

Parshas Korach, Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 5777 - 6.17

Parshas Korach - Overcoming the Negativity Within

In this week's *parsha*, *Parshas Korach*, under the direction and persuasion of Korach, a first cousin of Moshe and Aharon, the elite of the nation stage a rebellion against the leadership of Moshe and Aharon. "Is not the entire nation holy?!" Korach rhetorically asks and demands. "Why do you pride yourselves over the assembly of G-d, for is He not amongst us all?" (Bamidbar 16:3)

Unsatisfied with his task as a Levi who served in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), Korach wanted more greatness for himself. Korach, fueled by his ego and desire for fame, met his end when the ground opened up and swallowed him alive (ibid, v.32-33).

From jealousy, one will never meet success; from chasing after honor, honor will flee from man; and from desire, one will bring upon himself ruin. As the Sages teach: הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאין את האדם מן העולם - *Jealousy, desire, and honor remove a person from this world* (Avos 4:28).

Korach, full of negative feelings, dissatisfaction with his self, and enmity towards his first cousins, teaches us what *not to do* and how we ought not to behave. *Who is a wise man? One who learns from every man* (Avos 4:1). Even from those who are sorely, sadly, terribly misguided, such as Korach, we can learn powerful life lessons...

R' Aharon Lichtenstein zt'l teaches, "Chazal expressed very strong words about envy: *Envy, lust and honor remove a person from this world*. This refers to a person who has a passionate, sometimes obsessive quest for the object of his lust or envy. One might interpret the *mishnah* to mean that these remove a person from the World to Come. But I think that anyone who knows people who are totally consumed by envy, lust and honor realize that such people have efficiently removed themselves from 'this world' as well. Even if there are circumstances where envy is not formally prohibited, it nevertheless is to be avoided since it is a bad character trait."

Yet, are not jealousy, desire and the pursuit of honor, at least on some level, character traits found within every person? Certainly, we are human beings, with human feelings and emotions, with our *yetzer ha'tov* (inclination to do, and be, good) on the one side and our *yetzer ha'rah* (lit. evil inclination) - doubling his efforts - on the other side.

What to do when such negative feelings overtake the better side of ourselves?

In regard to the story of Korach, Rebbetzin Henny Machlis a'h (d.Oct 2015, J'lem - age 58) related a profound and impactful teaching: She explained that Korach didn't receive justice and punishment because he was jealous. He received justice and punishment from Hashem *because he didn't ask for help*. Hashem made Korach with that trait of jealousy. Similarly, Rebbetzin Machlis explained, Hashem made each of us the way we are with whatever faults we have - anger, laziness, jealousy, impatience, etc. We need to ask Hashem for help. We need to say it and mean it, she would say.

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She told the parable of a doctor who didn't ask for help. There was a hospital that was short of staff for the night shift. They could have only one doctor for this shift. They told this young doctor that he would be the only one during the night shift. He was told that if he got overwhelmed or needed help, to call in and they would send additional staff. This doctor worked all through the night selflessly. He helped patient after patient. It started to get very busy, and he was running from one patient to the other. Unfortunately, one patient died. He was taken to court for the patient's death. He told the court that he didn't understand why he was there because he gave literally everything he had to keep the hospital running that night. The judge told him that he wasn't at fault for trying to help all the patients; he was at fault for not asking for help.

So the Rebbetzin would say to ask Hashem for help, '*Hashem, You made me this way!*' Ask Him to change you in these areas. She would say, "There no room for sadness, and there's no room for despair. There's only room for prayer. And we can't be lazy. When we need help, we have to ask Hashem..."

The Rambam (*Hilchos Mikvaos 11:12*) teaches that, "Just as one who sets his heart on purification becomes pure as soon as he has immersed himself, although nothing has changed physically, so too a person who sets his heart on purifying himself from the impurities that beset people's souls - namely, thoughts of evil and bad character traits - is purified as soon as he decides in his heart to distance himself from these counsels and brings his soul into the waters of pure reason..."

It is true that we all have negative feelings - for if we did not, we would perhaps be angels and not human beings of this world. The question is not necessarily how we feel, but rather, what we do with how we feel? Do we strive, to the best of our abilities, to eradicate such feelings from within ourselves? Do we turn to G-d and ask He Who made us this way to help us overcome and change ourselves? Or, as did Korach, do we give in and let our emotions run amok, dictating who we are and how we behave...?

For two and a half years, Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai disagreed. Was it better for man to have been created, or not to have been created? They concluded by agreeing that: נוח לו לאדם - *It was better for man to not have been created, than to have been created! But since he was created, let him examine and scrutinize his deeds...* (Eruvin 13b).

Let us learn from Korach that we should never allow our deep-seated, primal and potentially destructive emotions and traits control who we are and how we behave. For along with those negative emotions, we also have tremendous inner strengths which can be channeled into positive, beautiful, peaceful, *kasher* and *yasher* acts of *avodas hashem*. *For he who comes to be purified, will be helped* (Yoma 38b).

בברכת שבת שלום, חודש טוב ובשורות טובות