

תורה מציון Torah MiTzion

RELIGIOUS ZIONIST KOLLELS כוללים ציוניים בתפוצות

Shabbat Shalom from Torah MiTzion

Issue 145: Parshat Korach (Israel: Chukat)

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*Our thoughts are with the family of the viciously abducted soldier **Gilad ben Aviva**, and our tefilot are dedicated to his quick and safe return. May this shiur also be l'iluy neshama of 18 year old **Eliyahu Pinchas ben Miriam** from Itamar who was also abducted this week, and found murdered earlier today.*

Alive To the Pit **Rav Dror Brama, former Rosh Kollel, London**

Our parsha describes the harshest attack on Moshe's leadership. Korach complains:

"For the entire assembly - all of them - are holy. So why do you exalt yourselves".

All of *Am Yisrael* is holy. What should only Moshe get to be the leader and only Aharon and his sons deserve to be Kohanim?

The psukim do not clearly elucidate Korach's goal. Did he himself want to be the leader? After all, his charge could be leveled at any leader or Kohen: Moshe, Korach or any other individual.

Equality was important to Korach. Everyone is holy; everyone is equal. Therefore, the leadership should be democratic, because the nation is the majority. The whole assembly is holy and not just the leader.

Clearly, Korach was complaining about Hashem's decrees. However, there were many other sinners, but none of them was immediately swallowed up by the ground. The response to Korach's sin is astounding in terms of both its intensity and its rarity.

"And when he finished speaking all these words, the ground which was under them split open. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all the people that were with Korach and all the possessions. And they and all that was theirs descended alive to the pit, and the earth covered them and they were lost from among the congregation."

Everything was lost: all the people and all the property. Why was such a severe punishment necessary?

Close examination of the punishment shows that it directly corresponds to the insistence that everyone is equal.

"Moshe said: 'This is how you will know that Hashem sent me to execute these deeds, and it was not from my heart. If these die like any other man, and the destiny of any other man does befall them, then it was not Hashem who sent me. But if Hashem will create a creation and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that belongs to them, and they will descend alive to the pit, then you will know that these men provoked Hashem.'"

Conventional wisdom holds that everyone faces death equally. Death is each person's eventual destiny. A master and a slave share the same fate. However, in this case, Moshe announces that equality in the face of death will be the criterion for testing his leadership. If Korach and his assembly die a death unlike any other, then the equality claim is false.

Other criteria could have been used for equality. For instance, at the end of the parsha, Moshe initiates the test of the staffs, in which only the chosen one's rod blossoms. Why was death specifically used to demonstrate inequality?

In Midrash Rabbah, Chazal sharpen this question and hint at an answer.

"R' Brachya said: 'How severe is strife (*machloket*). The Heavenly Court only imposes a penalty from age twenty and up, but the earthly courts [do so] from age thirteen. During Korach's *machloket*, one-day old babies were burnt and swallowed down to the lower pit, as it says: "Their wives and their children and their infants . They and all that was theirs descended alive into the pit.'"

The punishment is not limited to the sinners themselves and is expanded to include even day-old infants. At first glance, this is astonishing. How did those babies sin? Furthermore, even if they did in fact sin, does not the Midrash explicitly state that minors are not punished? In cases where individuals who obviously did not choose to sin are nonetheless hurt, Chazal instruct us to view the incident as a consequence rather than a punishment. When a pregnant woman takes drugs, the fetus will suffer. Clearly, the fetus did not sin; he has neither control over the situation nor free will. Thus, his suffering was a result, not a penalty. *Machloket* is so severe because it causes the loss of day-old babies.

Chazal define the *machloket* of Korach and his assembly as a "*machloket* that was not for the sake of Heaven". This type of *machloket* induces destruction on its instigators. There are two main categories of *machloket*. In the first type, the truth is sought. In other words, the *machloket* is the means used to clarify the truth. In contrast, the instigators employ the second sort of *machloket* to achieve their own personal aims. That is to say, the claims serve to advance goals. Truth and lies are utilized equally, depending on their relevance to the aim.

The great danger and ruthlessness inherent in Korach's *machloket* was that Korach was suggesting an alternative ideology to Moshe. The point of this ideology was not to achieve the ultimate truth. Rather, the goal was to advance Korach's own personal interests.

Korach hitched one of the most convincing arguments to his *machloket*. Namely, he claimed that he was fighting for equality. This claim is very appealing, because it aggrandizes every detail and nullifies a person's envy for his contemporaries. Naturally, this claim is false, because the world contains both individuals chosen by Hashem and those not chosen. However, it sounds good and serves Korach's aims well. Reality can be very painful. A marketable ideology that will attract a maximum number of consumers requires sacrificing the truth in favor of whatever it is that people want to hear. These types of considerations came into play more than once throughout the history of religion. For example, Christianity waved the need for observing the *mitzvot* in order to appeal to the nations of the world.

For *Am Yisrael*, for whom the Written Torah comes together with the *masoret* (lit., our traditions) and the Oral Torah, the danger inherent in this sort of *machloket* increases sevenfold. Every religious ideology and interpretation can combine with the *masoret* and become part of the Torah. If these ideologies and interpretations are not derived from heeding Hashem's will and the quest for truth, but rather from personal agendas, then the Torah may, *chas vishalom*, transform from Hashem's words to a marketing tool for charismatic leaders.

Hashem gave the Torah to mortals, but the control mechanisms remain in His hands. A *machloket* that is not for the sake of Heaven will not survive. Those who persist in such a *machloket* cut off the branch which they are resting upon and will be lost to the congregation. Throughout the generations, we have seen many *machlokot* in *Am Yisrael*. Some have survived, but some have been lost to the congregation. Christianity and the Sadducees instigated tremendous *machlokot* in their times and were lost to the congregation. They and their spiritual descendants are no longer part of *Am Yisrael*.

Parshat Korach is a stern warning to those who choose to either instigate or follow market- and agenda-based ideologies. Individuals who continue along these paths and who raise their children in these ways will descend alive to the pit. It does not say that they "are dead". Perhaps, they remain alive, in the pit, lost to the congregation.

Thus, the Torah concludes this somber parsha:

"As a reminder to *Bnei Yisrael*, so that no alien person who is not a descendent of Aharon shall draw near to bring the *ketoret* before Hashem, and he shall not be like Korach and his assembly."

Mazaltov - Shabbat 156b
Howard Jackson

Shmuel and Avleit (a gentile astrologer) were sitting together as some men were going to a swamp to cut reeds.

Avleit said: "This man will go but he will not come back; a snake will bite him and he will die."

Shmuel responded: "If he is a Jew, he will go and come back."

While they were sitting there, the man went and came back. Avleit stood up and threw off the man's pack of reeds, finding there a snake that had been cut into two pieces.

Shmuel said to the man: "What have you done that might have made you worthy of escaping death?"

The man replied: "Every day we all throw our bread together in one basket and eat it. Today I realised there was one of us who did not have any bread to contribute, and he was growing embarrassed. So I told them all that I would get up and collect the bread. When I reached that person I pretended to take something from him and made up the difference with my own bread so that he should not be embarrassed."

Shmuel said to him: "You have done a Mitzvah, an act of true charity."

Shmuel went out and expounded the verse in Mishlei 10:2: "Charity saves from death" - and not just from an unusual death but even from death itself.

Another incident, involving Rabbi Akiva, also teaches us that the celestial signs hold no sway over Israel. Rabbi Akiva was extremely worried when the astrologers told him that his daughter would be bitten by a snake and die on the day she would enter her bridal chamber. On that day, however, she took her brooch and stuck it in the wall, unknowingly lodging its needle in the eye of the snake. The next morning, when she took the brooch out of the wall the dead snake was stuck to the brooch.

Her father said to her: "What have you done that might have made you worthy of escaping death?"

She replied: "In the afternoon a poor man came and called out at the doorway but everyone was busy at the wedding banquet and nobody heard him. I stood up and took my portion of food and gave it to him."

Rabbi Akiva said to her: "You have done a Mitzvah, an act of true charity." . (Gemara Shabbat 156b)

Maharsha comments on the significance of both episodes involving a snake and food. The snake represents the snake in the garden of Eden who brought death into the world. The food corresponds to the forbidden food that Adam and Eve consumed. These Mitzvot of donating food as charity served to counter the negative influence introduced to the world by the snake. Perhaps the symbolism is deeper in light of the Talmudic opinion (Gemara Berachot 40a) that Adam and Eve's forbidden food was wheat, the main ingredient of bread.

Family Learning, Parshat Korach Bluma Zalcman

- 1) Who were the people that Korach took with him into his assembly?
- 2) How did Hashem kill Datan, Aviram, and Korach? How were the rest of the 250 rebels punished?
- 3) How did Hashem tell Moshe to prove that he had chosen Aaron as the kohen gadol and not anyone else?
- 4) Both Kohanim and Levi'im receive t'rumot and ma'asrot from Bnei Yisrael since they do not own any land. Do Levi'im have to give kohanim ma'aser as well? If so, what is it called?

Answers follow below

ZAKA

ZAKA- (an abbreviation for "Identifying Victims of Disaster" (in Hebrew: Zihuy Korbanot Asson)), is a voluntary community emergency response team in Israel. The organization was founded in 1989 by Yehuda Meshi Zahav and Rabbi Moshe Aizenbach.

Members of ZAKA, most of whom are Orthodox Jews, assist ambulance crews, identify the victims of terrorism, road accidents and other disasters, and where necessary, gather body parts and spilled blood for proper burial. They also provide first aid and rescue services, and help with the search for missing persons.

The founders and members of ZAKA prefer to call the organization and their work Chesed shel Emet-true kindness, because they are dedicated to arranging the bodies of slain Jews to be buried according to Halacha. After acts of terrorism, ZAKA volunteers also collect the bodies and body parts of non-Jews, including suicide bombers, for return to their families. The phrase Chesed shel Emet refers to doing "kindness" for the benefit of the deceased, which is considered to be "true kindness", because no reward is expected.

ZAKA started when a group of volunteers gathered to assist in the recovery of human remains from a terrorist attack on a number 405 bus in Israel in 1989. In 1995 they were officially recognized by the Israeli government and now work closely with the Israeli police in the identification of disaster victims.

ZAKA activity expanded rapidly during the al-Aqsa Intifada (starting in September of 2000), where almost daily terrorist suicide bombings created many scenes of disaster, with the remains and body parts of many victims strewn around bombing sites.

The devotion of the members of ZAKA and the professional manner in which they handled difficult and tragic scenes, such as the treatment of the bodies of victims killed in suicide bombings, led to strong public respect and admiration. The great contribution of ZAKA to Israeli society was soon widely recognized.

This recognition enabled ZAKA to recruit more volunteers, and with growing monetary donations, purchase advanced equipment, such as first aid kits, ambulances, MIRS and motorcycles (for rapid response).

The increase in reputation, donations and manpower enabled ZAKA to participate in additional voluntary activities beyond disaster victim identification and supplying first aid. Such other activities include helping senior citizens and education initiatives to prevent road accidents.

One of the founders of ZAKA, Yehuda Meshi Zahav, was given the honor of lighting an honorary beacon on Israel's 55th Independence Day official ceremonies on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, the revered burial spot of modern Zionism's founder Theodore Herzl.

In late 2004 and early 2005, members of ZAKA provided forensic services and other assistance in Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake. Other forensic teams reportedly dubbed the group "the team that sleeps with the dead" because they toiled nearly 24 hours a day at Buddhist pagodas in Thailand that had been transformed into morgues to identify those who died in the tsunami. The experience of ZAKA members, who reportedly see 38 bodies a week on average in Israel, helped them identify corpses faster than many of the 20 or so other forensic teams that operated in Thailand in the aftermath of the disaster, which placed them in high demand with grieving families.

Torah MiTzion establishes Religious Zionist Kollels (centers of Jewish learning and outreach) in Diaspora Jewish communities to strengthen the study of Torah, Jewish identity, the unity of the Jewish people, and the connection between Torah study and Israel.

The Kollels, led by a Rosh Kollel, are comprised of Israeli shlichim (emissaries) - married men and their wives, and single young men, graduates of Yeshivot Hesder in Israel - who serve in the communities for a period of one-three years.

Torah MiTzion is also proud to be a partner of the "**Jewish Learning Initiative**" program on college campuses.

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Answers:Family Learning

1. On ben Pelet, Datan, Aviram, 250 members of the Tribe of Reuven
2. He opened up the earth underneath them and it swallowed them. The rest of the rebels were killed by fire from their pans of ketoret.
3. He told him to tell each tribe to erect a staff with their name on it. The one which would blossom would mean that Hashem chose them.
4. Yes, they do. It is called *terumat ma'aser*.