

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת קרח

ויקה 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)

R' Dovid Feinstein notes that the name Korach is an anagram of the word "חקר," "analysis." Korach's mistake was that he analyzed things that were beyond his capacity to understand. He challenged the mitzvos of Hashem which were beyond his scrutiny. Torah is of divine origin and we do not always understand everything that is contained in it. However, just because a mitzvah does not pass the test of the human intellect does not invalidate the obligation to fulfill it.

The numerical value of Moshe is 345 and that of Korach is 308. The difference between the two is 37, the numerical value of the word "hevel," "nonsense." The difference between Moshe and Korach was that which did not make sense. Moshe appreciated the divinity of the Torah and understood that we cannot question anything that Hashem says, even if we do not understand it. We do not always comprehend everything in the Torah but we are bound to it nonetheless.

ויקהלו על משה ועל אהרן ויאמרו אליהם רב לכם כי כל העדה כלם קדשים ובתוכם ה' ומדוע תתנשאו על קהל ה'

“They gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon and said to them: It is too much for you! For the entire assembly - all of them - are holy and Hashem is among them; why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem” (16:3)

R' Moshe Feinstein writes that Korach erred because he felt that everyone could serve Hashem in his own way. It is important that we rely on the tradition that we have from our forefathers. We have a mesorah and this lights the way for us to follow. We need this mesorah for both the written and oral Torah so that we do not see things that are not really there. Even in the wilderness, where they heard Torah directly from Hashem, they needed to rely on the teachings of Moshe Rabbeinu. It is important to learn from teachers and parents. Even in our day where information is readily available to all and self-tutelage is increasingly popular, it is wise to have a teacher to learn from to ensure that one is learning correctly.

אם כמות כל האדם ימתון אלה ופקדת כל האדם יפקד עליהם לא ה' שלחני
“If these die like the death of men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me” (16:29)

The gemara in Nedarim cites this posuk as the source of the mitzvah to visit the sick. The root "פקד" also means "to visit." Moshe was saying that if Korach and his cohorts would become ill before dying naturally and would be visited by people, it would be proof that Moshe's mission was not divine. Thus, we see that when someone is ill, it is an

obligation to go visit him.

Why was it necessary for Moshe to mention the fact that they would be visited by others? How would this prove the veracity of their words? The Kli Yakar explains that visiting the sick serves two purposes, one for the sick person and one for the visitor. The visitor should inquire after the needs of the ill person and make sure that he is comfortable. (The Aruch Hashulchan says that this is the primary purpose of the mitzvah.) The second purpose of visiting a sick person is that it makes the visitor aware of the frailty of human life and leads him to reassess his ways and to strive to make the most of the years granted to him. When the visitor has these thoughts, it is a merit for the sick person whose condition led the visitor to rethink his ways. Now we can understand the posuk, translating "פקד" to mean, "to remember," another meaning of this root. Moshe announced, "If these men die a natural death like all men, and the remembering of all people (their reassessment of life) is remembered for them (in their merit), Hashem has not sent me." When other people would improve their ways on account of these evildoers, this merit would allow them to be spared from punishment. Therefore, it was important that they die unnaturally and that they should not be able to accrue additional merits through having visitors who change their ways.

Why were they punished by being swallowed alive? The Kli Yakar explains this based on the mishna in Pirkei Avos: "Pray for the welfare of the government, for without the fear of it, each man would swallow his fellow alive." Leadership is important in a society because it keeps people together and in line. Every society needs strong leadership. Korach and his followers argued against having Moshe as their sole leader. Instead, they advocated an oligarchy because they felt that everyone was holy and had heard Hashem speak at Har Sinai. When punishing them, Hashem gave them a taste of their own medicine. When there is no leadership, there is chaos and people are swallowed alive. Since Korach wanted to do away with the leadership of the Jewish people, the ground opened up and swallowed him and his followers.

ויהי ממחרת ויבא משה אל אהל העדות והנה פרח מטה אהרן לבית לוי ויצא פרח ויצץ ציץ ויגמל שקדים

“On the next day, Moshe came to the Tent of the Testimony and behold the staff of Aharon of the house of Levi had blossomed; it brought forth a blossom, sprouted a bud and developed almonds” (17:23)

Why does the posuk say that there were blossoms and almonds. Normally the flowers fall off before the fruit itself grows. How were both present on Aharon's staff? If only almonds were present and the posuk is merely describing the growth process, why mention the flowers if nobody saw them?

Rashbam answers that when Moshe removed the staff from the Kodesh Kodashim, it only had flowers on it. When he showed it to the people, it grew almonds in place of the flowers at that very moment. Thus, the people witnessed both the blossoms and the fruit. This also explains the repetition of the presence of blossoms in the posuk. When Moshe first retrieved the staff, "behold the staff... had blossomed." Only later "it sprouted a bud

and developed almonds."

The gemara on Yoma 52b states that when this special staff was hidden away by King Yoshiyahu shortly before the destruction of the first Bais HaMikdash, it was buried "with its flowers and almonds." This seems to imply that the staff remained with both flowers and almonds simultaneously forever. The Tosfos Yeshanim explains that while some flowers fell off and produced almonds, there were some flowers that had their development arrested at the flowering stage. This is how both blossoms and almonds were present on the staff.

R' Moshe Feinstein asks: What was the purpose of this miraculous combination of both flowers and fruit? He explains that the flowers represent what is invested in a mitzvah. The flower is the preparatory stage leading up to the ultimate growth of fruit. The almonds are the final product and represent the actual performance of a mitzvah. Just as the flowers of Aharon's staff remained alongside the almonds, the energy that brings a mitzvah to fruition remains forever. In the physical world, effort is not as important as the bottom line. If a person invests little effort but is able to produce results, it is just the same. Precisely the opposite is true of mitzvos. Chazal teach us on Berachos 17a that "praiseworthy is he who toils in Torah." It is not the one who studies much Torah and understands many laws thoroughly that is commended, but the one who toils and makes an effort. It is the effort that is rewarded. This is why when we make a blessing each morning for Torah study, we say "Who sanctified us and commanded us to toil in words of Torah." This is true whether the toil produces results or not. The effort that goes into making a mitzvah happen is eternal.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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