THE SURVIVAL OF THE WORLD

When Korach challenged Moshe’s authority, the sun and the moon ascended...and said to God: “Master of the Universe, if you render justice on behalf of the son of Amram (Moshe), then we will illuminate the earth. But if not, we will not illuminate the earth any longer.” -- Nedarim 39b

The world was created due to Torah, and it continues to exist in the merit of the study of Torah and the fulfillment of its mitzvos. From the outset, all of Creation was set contingent upon this arrangement. The Gemara (Shabbos 88a) states: “If the Jewish people accept the Torah, that will be good. If they do not, the entire world will revert back to being null and void.” The luminaries were placed in the heavens to illuminate the world. Accordingly, anyone who challenges the authenticity of the Torah and its prophets is actually threatening the very existence of the world. If the Torah is attacked, the justification for the world’s continued survival is at risk. If this would be the case, the luminaries have no purpose in their ongoing mission to provide light and warmth for the world.

Our sages express the series of events surrounding Korach and his followers in allegorical terms. The sun and moon appealed directly to Hashem to put an end to the uprising of Korach and his attack against the legitimacy of Torah. These heavenly spheres realized that their own function was being undermined, and they fought for Moshe and his prophecy to emerge triumphant.

Rashba (to Nedarim 39b) presents a very fundamental understanding of how to interpret the exchange between Hashem and these heavenly spheres. He explains: “In many places, an aggadic text will express a well-known concept in hints and parables. It is essential for our sages to teach that Hashem is profoundly involved in every detail of our existence. Hashem is also involved in truth and correctness. This dialogue did not take place in a literal sense, for the sun and moon do not have an awareness to be able to conduct a discussion. Yet, we are told that it is as if it did take place. The arguments and the conclusions are valid, for if there would be no Torah, the world would cease.”

Hashem reassured the luminaries, “Although Korach is staging a rebellion, it is no different than the fools who engage in idolatry every day. There is a constant barrage of missiles and projectiles which they cast against truth, but the world cannot come to a standstill due to their futile efforts. Rather, the cause of Torah continues, and these scoffers will ultimately pay the price for their actions.”

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FAMILY DEVASTATION

In Sha’ar HaZechira, the Chofetz Chaim writes that machlokes, divisiveness, is one of the most destructive sins that a person can commit. The harm it causes is devastating in both physical and spiritual terms. The Midrash on our parasha says that while normally the Heavenly Court only punishes sinners from age twenty and up, and the human courts only punish from bar/bas mitzvah age and up, the feud of Dassan and Aviram resulted in even young infants’ being punished and swallowed up by the earth. Personal battles not only destroy a person and his family, but also his young children.
In addition to all of the other sins associated with machlokes (slander, jealousy, hatred, etc.), it invariably leads to one’s losing his perspective of the broader picture, and becoming focused only on “I will win this matter”. This evil inclination then creates the most destructive of outcomes. People often will do anything not to lose the argument, even if it means losing themselves and their families, just as we find in the case of Dassan and Aviram.

TWO BASIC TENETS

This statement of Moshe has within it a degree of redundancy. First, Moshe proclaims: “It is God who has sent me to do all of these things.” Then Moshe emphasizes that all that has happened in fact “is not from my doings” and he denies any credit for possessing any personal miraculous powers. What is the meaning of this repetition?

Among the thirteen principles of Jewish belief which Rambam lists, we find one which confirms our belief that the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu was authentic and that he was the “father of all prophets”. His level of prophetic vision was superior to all who preceded him in Israel and all those who followed. Another distinct tenet to which we ascribe is that the Torah which we have is that which was given to Moshe Rabbeinu from God.

The Griz notes that in this single act, Korach and his group denied and scoffed at both of these doctrines. They confronted Moshe and accused him of assuming power unjustifiably when they claimed (16:3), “It is too much for you...why do you act so authoritatively!”

According to Tanchuma (2), they also repudiated Torah as having divine origin in that they mocked the mitzvos of tzitzis and mezuzah, claiming that a garment entirely of techeiles should be exempt from fringes, and a house filled with Torah scrolls should be exempt from mezuzah. This represents a blatant denial of mitzvos as being part of Revelation. Corresponding to these two attacks, Moshe declared that on the one hand: “God has sent me and I am His messenger”. Secondly, Moshe confirmed that the entire Torah “was not fabricated from my heart”, and everyone would clearly know that the Torah was transmitted to him directly from God.

Directly corresponding to the controversy which Korach stirred, and to its being of a dual nature, it is specifically fitting for him now to correct the false notions that he addressed. This accounts for the Gemara (Bava Basra 74a) which reports that after Korach and his crew were swallowed up alive to the depths, they now can be heard chanting: “Moshe is true and the Torah is true, and we are liars.” They are now eternally assigned the role of affirming that Moshe was a true prophet and that the Torah is from Heaven.

WHEN PRAYER IS EFFECTIVE

Moshe tried to appease Korach in many ways, yet we do not find that Korach responded in any way at all. This was because he was clever in his wickedness. He thought: “If I answer him, I know very well that he is a wise man and will soon overwhelm me with his arguments, so that I shall have to concede to him against my will. It is better that I should not even discuss it with him.” When Moshe saw that he could do nothing with Korach, he took leave of him. -- BeMidbar Rabbah 18:9

Rabbeinu Bachya points out that Moshe Rabbeinu, the loyal and sensitive shepherd of the Jewish nation, never failed to pray on their behalf. Whether it was when they worshipped the Golden Calf or when they sinned by sending spies to Eretz Yisrael, Moshe was ready to guide them to correct their ways. Why, then, did Moshe refuse to intervene and try to save Korach and his cohorts?

The Gemara (Berachos 10a) tells about some violent people who lived in Rabbi Meir’s neighborhood and caused him much distress. When he davened that they should die, his wife immediately realized that her husband was making a mistake. She explained, “The verse in Tehillim (104:35) clearly proclaims that we must not look forward to a situation where ‘sinners’ will perish, but rather that ‘sins’ will cease. In fact, the end of that very verse declares that ‘evil will no longer exist’ as an automatic result of sins no longer being committed, and not as an outcome of the sinners being killed.” Rabbi Meir understood. He davened that the hoodlums should repent and improve their ways, and in fact they did.

In his Perek Hamelach, Rabbi Yaakov from Lisa (the author of the Mishnah Yatom) explains that there are people who sin only on occasion, and there are those who sin as a matter of habit. Regarding this second type, sinning has become part of their very nature. They are not just “normal” citizens who happen to sin “שונים”, but they can be identified as “שונים עננים” - sinners. It is this hardened, unredeemable criminal type...
some of them are the gravestones in the cemetery. Many of you were not even born at that moment, members of the community during those years. Where are they now? All that is left of them was the smoke of incense before God, and you will try to face, and you will try to frighten of the judgment that you will have them thrown out and discarded in front of his face.

The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 7a) points out that an object must be destroyed if it was used by a person to commit certain major sins. One reason is that since the object was used for a terrible crime and it contributed to the death of a person, it is now considered to be a repulsive and objectionable item. Another reason is that whenever an object is indirectly involved in causing the downfall of a person, having the object around would serve as a disgrace for that person, for anyone who sees it would be reminded that this is what caused that person to sin.

*FUTILITY OF FEUDS*

In 1908, many Jews gathered in the city of Radin, the town in which the Chofetz Chaim lived. Some of the new residents wanted to establish their own “Chevra Kadisha” (burial society) aside from the group which was already functioning in the city. The situation was not settled, and a feud was brewing which threatened the very stability of the community at large. That Shabbos, during a break in the davening, the Chofetz Chaim rose to address the assembled. He called for their attention. “My brothers! Believe me, if you would offer me thousands of rubles to speak to you, I would have refused. I am already an old man (he was approximately 69 at the time), and my time is precious to me. I would not agree to sell it simply to speak, when others can do just as well. However, there is a crisis which is developing, and I must speak about it. I have been here more than fifty years. I remember standing in this very shul with many of the members of the community during those years. Where are they now? All that is left of them are the gravestones in the cemetery. Many of you were not even born at that time, and those who were youngsters at that time are now old people. Yet, we all are headed to the day when we will have to give an accounting for the things we did during our sojourn in this world.

“My dear friends, feuding and bickering are very serious problems. Even someone who fulfills many mitzvos will have them thrown out and discarded in front of his face if he gets caught up in the web of controversy. Now, I am certain that at that moment, some of you will be very frightened of the judgment that you face, and you will try to grasp at any straw of hope to save yourselves. I am afraid that you will say that in your town there was an elderly Jew named Yisrael Meir, and he saw everything that
was happening and he was silent as the fire of arguing and fighting raged on. You might claim that I tolerated it, and that it must have been acceptable. Well, I am here to tell you that this is totally unacceptable. I have my own agenda which I will have to try to defend, and I cannot take the responsibility for what is going on here.”

At that point, the Chofetz Chaim broke out in tears, and his body trembled. Everyone in the community was shaken by his words and by his emotion. They then joined together and tried to overcome all elements of strife. In particular, the first enactment of the joint Chevra Kadisha was that for the next three years, no money would be collected from any families in order to conduct any funerals. This mitzvah was designated to be a genuine mitzvah

The tribe of Levi did not receive a portion of inheritance in the Land. They possessed no fields or vineyards to tend or protect. The reason is that the role of Levi was to serve the holy mission of guarding the Mikdash, and they could not be burdened with the task of toiling with the mundane. In order to maintain this system, the Jews were commanded to designate a tenth of their produce to subsidize the Levi as he served his sanctified charge.

Ramban explains that the Tribe of Levi was divided into twenty-four family divisions. These branches each served on a rotation basis, each shift being for one week at a time. Therefore, even when a particular family division served for its week, any individual member of that family only worked one day of that week. We can conclude, then, that a specific Levi would actually work in the Mikdash only two days a year. Why, then, was he not to receive land in Eretz Yisrael? Was he indeed unable to find time to work the land simply because he was busy two days a year?

Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk explains that to be spiritually prepared and fully fit in a hallowed sense, a Levi would have to purify and sanctify his lifestyle and personal character. The one day of hands-on service was to be distinctive and exceptional. It was to be a great day, one in which the Levi could proudly minister to his people with skill and noted qualification. It was truly deserving for him to be the recipient of Ma’aser on a yearlong basis. He worked with dedication every day to prepare to fulfill his role with prominence. Ramban writes (Hilchos Klei HaMikdash 3:1): “There is a positive commandment to ensure that the Levi is available and prepared for their work in the Mikdash…”

Questions for Thought and Study

1. Why is the section regarding the rebellion of Korach written right after the section regarding the one who gathered wood in the wilderness at the end of last week’s parasha?

See Ibn Ezra 16:1
2. To what were Dassan and Aviram alluding when they said to Moshe "לֹא-יָכוֹלֻּךְ בְּעַצָּםָּךְ" ("We will not go up")? See Ohr HaChaim and Ibn Ezra to 16:12.

3. What action indicated that Moshe’s warning to Korach and his followers was fulfilled immediately? See Ohr HaChaim 16:31.

4. Why does the Torah say that all “the possessions” (נְבָאָרָה) of Korach were swallowed up rather than "שִׁנְיֹרָה" (their possessions)? See Meshech Chocmah 16:32.

5. What was written on the twelve staffs placed in the "וְעַל אֶלֶךָ" ("Tent of Meeting")? See Ramban 17:17.

6. What hint is there to the Chanukah story in the rebellion of Korach? See Ba’al HaTurim 17:23.

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- Save the date for this outstanding event! The community is invited to join the Blitstein Institute for Women of HTC, the Associated Talmud Torahs of Chicago, the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center and Yad Vashem International School of Holocaust Studies for an Introduction of “Teaching the Holocaust, the Summer Institute of Orthodox Educators”. This remarkable program will take place on Sunday, August 4, at 7:00 PM, at the Illinois Holocaust Museum.

- Riveting speakers at this Symposium will enlighten you as to the importance and pedagogy of teaching the Holocaust to the next generation. This Symposium, the Hartman Family Foundation, the Raichenbach Family, and the Davis Family, Register for the Symposium at https://www.iholocaustmuseum.org/teaching-the-holocaust-summer-institute-for-orthodox-educators/. For more information call 773-973-0241.

- Educators are invited to participate in the Blitstein Institute for Women of HTC, the Associated Talmud Torahs of Chicago, the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center and Yad Vashem International School of Holocaust Studies for a 3-day symposium, “Teaching the Holocaust, the Summer Institute of Orthodox Educators”. The Educators will take place from Sunday, August 4, at 7:00 PM, at the Illinois Holocaust Museum through Tuesday, August 6.


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- Shaarei Tzedek Mishkan Yair is pleased to announce the following two new minyanim added to our schedule: daily 8:00 Shacharis (Sunday - Friday), weekday 6:30 Mincha during the summer months (Monday - Thursday).
Answers:
1. The rebellion of Korach occurred after the Levi'im were appointed instead of the firstborns. This event and the event of the wood gatherer happened near Sinai, so they are listed together.
2. Ibn Ezra explains that this is to simply indicate that the דִּשֵּׁיָן (Tent of Meeting), where Moshe resided, was located in a higher place than the rest of the encampment.
3. The Torah says אֲנִי קֻמַּה וַעֲלִיתָו יִשְׂרָאֵל - "And it was when he finished speaking". This was to indicate that the ground opened exactly as Moshe finished speaking and was a direct consequence of his warning.
4. The encampment of Korach and all his followers had a law of an עֲקֹדָה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמַד - a city condemned to be destroyed. Even if not everyone in that city is killed (such as Korach's sons), all the possessions are destroyed as part of the encampment.
5. The name of each tribe was written and also the names of each of the leaders of each tribe were written on the twelve staffs placed in the יָהֳרְתִּי (Tent of Meeting). The pasuk is telling us that the Twelve Tribes of Israel were destroyed. Even if not everyone in that city is killed (such as Korach's sons), all the possessions are destroyed as part of the encampment.
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