repentance process. Finally, covering our faces represents the helplessness that we feel in our lives without the assistance of Hashem. This is also why we put our feet together during Shemone Esrei. We show that our feet are tied when we are left to our own devices and we pray for Hashem's help so that we can do all the things that we need to do.

Rav Hai Gaon said that we lean on our left arm because the left side represents freedom, as it is the side to which we lean on Pesach night. By leaning on our left arm, we subjugate our freedom to Hashem and show our reliance upon him. This is why Moshe called Hashem "G-d of spirits" when he fell on his face. He was saying that Hashem is in charge of the world.

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 Mishna in Pirkei Avos (5:17) says that any argument that is for the sake of Heaven, such as that of Hillel and Shamai, will be everlasting

and any argument that is not for the sake of Heaven, such as that of Korach, will not last. Why does the Mishna list both sides in the argument between Hillel and Shammai but neglects to list the party opposed to Korach? One possible explanation is that when people argue for a good purpose, they listen to each other in their quest for the truth. However, in an argument which is not for the sake of Heaven, the truth is not important and so the two sides do not listen to each other because they have no interest in hearing what they have to say. Korach had no use for Moshe's counterarguments and it was as if Moshe was not even there. When we have disagreements with a friend or a spouse, this is a good way to tell if we are honestly arguing for a good reason. When one earnestly seeks the truth, he will listen to what others have to say, even if that is not his point of view.

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.

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