

Parshat Korach (5781): Covid and Kovid

Rabbi Chananya Berzon

וַיִּקְרַבוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אָהָרֹן וְאִמְרֻרּוּ אֲלֵיכֶם רַב־לְכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כָּלָם קָדְשִׁים וּבְתוֹךְם ה' וּמְרוּעַתְנֶשֶׁא עַל־קָרְבָּן ה' (קרח ט:ג)

They gathered against Moshe and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! The entire congregation are all holy, so why do you raise yourself above the Lord’s assembly?” (Bamidbar 16:3)

The Yalkut Lekach Tov poses the following question, “How could holy people, like Korach and his followers, sin?” He answers from the eleventh perek of the Ramchal’s Messilat Yesharim who quotes the Gemara in Sanhedrin 102a. regarding Yeravam ben Nevat, one of the worst kings to rule over the Jewish People. Yeravam ben Nevat was not only a sinner himself, he was also caused others to sin as well -- a מהטיה את הרבים, which is the worst level of *rashaim* that one can be. The Gemara Sanhedrin 102a. says, “**אמֶר ר' אָבָא אַחֲר שַׂתְפָּשׁוּ הַקָּב"ה לִירְבָּעָם בְּבָגְדוֹ וְאָמַר לוֹ חֹזֵר בָּךְ וְאַנְיָ וְאַתָּה וּבָנְךָ נְטִילָה**” “Hakadosh Baruch Hu ran after Yeravam ben Nevat, and grabbed onto his garment; He said to him, ‘Do teshuva! And you, and I, and Dovid Hamelech, will go walking together in Gan Eden.’ Yeravam Ben Nevat asked Hashem, ‘Who will be in front? Dovid Hamelech or myself?’ Hashem responded, ‘Dovid Hamelech will be in the front.’ Yeravam retorted, ‘If that’s the case, then I don’t need it.’”

If you have the *chutzpah* to ask such a question, then you don’t deserve to be first. Hashem was planning on sending Yeravam ben Nevat first, this is why He said, “You and I, and Dovid Hamelech.” We can see how great Yeravam ben Nevat was by the fact that Hakadosh Baruch Hu entreated him to do teshuva, and offered him all of Gan Eden; however, when he wasn’t offered to be in front of Dovid Hamelech, none of it was good enough for him. All because of *kovid*, haughtiness! His *kovid* was his covid, his pandemic and destruction. The Baalei Mussar point to a specific point in Iggeret HaRamban -- all of the *midot raot*, all of the faulty human qualities, stem from *kovid*. Pride, egotism, vanity, haughtiness, conceit, lead to *midot raot*.

My father, a tremendous *talmid chacham* and orator, also had a great sense of humor! When he was elected president of the Rabbinical Council there was an event held in Heichal Shlomo which the chief rabbis and important politicians attended. That evening, we went back to our hotel and our father poured for us a small L’Chaim. He told us that he had just one dream; that is, that he should be able to go to sleep that night and wake up two years from then, when his term as president of the Rabbinical Council would be over. My father continued, “Until this point, I was receiving *kovid* in the forms of write-ups and interviews, etcetera, but now I have to actually work!”

I have not seen this written, but that night my father gave over a *gevaldik* vort. The Mishna Pirkei Avot 21 says, **רַبִּי אַלְעָזָר הַקְּפָר אֹמֶר, הַקְּנָה וְהַפְּנָה וְהַפְּבָז**, מוציאין את דָּאָם מִן קָעוֹלָם “Jealousy, all different types of lust, and haughtiness, take a person from this world.” These three things can represent three stages in a human being’s life. Childhood is based on jealousy, “Why do I have to go to sleep now if my older brother gets to stay up longer?! And why did he get a toy that I didn’t get?!” Adulthood presents with *Teiva*, lust; whether it be *teivat nashim* or *teivat mamon*, it is an entire stage in life. Following childhood and adulthood, one ends up at old age with *kovid*; he is preoccupied with respect and with how others are treating him. My father concluded by telling us, “I lived through the stage of *kinah*, I’ve been through the stage in life of *teivah*, and now I am up to *kovid!* *Halevai* that the *kovid* should come along with work!”

Chazal point out that Korach and Yeravam went astray when everything became about *kovid*. When it comes to *kovid*, people are willing to destroy everything because they are preoccupied with one thing, and one thing only -- *kovid*. And nothing else matters, unless you get the *kovid*. This is why Yeravam rejected Hashem’s proposal, unless he was in the lead!

As human beings, let us work on developing our *midot tovot*, especially eradicating and inoculating ourselves against the *kovid*, the personality pandemic. Amen v’Amen!