

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI GIL STUDENT

Bemachashavah Techilah

One of Korach's strategies in his rebellion against Moshe was to question some of the *halachos* as transmitted by Moshe. This act was sufficient to lead to the Talmud Yershualmi calling Korach an *apikorus*.¹ The doubting of the authenticity of Moshe's tradition is one that we should find surprising. After all, the Torah itself testifies/promises about Moshe that "And they will also believe in you forever" (Shemos 19:9). If that is the case, how could Korach doubt Moshe?

There is more than one way to answer the question. One possibility is that the verse refers to Jews in general, allowing for some exceptions.² Expanding on this, we could suggest that the verse only implies that there will always be some people who believe in Moshe's prophecy, in contrast to other religions (such as those of the ancient Greeks) that fade away entirely. An alternative is that this verse was only speaking about those present at that time. The direct witnesses of the revelation at Mt. Sinai will always believe Moshe. However, that leaves Korach's disbelief as a problem because he was at Mt. Sinai. A different explanation is that belief in

Moshe will be eternal, even if there are brief periods of disbelief. The Messianic Era and the subsequent eternity will guarantee that belief in Moshe will exist forever.

The Steipler Gaon³ offered another explanation. The Jews will always *naturally* believe in Moshe's prophecy, but they still maintain the ability to acquire contradictory biases or construct reasons to negate this belief. A "normal" Jew, who has no biases against the Torah, will believe

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in it. But someone like Korach, whose personal success depended on removing Moshe from his lofty position, was prejudiced against the Torah by his greed. Similarly, others might be prejudiced towards accepting their own conclusions and be thereby misled.

The Steipler Gaon's approach is very similar to R' Elchanan Wasserman's explanation of the nature of the obligation to believe in the fundamentals of Judaism. How, asks Reb Elchanan⁴, can a 12 or 13 year-old

child be obligated to formulate beliefs that have confounded some of the greatest philosophers in history? For that matter, how can a simple adult without profound thinking abilities arrive at the necessary beliefs of Judaism?

Reb Elchanan answers that belief in the fundamentals is the natural state of all people. It is really a simple achievement that all would achieve if they had no subtle biases. However, people who lack the purity of heart that the Torah demands of us (or who were raised with anti-Torah biases) will frequently find that belief is hard to achieve. An example of the impact of even tiny biases is the prohibition on a judge against accepting bribes. While accepting a million dollar bribe will obviously bias a judge in one direction, the minimum bribe prohibited by the Torah is of a *perutah*, a few cents. Even if someone as great as Moshe Rabbeinu accepts a bribe of one *perutah*, and even if it is from the side that he already believes should triumph, the prohibition has still been violated because it is a basic law of human nature that the will guides the mind. What one desires will affect one's thought processes in ways often undetected. What the Torah demands of us is to purify our hearts so that we lack personal biases and, when we

¹ Sanhedrin 11:1

² R. Elazar Mann Shach, quoted in Peninim MiShulchan Gavoha, Bamidbar 16:3.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kovetz Ma'amarim, pp. 11-20

accomplish that, belief will come naturally.⁵

This position is a combination of modern and post-modern thought. On the one hand, there exists absolute truth and man can reach it. On the other, most people are unable to attain that truth and, instead, are struggling with ideas and theories that are colored by their own biases and desires.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (38b) states that Adam was a heretic. This is certainly a bold and surprising statement about someone who spoke directly with G-d. The Alter of Salbodka⁶ explains that Adam lacked gratitude to G-d for the

⁵ A professor has objected to this position because Martin Heidegger, a famous philosopher and a one-time member of the Nazi movement (although his affiliation was somewhat complex), was a “moral pygmy” but still an important philosopher. This totally misses the point. According to Reb Elchanan, someone with negative character traits can still acquire truth. However, someone with only positive character traits will automatically acquire truth. That a professor with severe negative character traits reached some truth (it is unclear whether he was religious at all, and he certainly did not believe in Judaism, so he did not even reach the fundamental truths) does not damage Reb Elchanan’s thesis.

⁶ Or HaTzafun, vol. 1 pp. 87, 91-92

creation of a soulmate with whom he can spend his life. When confronted with his sin of eating from the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed G-d for

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creating Eve who led him to sin.⁷ This ingratitude was a serious character flaw, but how can that be construed as heresy? The Alter explains that true belief stems from purity of character. When Adam displayed a character flaw, he revealed that he has the seed from which heresy grows. While he may not have been an actual heretic, Chazal refer to him as one because he possessed a trait that can lead to heresy.

We say twice every day in Shema: “*Hisham’ru lachem pen yifteh levavchem vesartem va’avadtem elohim acherim* – Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced

⁷ Cf. Avodah Zarah 5b

and you turn astray and serve gods of others” (Devarim 11:16). The Sifrei writes on that verse: “Once someone removes himself from Torah he goes and affixes himself to *avodah zarah*.” Is that really true? On a daily basis, we see people who have left Torah study but have not become idolaters. Rather, explains the Alter⁸, someone with a character flaw that causes him to leave the study of Torah has already exhibited the symptoms of what causes heresy. Whether or not he actually reaches that low point of denial, he has within himself the cause of heresy.

Korach’s rebellion against the Torah of Moshe, and all subsequent replications, derived its basis from selfish or other biases that (perhaps) subtly directed otherwise healthy minds away from the absolute truth. The most basic sin of these rebels, from where all other transgressions emanated, was a lack of proper control over their desires and character. Had they focused more on character development than on theology, their fates would have been much more for the better.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 94

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bakeish Shalom

With thanks to Rabbi Zvi Miller of The Salant Foundation, who provided the core thought of this week’s column.

The title verse of this week’s *parashah* reads “*Vayikach Korach*” (Bamidbar 16:39). The simple translation would be “And Korach took”. However, the *Midrash Rabbah* takes it slightly differently, using an equally valid if less obvious translation. “And Korach took’ – meaning, his heart took him.” The Ramban notes that

the word “*vayikach*” consistently refers to a non-physical move.

This connects our chapter to the previous one of *tzitzis*. “And you shall not explore after your heart and after your eyes, after which you stray.” (15:39). Rashi explains that the heart and eyes are spies for the body. The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body commits the sin.

Why was he moved to rebel? In what direction did Korach’s heart take him? Moshe appointed Elitzafan ben Uzi’el to be the leader of the clan of Kehas. The Tanchuma¹ writes that Korach, being older than his cousin Elitzafan, thought that the job would be his.

¹ Ch. 1

Korach could not belittle Moshe's authority – the Jewish People all saw the beams of light radiating from Moshe's face when he came down from Sinai. Instead, Korach built up the masses. "The whole community, every one of them is holy, and Hashem is among them; and why do you raise yourselves above the congregation of G-d?" (16:3) He attacked Moshe politically by trying to make him redundant religiously.

This is the meaning of the two slogans a third *midrash*² attributes to Korach. "If a garment is all blue, does it need *tzitzis*?" The whole garment is *techeiles*, reminding us of heaven and of G-d, so why would we need an additional blue thread? The whole community was at Sinai and had experienced the heights of prophecy at the Red Sea; we do not need priests and leaders. Similarly, "If a room is full of *Sifrei Torah*, does it need a *mezuzah*?"

R. Moshe Feinstein³, stresses a second aspect that builds on the first. As his very examples show, Korach assumes that anyone can interpret the Torah for themselves. That, somehow, at Sinai they were imbued with the "spirit of the law" and can use that to guide practice.

The meaning and purpose behind *halachah* is critical. It is true that we rule that *mitzvos* do not require intent. However, as the *Mishnah* writes, "From [acting] *shelo lishmah*, not for its sake, one comes to act *lishmah*." The purpose

in the *mitzvah* performed by rote observance is in its bringing the person closer to later performing it with intent.

Rav Hirsch likens the relationship between *halachah* and *lishmah* to that of experimental data and scientific theory. G-d gave us the *halachic* process; its results are the objective data with which we work. Our theories about the meaning and purpose are just that

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– theories. In a scathing comment against Reform, and Geiger's notion of a "science of Judaism", Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch likens deriving practice from ideas about the purpose of the law to alchemy.⁴

Korach's rebellion is held up by the *Mishnah* as an archetype of lacking *lishmah*. "Any controversy which is *lesheim Shamayim*, for the sake of [the One in] heaven, will in the end persist; and that which is not *lesheim Shamayim* will not in the end persist. Which is a controversy for the sake of Heaven? The controversy between Hillel and Shammai. And which is not for the sake of Heaven? The controversy of Korach and his entire congregation."

Amazingly, Korach was not inherently an evil person. The Arizal associates his name with the last three letters of the words

"*TzaddiK katamaR yifraCH* – the righteous shall blossom like the date-palm." (Tehillim 92:13) The Ari concludes from this that Korach will eventually have a place in the World to Come.

Where did the gap emerge between this Korach and the one who challenged Moshe's authority? He was hurt by being passed over for an honor. He did not rebel for the sake of heaven, although he might have convinced himself that his position was the more reasonable way to worship Hashem. A tiny seed of jealousy, and all objectivity was lost. Without deriving values from the grounding of *halachah*, all was lost.

A tiny gap opened between his heart and his mind, between his subconscious and his righteous ideals. And so Korach "explored after his heart". Such gaps are all too common. As we say in *Aleinu*, "*Veyadata hayom, vehashevosa el levavecha* – And you will know today, and you will respond to your heart." (Devarim 4:39) The mind can know something that must still be answered to the heart.

Through the study of *Mussar* one can close that gap. Bridging heart and mind, *mitzvah* and *lishmah*, is critical. From the smallest of imperfections in his control of his inner self, Korach took to leading a full rebellion. *Mussar* has the power to cleanse our hearts from all impurities – both conscious and subconscious. It gives depth and meaning to our observance of *halachah*; it connects the act to the *lishmah*.

² Midrash Rabbah, quoted by Rashi

³ Derash Moshe

⁴ The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel

Sefasai Tiftach

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This *Shabbos* is also *Rosh Chodesh*. Not an unusual combination, with at least two and sometimes three *Shabbos* – *Rosh Chodeshes* a year (including *Shabbos* only, Friday-*Shabbos*, and *Shabbos*-Sunday).

Shabbos is about the Sanctity of Time, and *Rosh Chodesh* (and all the Holidays in its wake) is about Sanctity of Time. When *Shabbos* and *Rosh Chodesh* coincide, it gives us pause to reflect on the concept that each demonstrates. The lesson for us comes in two stages. G-d alone sanctified *Shabbos*, the Crown of Creation. Later, with the fourth Commandment, He asked us to remember *Shabbos* and to sanctify it. With *Rosh Chodesh*, He gave it to us without sanctity, and asked (commanded) us to sanctify it. It is as if He told us, “I showed you how to sanctify Time by giving you the Holy *Shabbos*; now let’s see how you do it on your own. Here is *Rosh Chodesh*. You sanctify it. If you don’t, it won’t be holy.” G-d shared *Shabbos* with us, so to speak, after He made it on His own. By our sanctification and establishment of the Jewish Calendar, we bring G-d into the partnership with us, so to speak. Of course, He created the Sun and the Moon and commanded us as to how to go about *Kiddush HaChodesh*, but we are the ones who set up the Calendar and give it its *Kedushah* (sanctity). *Shabbos-Rosh Chodesh* is a powerful combination of *Kedushos*.

These are thoughts we should have when we *daven* and otherwise celebrate and mark *Shabbos* and *Rosh Chodesh*. We’ve raised the following issue in the past, but it is

time to bring it up again. The Aruch HaShulchan and others raise the point, but we’ll present it from the Aruch HaShulchan.

He writes: “And know that I have always wondered about our

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nusach towards the end of the “*Ata*” *beracha* of the *Mussaf Amidah* for *Shabbos* and *Rosh Chodesh*...”¹

The Aruch HaShulchan does not understand why “*kadsheinu bemitzvosecha vesein chelkeinu beSora-secha* – sanctify us with Your *mitzvos*, and give us a portion in Your Torah” through to the closing disappeared from our *nusach*. It is part of the *siyum haberacha* (ending of the middle *beracha*) on a regular *Shabbos* and on *Yom Tov*, *Rosh HaShanah* or *Yom Kippur*, whether they are on a weekday or on *Shabbos*. There is no reason why the passage would not be appropriate of *Shabbos Rosh Chodesh*, and no reason why it should be omitted. The Aruch HaShulchan concludes by saying that it is missing from the text and that it was his practice to say it.

That is what the Aruch HaShulchan said. Add to that, the following:

Some recently produced *siddurim* (*Nusach Ashkenaz*) have included the passage in the *Amidah* for *Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Mussaf*,

either as part of the main text, or as a footnote.

The *siddur* for *Eidot Mizrach* has two separate passages - one for *Shabbos* and one for *Rosh Chodesh*, with the concluding *beracha* uniting the two by referring to both *Shabbos* and *Rosh Chodesh*.

Side point: Whereas *Ashkenazi siddurim* (*Sefard* and *Ashkenaz*, etc.) usually have *Mussaf* for *Shabbos* and then have regular and *Rosh Chodesh* side by side or above and below a line, and *Rosh Chodesh Mussaf* for a weekday is on its own, in *Eidot Mizrach siddurim* (at least some), there is a *Rosh Chodesh Mussaf* with *Shabbos* and weekday together, above and below a line, and regular *Shabbos Mussaf* is by itself.

Use the full version of the final passage of the middle *beracha* when you *daven* this *Shabbos-Rosh Chodesh*. If you have any doubts as to whether you should switch, discuss the issue with your Rav or other halachic consultant. One way or the other - *Shabbos Shalom* and *Chodesh Tov*.

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¹ Orach Chaim 425, *Hilchos Rosh Chodesh*, se'if 2