



Parashat Korach 5770

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On the Parashah... An Argument for the Sake of Heaven?

A commentary on the Rambam, called “Yad Ketanah”, suggests a novel thought: Arguments for the sake of heaven are forbidden! (Hilchot De’ot 10). This is puzzling. After all, Pirkei Avot refers to the controversy between Hillel and Shammai as a controversy for the sake of heaven, singling it out for praise, and contrasting it with that of Korach and his assembly, which was not for the sake of heaven! The Yad Ketanah explained that everyone always claims that their controversy is for the sake of heaven! Have you ever seen a disputant say: “I’ve got to admit: This controversy is not for the sake of heaven”? People always deceive themselves, and not just others, claiming that their controversy is for the sake of heaven. They are not conscious of their being motivated by self-interest.

After all, we’ve got to wonder how Korach, who was an exceedingly wise individual, as well as saintly and blessed with Divine intuition, immersed himself in such an ugly controversy with two holy individuals, Moshe and Aharon. Surely he was not the sort who pursues honor for himself.

The Yad HaKetanah explained that Korach deceived himself, speaking about the glory of G-d and the glory of Israel, and he claimed: “All the people in the community are holy, and G-d is with them. Why are you setting yourselves above G-d’s congregation?” (Bemidbar 16:3). Truthfully, however, a minuscule element of passion was present in Korach. It was so minute and concealed that he was not conscious of it, and this led him to become confused and to call evil good.

Moshe knew full-well what the problem was, and he answered Korach: “Listen to what I have to say: You sons of Levi, isn’t it enough that the G-d of Israel has separated you from the community of Israel? He has brought you close to Him.... Although He gave this privilege to you and all your fellow Levites, you are now also demanding the priesthood!?” (ibid. v 8-10).

Why does Moshe use such an argument to reject Korach’s claim about the Divine holiness that envelops the entire Nation of Israel? Rather, Moshe was saying: If you are truly concerned about the specialness of Israel in the aggregate, and the idea that one should not set himself above them, then why didn’t you say so when you were chosen with your tribe? Rather, you have to understand that you have personal motives veiled in a lofty ideology.

Yet by then Korach's conscience had already been dulled and he didn't listen, and that is how he sank into perdition. We thus learn that when someone gets enthusiastically involved in a controversy, so to speak "for the sake of heaven," he must examine himself many times over, wondering whether or not extraneous considerations are involved.

As a humorous aside, there was once a Knesset member who would stop at nothing to hold on to his seat, yet he claimed that he was acting for the sake of heaven. People answered him, "Of course you are! Surely Yeshayahu said (66:1): 'Heaven is My seat'..."

If so, the question remains: How did our Sages say of Hillel and Shammai that their controversy was for the sake of heaven? The Yad Ketanah answered very simply: They were intimate friends, and we can therefore be certain that neither was interested in claiming victory over the other. They only wished to clarify the truth. Similarly, Rabbi Yonatan Eibschutz in his book "Ye'arot Devash" explained that the gauge of a controversy being for the sake of heaven is whether or not the parties are friends.

In summary, differences of opinions are permissible but divided hearts are forbidden. Every one of us must flee a thousand miles from what seems like controversy, and must run like a gazelle towards friendship and camaraderie.

Rav Aviner on... Strengthening the Religious-Zionist Community

Question: How can we internally strengthen the Religious-Zionist community and increase its influence? Not through specific programs but by an overall philosophy.

Answer: When we speak about a movement, i.e. a powerful historical process, it is impossible to employ artificial ideas and use foreign concepts; rather we must identify the fundamentals of the movement which nurture and increase its strength. This movement was born a little over one hundred years ago and its purpose was to insert a spiritual soul into a powerful movement which then appeared and was growing: The national revival of the Nation in its Land. The Religious-Zionist movement therefore nurtures its strength from these two entities: the body and soul. Its beginning was quite modest but it grew stronger, both internally and in its influence.

Regarding its quantity, it has reached ten percent of the Nation which dwells in Zion, and regarding its quality, it contains a much high percentage of those active in the government, army, economy, science than other sectors of society, and today there are more Bnei Torah, Torah scholars, yeshivot, women's high schools and seminaries than ever before.

Its influence on the Nation is incredible, and much greater than the ten percent it represents. One must obviously point out that the Religious-Zionist community has

many shades and includes different streams: yeshivish, university types, those who are punctilious about the mitzvot, liberals, right-wingers, left wingers, etc. The common denominator between all of them is the belief in the revival of the Nation in its Land according to the Torah.

Besides the fact that this community is becoming stronger both quantitatively and qualitatively, it also has a major impact on the other two communities between which it mediates: the Non-Zionist Charedim and the Secular-Zionists. This influence is not a direct one but a natural one of absorption. The Secular-Zionists are coming closer to Torah, and are much closer than they were before the establishment of the State – and this is based on their encounter with the Religious-Zionist community, in which it sees many sterling qualities in the area of education, family life and in our relationship to the State and the army. Similarly, the Charedi community is coming closer to the State and the entire enterprise of the national revival, in that it unwittingly absorbs Torat Eretz Yisrael from the Religious-Zionists.

There is obviously much more work to be done, and there are certainly many deficiencies in our community, but this is not on account of a faulty foundation, but because we are since at the beginning of our path. It is the correct path and we must continue on it. The strengthening of the physical national revival is a natural process which feeds itself, and does not require additional action.

Regarding the spiritual national revival, we must exert much more effort, i.e. to increase Torah learning in our community. The more we learn Torah, the greater blessing will come to us and others.

This conclusion is not surprising. We know that the Torah is the Divine cure for all maladies, both communally and individually, as the Maharal wrote at the beginning of his work *Netivot Olam, Netiv Ha-Torah*, that the Torah provides the order of the world. The Netziv of Volozhin similarly wrote in his teshuvah "Yamin U-Semol" (Right and Left) regarding the different streams among the Nation of Israel, in which the solution is not separate communities but increasing Torah among the Nation, producing Torah scholars and Torah learning among the masses (*Shut Meishiv Dvar* 1:44). Maran Ha-Rav Kook similarly wrote that the various spiritual ailments are a result of an intrusion upon the pure Israeli nature which retains its purity by learning Torah, whether Torah learning in order to produce Torah scholars or Torah learning for the masses (*Orot Ha-Teshuvah*).

The main remedy is therefore to increase Torah among the Religious-Zionist community, from top-to-bottom, in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and in yeshivot for both men and women.

And we must also strengthen what must precede Torah, i.e. proper character traits of integrity, honesty, helping other, care in guarding one's tongue as the central focus. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, did not want to force the yeshiva's schedule on the students, except for demanding that every day between 12:45-1:15 the students learn the book "Chafetz Chaim."

The general principle is that we must increase proper character traits and Torah learning among the community in general and for one who display self-sacrifice for it in particular.

Stories about Leaving the Land of Israel

It once happened that a student of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai traveled outside of Israel and returned wealthy. The other students saw him and were jealous, and they also wanted to travel outside of Israel. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai brought them to a valley near Mt. Meiron in Northern Israel and prayed: Valley, valley, fill yourself with gold coins. He said to them: If you want gold, take this gold, but know: Anyone who takes now also takes his share in the World to Come, since there is no reward for learning Torah in this world, but only in the World to Come (Shemot Rabbah 52 and Yalkut Shimoni Mishlei 31).

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Leading Davening or Bircat Cohanim

Question: If an Ashkenazic Cohain, who lives outside of Israel, has Yahrtzeit on Yom Tov, and he davens in a community that does not permit the Shaliach Tzibur to duchen, is it better that he does not act as a Shaliach Tzibur for Mussaf and Duchens so he does not miss the opportunity of fulfilling a Torah obligation of Bircat Cohanim? I am also able to lead the Davening during other times on Yom Tov.

Answer: It is preferred to Duchen since there is no obligation to be the Shaliach Tzibur at every Davening.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

My Wife or My Mother

Question: I have a problem: I am torn between my mother and my wife. There is tension between them and I am stuck between a rock and a hard place. My mother is the one who raised me, but my wife is part of me. What should I do?

Answer: This question is not phrased correctly. Your wife is not part of you, rather the both of you are one person, as the Torah says that you are "One flesh" (Bereshit 2:24) and obviously one soul and one spirit. The correct phrasing is therefore: You and your wife have a problem. You are one person, and the both of you are obligated to honor your parents. The husband is obligated from the Torah to honor them, and the wife is obligated by the Rabbis, but it does not matter, you are both obligated and it is not always easy. As you said, your mother raised you, but you are an independent person. This does not mean that you should be ungrateful for all she has done, but you were first a part of your parents and you are now a part of a new being which is made up of you and your wife. "A man therefore leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (ibid.). The correct phrasing is therefore: My wife and I have a problem with my mother. And what is the solution? Knock your heads together. Together. When one phrases the problem correctly, this is already half the solution. Solve the problem together.

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Standing for one's Rabbi

Q: Do I have to stand when I speak to my Rabbi on the phone?

A: One is not obligated to do so, but it is proper (Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach would stand when he spoke on the phone with Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein – Chicho Mamtakim vol. 2 p. 34. And we also heard that Ha-Rav Shimon Schwab – after he was more-or-less confined to a wheelchair because of his knees – would stand when he spoke on the phone with Ha-Rav Shach, and Ha-Rav Ahaon Kotler would stand when speaking on the phone with the Skverer Rebbe).

Pre-Historic Man

Q: How should we relate to the discoveries of pre-historic man which precede the date we give to Adam?

A: Adam Ha-Rishon is the first person created with the image of G-d. Shemoneh Kevatzim of Maran Ha-Rav Kook 1, 594.

Health Insurance

Q: Isn't having health insurance a lack of trust in Hashem?

A: No. Trust in Hashem is to trust Hashem in something He promised. Hashem never promised that you would not get sick. The book "Ha-Maspik Le-Ovdei Hashem of Rabbenu Avraham ben Ha-Rambam. Sha'ar Ha-Bitachon (Shut Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 2:111. Shut Yechaveh Da'at 3:85).

Netilat Yadayim

Q: If I am only able to wash one hand for Netilat Yadayim because of a medical problem with my hand, do I recite a blessing?

A: Yes, and wrap the ill hand. See Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 162:10. And recite the blessing in the plural "Al Netilat Yadayim (hands)" as usual. Kaf Ha-Chaim 4:2.

Hiding a Fact

Q: Is it permissible to say that we do not know the gender of the fetus so that people do not bug us about us?

A: Yes, just as it is permissible to conceal that a woman is pregnant (Yevamot 65b).

Calling-Off an Engagement

Q: I called off my engagement because I discovered serious issues which my fiance hid from me. He has not forgiven me. I was told that if he does not forgive me, it will cause me NOT get engaged again.

A: 1. This will not block a future match. 2. He needs to ask your forgiveness for deceiving you. 3. You acted strictly by asking his forgiveness. May Hashem bless you.

Moshe Rabbenu

Q: How did Moshe Rabbenu manage to learn Torah when he went to live in Pharaoh's house as a baby?

A: He went when we are 12 years old. Shemot Rabbah 5:2.

Clinking Glasses

Q: Should one clink glasses together when saying "Le-Chaim"?

A: It is "Chukot Ha-Goyim" – imitating non-Jewish practices (Shut Mesaver Tov 2:79).

Talkbacks

Q: Is it permissible to read talkbacks on the internet?

A: It is best not to have the internet at all. If one nonetheless does have the internet, he should greatly distance himself from talkbacks since they are full of Lashon Ha-Ra, insults, lies, etc.

Torah or Eretz Yisrael

Q: Which is preferable – Torah or Eretz Yisrael?

A: There are circumstances in which Hashem decides to send us into Exile in order for us to strengthen ourselves in Torah.

Special thank you to Fred Casden for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parshah Sheet



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