

RABBI GOLDBERG'S Parsha Perspectives FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Korach for your Shabbos Table

Delivered on Tuesday, 1 Tammuz, 5783/June 20, 2023

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DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Emuna and Unity

The Torah begins the story of Korach's brazen revolt against Moshe Rabbeinu with the words ויקח קורח – "Korach took." As discussed by many commentators, the Torah does not tell us what it is that Korach "took," and we find a number of different approaches to explain the precise meaning of this *pasuk*.

The Gemara in Maseches Sanhedrin (109b) cites Reish Lakish as interpreting the words ויקח קורח to mean לקח מקח רע לעצמו – "he made for himself a bad acquisition." According to Reish Lakish, the word ויקח here denotes a "purchase," teaching us that Korach made a bad purchase.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe, in *Imros Tehoros*, offers a profound insight to explain Reish Lakish's understanding of this *pasuk*. The Gemara in Maseches Makkos (24a) comments that the prophet Chabakuk condensed all 613 *mitzvos* into a single precept, when he proclaimed, וצדיק באמונתו יחיה – "and a righteous person shall live in his faith" (Chabakuk 2:4). All *taryag* (613) *mitzvos*, the Gemara here teaches, can be encapsulated by the single *mitzva* of *emuna*, having faith in Hashem. Of course, each and every one of the 613 *mitzvos* is binding, and nobody can excuse himself from any of the *mitzvos* simply by having faith in Hashem. What the Gemara means, the Rachmastrivka Rebbe explains, is that we need *emuna* in order to be considered to fulfill all *taryag mitzvos*. Practically speaking, it is impossible for any individual to observe all 613 *mitzvos*. Some *mitzvos* apply only to *kohanim*, some to *leviyim*, and some to *Yisraelim*. Some apply to men, some to women. Some apply only in *Eretz Yisrael*, and some apply only under very specific circumstances. The only way to observe all the *mitzvos*, the Rachmastrivka Rebbe writes, is through unity. When we bond together into a single, indivisible entity, then every *mitzva* any Jew performs is performed on behalf of the collective unit of *Am Yisrael*. If we all act for ourselves, as individuals, then no one can ever fulfill all 613 *mitzvos*. It is only through unity, by merging together into one nation, such that every *mitzva* is, in effect, credited to all *Am Yisrael*, that we collectively observe all the Torah's commands. Through unity, we all become limbs of a single body, such that every *mitzva* performed by an individual Jew is considered as having been performed by the entire nation.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe writes that *achdus* (unity) is not possible without *emuna*. When we live with *emuna*, we see

all our fellow Jews as Hashem's children, and we accept everything that happens as Hashem's will. With faith, we don't see our fellow as our competitor, as our adversary, or as our nemesis, but rather as part of Hashem's family. We aren't angered when somebody aggrieves us, because we understand that everything happens for a purpose. We aren't jealous or resentful of other people, because we firmly believe that Hashem gives every person precisely what he or she is meant to have. *Emuna* saves us from hard feelings such as anger, anxiety and envy, thus enabling us to live peacefully with the people in our lives.

This, the Rebbe explains, is the meaning of the Gemara's teaching, בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת – that Chabakuk encapsulated the entire Torah. In order to fulfill all 613 *mitzvos*, we require *achdus*, and we attain *achdus* through *emuna*.

Korach did just the opposite. He was consumed by jealousy, and instigated a fight, opposing Aharon and the *kohanim*. He lost his ability to fulfill all 613 *mitzvos* by breaking away from his fellow Jews. The famous *pasuk* in Mishlei (4:2) states, כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם – that Torah is a לקח טוב, a "good acquisition." Korach, through instigating *machlokes* (strife), forfeited his opportunity to fulfill the entire Torah, and was thus left with a מקח רע. Rather than take advantage of the לקח טוב, the beautiful, perfect Torah that he – and all of us – have been given, by accepting his role and bonding together with the rest of the nation, he decided instead to break away, such that he was left with a מקח רע, with a "bad purchase."

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

It's Not About Us

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev offers an additional insight into Reish Lakish's understanding of the first *pasuk* of Parshas Korach, לקח מקח רע לעצמו – "He made a bad acquisition for himself."

There are those, Rav Levi Yitzchak observes, who serve Hashem sincerely, out of genuine love and devotion to Him. But there are others who serve Hashem with their own interests in mind. The difference between these two groups of people is manifest when a job could be done by somebody else. For the sincerely-driven servant of God, it makes no difference whether he *davens* for the *amud*, reads the Torah, runs the program, delivers the *drasha*, etc., or if somebody else does. As

The Greatest *Segula* for *Parnasa*

The 17th-century work *Sheivet Mussar* writes that there was something unique about the day of Korach's revolt, when he and his followers challenged Moshe. Unlike any other day that *Benei Yisrael* spent in the wilderness, they all went hungry. All 2 million or so people had nothing to eat. Because on that day, the manna didn't fall.

On the day of חטא העגל, when *Benei Yisrael* betrayed God and worshipped a graven image, the manna fell. The Chida, in his work *Yosef Tehilos*, writes that this is the meaning of the *pasuk* in Tehillim (136:25), נותן לחם לכל בשר כי לעולם חסדו, – "He gives bread to all flesh, for His kindness is everlasting." Hashem continues showering His kindness upon us even when we fail, when we make mistakes, when we betray Him. Even at the time of the greatest betrayal, when *Benei Yisrael* bowed to a golden calf, Hashem still lovingly provided them their sustenance by bringing the manna.

But on the day of Korach's revolt, the manna did not fall. Fighting and strife are so destructive, so sinful, and so pernicious, that it causes Hashem to withhold *parnasa*.

The Shelah Ha'kadosh (Yoma, 197) teaches: מחלוקת אחת דוחה מאה פרנסות – "A single fight keeps away one hundred livelihoods." As Korach's uprising teaches us, nothing is so detrimental to our sustenance – not even worshipping a graven image – than *machlokes*.

People are always looking for "*segulos*" for earning a comfortable livelihood. If only they realized that the most important such "*segula*" is peaceful relations with others, avoiding strife and fighting, which requires us to yield, to forgive, to be flexible, and to humbly accept differences of opinion. If we are looking for a "*segula*" for *parnasa*, this is it – avoiding *machlokes*.

The unique severity of *machlokes* is noted also by Rashi (16:27). Citing the *Midrash Tanchuma*, Rashi comments that when the ground opened and devoured Korah, Dasan and Aviram, the three leaders of the revolt, it devoured even the young children. Normally, of course, children are not punished for wrongdoing. Rashi writes that *Beis Din* does not punish youngsters before *bar mitzva* age, and Hashem's Heavenly Court does not punish those under the age of 20. *Machlokes*, however, has the ability to bring death upon even small children. Fighting is so toxic that nobody is spared from its devastating consequences.

Those of us who are parents (and may all those who want to have children be blessed very soon with the ability to do so) know that there are many things we can tolerate from our children, many things that are excusable and forgivable. But fighting with one another is something we have no patience for. The children can disagree; they don't have to see eye-to-eye or conform to one another, but they cannot have conflict. Fighting among our children breaks our heart, and hurts our soul. The same is true of Hashem and His children. He can tolerate our mistakes and failures – even the worship of the golden calf!!! – but not our fighting.

It is time for us to let go of whatever we are holding on to. There are so many people who hate us, so many who threaten us; we shouldn't be hating one another. There are so many just causes to fight for – let's not fight with each other. If we want *parnasa*, prosperity for us and our families, we need to stay as far away as possible from *machlokes*.

long as the job is completed satisfactorily, as Hashem wants, this עבד ה' is pleased, knowing that Hashem has received נחת רוח (gratification). The other type of person, however, insists on doing the job himself. If somebody is driven by ego, then even though he might say that his intentions are purely for Hashem's sake, in truth, it's about him, not God. He has to lead the *davening*; he needs to give the speech or the *shiur*; he needs to take the spotlight; and he needs to get the credit.

This was the difference between Aharon, the chosen *kohen gadol*, and Korach, who coveted this position. *Chazal* teach us that Aharon was initially reluctant to assume the role. He did not feel he needed to serve in this capacity, and would have been just as pleased if somebody else had received the appointment. His focus was on fulfilling Hashem's will, and so it did not matter to him one iota whether he executed the responsibilities of the *kohen gadol* or if somebody else did. For Korach, however, it was all about him. He was driven not by love of Hashem, but by ego. He needed to get the position; he wanted the job for himself.

I recall Rav Avraham Rivlin, the *mashgiach* in Yeshivas Kerem Be'Yavneh, making the observation that nobody complains about not receiving an *aliya* on Sunday, or on Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday. These are days when the Torah isn't read, and thus nobody receives an *aliya*. Since nobody is called to the Torah, nobody feels upset about not having been called. People complain only on Monday, Thursday and Shabbos, when others receive *aliyos* and they don't. This proves that what irks them is not that they aren't called for an *aliya*, but rather that other people are...

If we are concerned with Hashem's honor, then we aren't bothered by other people receiving an *aliya* or other *kibbudim* (honors) in shul. If we are bothered, this is because our concern is not with Hashem's honor, but with our own honor.

Rav Levi Yitzchak explains לקח מקח רע לעצמו to mean that when a person focuses on לעצמו, himself, when it's all about him, his honor and prestige, then it's a מקח רע. We turn the beautiful Torah – כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם – into a מקח רע, a "bad acquisition," when we use it not for Hashem's honor, but for our own self-promotion.

Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, describes five different levels of leadership, the highest of which – level 5 – is when it's not about you, but about the cause. The greatest leaders care more about the project, the company or the institution, than about keeping their position. They are capable of succession planning, of laying the groundwork for others to take over to advance the cause. They don't get in the way of the project's success, because their priority is the project, and not their pride and prestige.

This concept was lost on Korach. In his eyes, it was all about him, not about Hashem. His downfall provides us with a perfect example of how ego destroys everything. Ego is our Kryptonite, that ruins *shalom bayis*, other family relationships, careers, institutions, and lives. When we learn to ignore our personal pride, we can then do our job and allow and encourage others to do theirs, and this is how we ensure success in everything we take part in.