

Pardes Yehuda

← Weekly Torah Journal By Yehuda Z. Klitnick →

פרשת קרח תשע"ז שבת ראש חודש פרקי אבות ד Parshas Korach 5777 year 6 #311

The analogy of the swallowing ground and the fire

ויהי כבלתו לדבר את כל הדברים האלה ותפתח הארץ את פיה ותבלע אתם ואת בתיהם וגו' ואש יצאה מאת ה' ותאכל את הקמטים ומאתים איש מקריבני הקמורת: (טז לב-לה)

As soon as he -Korach- finished speaking all these words, the earth beneath them split open.... A fire came forth from Hashem and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who had offered up the incense. (16:32-33) This Parsha revolves around Korach's challenge to the authority and leadership of Moshe and Aharon. Korach with his 250 cohorts ultimately lead a full-fledged rebellion against them, one which ends in disastrous and tragic results as he and his followers and all of their possessions were swallowed up by the ground. There are some difficulties here: In the verses one can deduce that there was a blanket punishment of all those involved in the dispute, that is, all involved being swallowed up in the ground. However the punishment of being consumed by fire was only dealt to the 250 people. The question is in what way was the punishment of being swallowed alive by the earth for rebelling against Moshe and Aharon specifically appropriate for his crime? Secondly: Why was the the punishment of being consumed by fire specifically appropriate for the crime of the 250 people? The answer may be: The way of Hashem is to punish מדה כנגד מדה /measure-for-measure for sins. Now the argument of Korach was, that he too is a descendant of Kehas and he is deserving the job of Kehuna. However his argument could have been refuted and that will be end of dispute. Enter the 250 of his people who inflamed the fire of Machlokes and pulled Korach deeper in the dispute, measure for measure, they caused the fire of machlokes, therefore Hashem only punished them with fire.

Now to answer the reason of the punishment of being swallowed up in the ground: The Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that Korach erred in seeking to rise to a lofty position for which he was unfit. Therefore, he was punished by being swallowed up by the ground and sent down to the lowest level of Gehinnom. The great tzaddik Rabbi Volf Strickover answers that Korach challenged Moshe and Aharon "Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of God," and accusing them of arrogance. In reality, the Torah testifies (Bamidbar 12:3) that Moshe was the most humble man on Earth and viewed himself as no greater than the ground itself. In order to punish him, Korach had to be lowered below Moshe. Since Moshe considered himself equal to the ground, the only choice was for the earth to swallow him up. The is another pshat: the Mishnah (Avos 3:2) states רבי תנינא סגן הכהנים אומר, הוי מתפלל בשלומיה של

Rabbi Chanina, מלכות, שאלמלא מוראה, איש את רעהו חיים בלעו. the Deputy High Priest, says: Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, man would swallow his fellow alive. Now without a leader to make and enforce laws, people would consume and devour one another. Since Korach argued that the entire nation was holy and didn't need a leader, he was punished by being swallowed up by the ground to hint to the natural consequence of his proposal. After these insights we must add that since the 250 furthered the dispute, they also received the punishment of Korach as well as the punishment of fire. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 11:7) says: Why did they deserve such a terrible punishment? Hashem regards quarrelling as one of the gravest sins. Divisiveness contradicts the essential unity of Hashem. A flower has perfect form and symmetry, the ecosystem functions harmoniously, the colors of a sunset blend perfectly. Quarreling – with its tension, allegations and incriminations – undermines the harmony of creation. The Shevet Mussar (37:22) cites a Midrash which teaches that fighting and discord is such a severe sin that on the day of Korach's rebellion the Manna didn't fall, whereas on the day of the sin of the golden calf, which was presumably a greater sin, the Manna did fall because there was peace and unity among the people. (Yehuda Z. Klitnick)

The wise woman

ואין בן פלת בני ראובן: (טז א)

On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben” (16:1). The Gemarra (Sanhedrin 109b) interprets the name of *On, the son of Peleth* as one who sat in acute mourning [aninut] over the sin that he committed, and he repented and was spared. “Peleth” is one for whom wonders [pelaot] were performed. Son of Reuben, is a son who saw and understood [*ra'a vehevin*] the nature of what was transpiring and repented. Although On Ben Peles was originally one of the leaders of Korach's rebellion, his sagacious wife convinced him to withdraw from the dispute. She pointed out that he had nothing to gain from the fight, as even if Korach won, he would be just as subservient to Korach as he currently was to Moshe and Aharon. In what way was her argument considered wise and eye-opening, as it seems to be simply telling him things that were self-evident and that he knew already? Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that when a person is involved in the heat of an intense conflict, his emotions are so strong that they overpower his rational thinking process. Under such circumstances, insights which would normally be considered straightforward and self-evident must often be provided by an objective and uninvolved party, in this case On's wife.

The same insight of can be applied by Avraham Aveinu and Sarah. ותאמר לאברהם גרש האמה הזאת ואת בנה כי לא יירש בן Sarah. ותאמר לאברהם גרש האמה הזאת עם בני עם יצחק: Drive out this handmaid and her son, for the son of this handmaid shall not inherit with my son, with Yitzchok. ירע בעיניך על הנער ועל אמתך כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקלה כי ביצחק יקרא לך ירע: Be not displeased: concerning the lad and concerning your handmaid; whatever

Sarah tells you, hearken to her voice, for in Yitzchok will be called your seed. Rashi states, We learn from here that Avraham was inferior to Sarah in prophecy. — [from Exod. Rabbah 1:1, Tan. Shemoth 1]. Here too: Avraham's emotions were so strong that they overpowered his rational thinking process. Therefore Hashem told him to listen to the advice of his wife Sarah the wise woman (Yehuda Z. Klitnick).

STORY OF THE WEEK (By Yehuda Z. Klitnick)

*****Hakaras Hatov for descendants of Reb Aryeh Leib from Polnoah*****

There was a Yid, Reb Eliyahu, who was a chusid of Reb Aharon of Tchernobil. He would travel around from town to town to collect money to distribute, but he would also collect many interesting stories. He told the following story:

[Harav Hatzadik Reb Aryeh Leib who was known as the Mochiach - preacher- from Polnoah was from the first and one of the biggest Talmidim of the Baal Shem Tov. He wrote a sefer Kol Aryeh - Koretz 1798. His Yahtzeit is the 23rd day in Sivan 1770.

Many are familiar with the holy printing press at Slavuta and then in Zhitomer. These were started by the sons of Harav Hatzadik Reb Pinchas from Koritz also a Talmid of the Baal Shem Tov. His 2 sons Reb Yechezkel and Reb Moshe were the first printers and many chassidische seforim were printed in their press. The Noam Elimelech, Tanya, Meor Einayim, Kedushas Levi, Rav Yeivi and many more. Then Rav Shmuel Avraham took over. His 3 children. Reb Chanina, Reb Aryeh Leib and Reb Yehoshua Heshel started the press in Zhitomer.]

These brothers were very successful and became great Baalei Tzedaka. However when a descendent of Hatzadik Reb Aryeh Leib came to them for tzedaka they gave a real large donation. No one knew the reason for this until Reb Eliyahu asked Reb Yehoshua Heshel. He told him that if it wasn't for Reb Aryeh Leib, we would not be alive. Reb Yehoshua Heshel told the following story: Before our grandfather Reb Pinchas became famous, he was a Melamed in Polnoah. Many people referred to him as the Black Melamed. Nobody knew the greatness of Reb Pinchas because he kept his holy ways hidden. However, Reb Aryeh Leib noticed he was special and a strong friendship was formed between them.

Reb Aryeh Leib had a mikvah near his house and that was a big prize for Reb Pinchas because he always wanted to be pure and holy. Reb Aryeh Leib told the caretaker of the Mikvah at all times to allow Reb Pinchas to enter the Mikvah, day or night. One night after saying Tikun Chatzos, the prayer for the Bais Hamikdash, Reb Pinchas wanted to go to the Mikvah. He knocked on the door of the caretaker to give him the key for the Mikvah. That day the caretaker had

purchased a large flock of geese and he was storing them in the Mikvah. He explained to Reb Pinchas that he can't give him the key because there are geese in the room of the Mikvah! This wasn't going to stop Reb Pinchas. He went to the mikvah and searched to see if there was an edition way to enter the building. He noticed some shingles on the roof weren't secure. He climbed on to the roof and took off some shingles. He descended through the hole down to the room. Having to contend with the geese was not a big problem for Reb Pinchas. He went to the Mikvah and left the same way that he entered. However as he was leaving the hole on the roof, a large beam fell on him and he passed out. No one heard his screams in the middle of the night and no one noticed what had happened. Reb Aryeh Leib suddenly woke up and started screaming to his Shamash - servant- "I hear screaming outside, go check and see who is crying for help." The Shamash went outside but it was dark didn't notice anything different. When he returned to RavAryeh Leib, he told him that he didn't see or hear anything. In the morning people noticed the Melamed laying lifeless and word spread like wildfire that the Melamed was no longer alive! When word reached Reb Aryeh Leib he instructed the town not to touch the Melamed until he arrives. In the meantime, the Rav went to the shul and started saying Tehilim and wept. He prayed that Hashem should return the soul to the holy melamed. He told Hashem that he will not regret it because Reb Pinchas will bring Him a lot of Nachas. Then he quickly went to the Mikvah where Reb Pinchas was laying and whispered in his ear "Pinchas you are a Melamed and your students are waiting for you, get up and go learn with them". To everyone's marvel, Reb Pinchas got up and said he is ready to go teach! This was a great Kiddush Hashem and the Yidden saw the great Miracle that Reb Aryeh Leib had performed.

Thus, concluded Reb Yehoshua Heshel, if not for Reb Aryeh Leib we would not be here, needless to say we have tremendous Hakaras Hatov to Reb Aryeh Leib and we help his descendants with very large amounts of Tzedaka.

Wishing all a freilichen Chodesh

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