

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

JULY 6, 2019

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Bernard Kraft's mother,
Carolyn bas Marcus. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 34

3 TAMMUZ

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS KORACH

The King's Prerogative

The entire congregation of Bnei Yisroel complained the next day against Moshe and Aharon, saying, 'You put to death the nation of Hashem!' (Bamidbar 17:6)

On the day after the earth miraculously swallowed up Korach and his followers, a most astounding confrontation took place: The rest of Bnei Yisrael accused Moshe and Aharon of causing the deaths of their fellow Jews. This is difficult to understand in light of the fact that the deaths of the rebels were clearly the result of a divinely ordained miracle. Moshe and Aharon had not been the ones to kill them; it was Hashem Himself who had done so in a miraculous fashion! How could Bnei Yisroel level such an accusation?

Before the final confrontation in which the rebellious people were killed, Moshe announced, *"With this you will know that Hashem has sent me to do all these deeds, for it was not from my heart. If these people die like all men, and the fate of all men befalls them, then Hashem has not sent me. But if Hashem creates a new creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that they have, and they descend to the grave alive, then you will know that these people angered Hashem"* (Bamidbar 16:28-30). Thus, Moshe announced that only a miracle would substantiate his claim to be a legitimate agent of Hashem. If that miracle did not occur, the validity of the entire Torah would be called into question.

Shockingly, Moshe was thus risking the entire Jewish nation's belief in the Torah on the basis that Hashem would perform a miracle for him. This is problematic; the

Chechenover Rebbe points out, the conspirators could have spared themselves by doing *teshuvah*. How could Moshe take the risk that they might repent and avert the miracle he had promised, thereby jeopardizing the entire nation's faith?

The answer is that in this case *teshuvah* would not have worked to save them from death. Moshe was not predicting that Hashem would perform a miracle in order to demonstrate who was correct. Rather, he was invoking his authority as the king of Bnei Yisroel to have those who rebelled against his authority put to death. The Torah gives a king that right, and Moshe exercised that right by asking Hashem to carry out the sentence through a miracle. The sentence of death itself, though, was based on his royal prerogative.

In the Torah's judicial system, no sinner can save himself by repenting from a punishment imposed by man. In fact, we are required to urge every person who is about to be executed to engage in *teshuvah*, even though the execution will not be cancelled as a result. Clearly, the purpose of the *teshuvah* is to have a beneficial effect on his soul in the World to Come, even though the *Beis Din* is still required to carry out the sentence of death. Likewise, Korach and his cohorts were unable to save themselves by repenting, because their deaths were the result of Moshe's decree, not a divinely



imposed punishment. Moshe simply asked Hashem to carry out that decree for him.

This explains the basis of the people's complaint; while a king has the right to have a rebel against his authority put to death, he is not required to do so. They therefore accused Moshe of unnecessarily causing the rebels' deaths, since he could have disregarded their crimes and refrained from calling for them to be killed. Even though the death sentence was ultimately carried out by Hashem Himself, it was Moshe's prerogative to waive it.

Did You Know...

This week we read about Moshe's first cousin (Korach), the rebellion he started, and how it ultimately led to his demise and that of his cohorts. However, how much do we really know about him, other than his relation to Moshe? Here are some interesting facts about Korach.

1. Korach was extremely wealthy, he had 300 donkeys just to carry the keys to his storehouses. He seemingly had found one of three hidden storehouses of Yosef's wealth (he had amassed almost all the money in the world from the famine) (*Sanhedrin* 110a).

(continued on reverse)

Your Wish is My Command

This week's *parsha* recounts the events surrounding the uprising instigated by Korach against Moshe Rabbeinu regarding Moshe's appointment of Aharon as *Kohen Gadol*. Essentially, Korach argued that Moshe was not commanded by Hashem to appoint his brother as *Kohen Gadol*; Moshe had done so of his own discretion. Thus, Korach seems to be insinuating that Moshe had fabricated the Divine command for Aharon's appointment.

This is shocking; if Korach could imply that Moshe had not actually received a command from Hashem that he claimed to have been given, then the veracity of the entire Torah, by extension, could be called into question. In other words, who's to say what Hashem commanded and what Moshe made up on his own? If the people could believe that Moshe had fabricated one Divine commandment for his own benefit, then they could also believe that he had fabricated the entire Torah as well.

Korach was a remarkable *talmid chacham* and hailed from one of the most prestigious and influential families. How is it possible that one of the greatest leaders of the Jewish nation could question such a fundamental underpinning of the faith, especially when doing so would essentially subvert the entire experience of Har Sinai and call into question the authenticity of Judaism itself?

After the Torah was given at Har Sinai, Hashem told Moshe that the entire Jewish people should "return to their tents," but He added a different command to Moshe himself: "And you, stay here with Me." The Gemara (*Shabbos* 87a) explains that the rest of the nation had been enjoined to abstain from marital relations while the Torah was given, but they were now freed to resume their normal family lives. Moshe, on the other hand, was told to separate permanently from his wife. The Gemara relates that this idea actually

originated with Moshe himself: Since he was at a high level of prophecy, he wanted to make himself constantly available to receive prophetic messages.

Tosafos (ad loc) explains that the Gemara infers this from the fact that Aharon and Miriam later questioned the propriety of Moshe's decision. Since they suggested that it was improper, it is clear that the idea must have come from Moshe, for they would never have made such a statement about an idea that originated with Hashem.

This points to an astounding concept: It is possible that Hashem may make a statement to a person not because it is His wish, but rather because the person desires it. In this case, Moshe felt that it was correct to separate from his wife. Aharon and Miriam disagreed with his decision, even though Hashem Himself had confirmed it, as it were, by directing Moshe to do so. Clearly, they felt that Hashem's command could be interpreted as a mere "rubber stamp" for Moshe's decision; it did not indicate Hashem's approval of it at all.

Parents often face similar dilemmas with their children. Many times parents disagree with their children's decisions; they may feel that their children are choosing a career that is not suitable for them, passing up an opportunity that they should not forego, or otherwise making imprudent choices. In these situations, the natural inclination of a parent is to attempt to control his child's decisions or pressure the child to make the choice that he deems correct. This, however, is a major mistake. Of course, it should go without saying, that if a child makes a decision that harms himself or someone else, his parents should intervene to stop him.

However, in most situations parents must support decisions made by their children.

This is exactly what Korach claimed to have happened. According to Korach, Moshe wanted to appoint his brother and Hashem merely supported it, just as He did when Moshe decided that it was proper to separate from his wife. This should not be mistaken as a commandment from Hashem. Korach wasn't calling into question the veracity of the Torah, merely the appointment of Moshe's brother as *Kohen Gadol*.

Did You Know Continued:

2. According to Midrash, Korach was one of Pharaoh's officials (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:1).
3. There are opinions that Korach's rebellion took place before the story with the spies (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:1; *Rabbeinu Bachye*).
4. There are other opinions that say this portion in the Torah is chronologically correct and that the rebellion happened because of the spies and the decree that they were going to die in the desert (*Abarbanel* 16:14).
5. Korach's wife was the one who convinced him to stand up to Moshe in the first place (*Sanhedrin* 110a). He probably wouldn't have done it otherwise, because as we are constantly reminded, behind all great men...
6. The crevice that literally swallowed Korach was one of the ten things Hashem created on the eve of the first *Shabbos Bein Hashmashos* (*Pirkei Avos* 5:6).
7. On the way down to *Gehenom*, a place of refuge was made for them, where they sang to Hashem (*Sanhedrin* 110a).



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