



TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Korach

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A Taste of Torah

Blurred Vision

by Rabbi Yosef Melamed

In this week's parsha, Korach famously incites a revolt against Moshe and Aharon in an attempt to gain the position of *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) instead of Aharon. The Medrash (Bamidbar Rabba 18:3) discusses the connection between this week's parsha, which discusses Korach and his revolt, and last week's parsha, which ended with the commandment of wearing *tzitzis*.

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander (1923-1986) makes an observation which provides an additional, beautiful answer to this question. Later, in the Book of Devarim (30:15), Moshe states, "See I have placed before you today life and the good, and death and the bad." This verse teaches the need to recognize that doing mitzvos, the good, is life, and doing *aveiros* (sins), the bad, is synonymous with spiritual death. Obviously, one's job is to choose good over bad and life over death. Rabbi Friedlander points out that the language of the verse is not "understand that I have placed before you," but "see that I have placed before you." Why is the term "see" used here in the context of the realization of the truth and goodness inherent in doing mitzvos and the destruction and detriment caused by committing a sin?

Rabbi Freidlander explains: We are confronted in life with many free will decisions: Should I do this mitzvah? Should I abstain from that activity? It may seem that the struggle of making the right choice begins only at the time one is confronted with the different possibilities of action. However, in truth, one's free will struggle began a long time before. This is because the struggles one faces right now are not only dependent on the circumstances of the moment, but also on how one views and relates to those circumstances. And the way one views current circumstances is dependent on past decisions regarding

the development of one's beliefs and principles, which shape one's viewpoint and perspective for all events that one encounters.

Therefore, when the verse instructs us to make the right choices in life, it uses the language of "see," to stress that it is not enough to strive to make the right choices at the time one is confronted with a challenge. Rather, one must live at all times with the realization that keeping the Torah is eternal life and neglect of the Torah is spiritual death. We must work on ourselves to develop Torah attitudes and beliefs that guide us all the time, even before we are confronted with the challenges of life. Doing so will enable us to "see" and view the situations that confront us with a Torah-true outlook, which will make doing the right thing all the more likely.

Rashi, citing a Medrash (Bamidbar Rabba 18:8), teaches that Korach, who was a very smart person, was well aware of the risk in his battle against Moshe and Aharon; Moshe had told Korach and his followers that only one person would survive offering the *ketores* that they wished to bring. That person ended up being, of course, Aharon the *Kohen Gadol*. Nonetheless, despite his great intellect, Korach convinced himself that the one survivor would be him. This error, says the Medrash, came because Korach was fooled by his eyes. The Medrash explains that Korach had a prophetic vision of a chain descending from himself which eventually led to the great prophet Shmuel (Samuel), who was, in certain ways, the spiritual equal of Moshe and Aharon. Korach was confident that since he was to produce such an illustrious descendant, he must be destined to survive, indicating that his fight was correct and valid. However, Korach was mistaken in his understanding of his

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Stories for the Soul

Timing is Everything

Rabbi Shneur Kotler (1918 - 1982), Dean of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, once traveled to New York to attend a wedding. He had an important meeting scheduled later that evening, and he asked his driver to please wait for him at the exit immediately following the *chupah* (marriage ceremony) so that they would be able to depart promptly.

Following the *chupah*, though, Rabbi Kotler told his driver that he would be staying at the wedding a bit longer than he had originally planned. A short time later, he changed his plans again, and informed his driver that he would remain for the entire wedding and had rescheduled the subsequent meeting for a different day.

To the surprised driver he offered the following explanation: "Although the meeting was quite important, something occurred at the wedding which was even more important and required my presence. I did not receive a *bracha* (blessing) underneath the *chupah*. Although it did not bother me in the least, I was concerned that somebody might misinterpret my early departure as an indication that I felt slighted. I realized that this could lead to tension and possibly even an argument between the father of the groom and the father of the bride as to who was responsible for this oversight. So I decided to stay, first for a short time, and then for the entire wedding, in order to be absolutely sure that nobody could possibly think that I had been offended."

Rabbi Kotler then concluded: "Of all the important tasks that we must accomplish in our lives, none are more important than *shalom*. Promoting peace between people and avoiding any strife and *machlokes* (dispute) overrides everything else. That is why I cancelled my meeting tonight - in order to ensure that a *machlokes* would be avoided."

Our Sages teach that Korach was guilty of instigating a *machlokes*. Despite Korach's view that his cause was justified and moral, he was swallowed by the ground for his efforts.

Kollel Happenings

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM BEGINS NEXT WEEK

The Kollel's Summer Night Seder for Bachurim begins Sunday night. Boys who are out of school join the Kollel's night seder. Refreshments available. A weekly stipend is available for those who attend consistently. Contact Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, rmf@denverkollel.org for more details.

SPRING-SUMMER AVOS UBANIM ON SHABBOS AFTERNOON

The Kollel's spring-summer Avos Ubanim program continues this Shabbos afternoon at the Kollel Torah Centers in West Denver and Southeast Denver. Learning begins one hour before mincha, followed by nosh and prizes. The month of Tammuz is sponsored by Reb Moshe Berkowitz in memory of his father, Reb Moshe ben Reb Aryeh Leib. Thank you, as well, to Denver Human Services for their partnership in this program. For sponsorships and more info, email info@denverkollel.org.

MILE HIGH TORAH PODCAST FROM THE KOLLEL

A wide variety of Kollel classes and short, inspiring Torah thoughts are now available on many podcast platforms such as Spotify, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts and Amazon Music. You can also access the latest podcasts at the Kollel's website, www.denverkollel.org.

Halacha Riddles

Last week's question: How could one's intention when falling asleep affect the need for a *bracha* on food?

Answer: If a person was eating and fell asleep in middle, there may be a need to recite a new *bracha* upon awakening if he wishes to continue eating. If the person unintentionally fell asleep, no new *bracha* is necessary. If, however, the person intentionally went to sleep,

a new *bracha* would be required upon awakening. This is true only for an actual sleep; a short doze would never necessitate a new *bracha*. (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 178:7 with Mishna Berura 48; see also The Laws of Brachos by Rabbi Binyomin Forst pg. 179 fn. 48).

This week's question: How could hand washing require another hand washing?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part III

Young Meir gained a reputation for being exceptionally bright, and was referred to as the Shatzer *Ilui* (genius). In addition to his regular studies at *cheder* (school), he studied with his illustrious

grandfather, Rabbi Shmuel Yitzchak Schor, author of the well-known work *Minchas Shai*. He also studied with Rabbi Shulem Moshkovitz, the Shatzer Rebbe.

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vision, and the true meaning of his vision was that Shmuel would descend from his sons, who eventually did *teshuva*, while Korach himself would perish.

Rabbi Friedlander explains that the Medrash is teaching that even a prophetic vision can be misunderstood when it's blurred by the preexisting desires and mindset of the viewer. In this case, Korach's desire for honor led him to view a prophetic vision as support for his revolt, which ultimately led to his downfall.

The mitzvah of *tzitzis*, as explained by the Gemara (Menachos 43b; see Rashi there), is intended to help us realign our vision and perception of the circumstances we experience to be consistent with fulfillment of the Torah. When we see the blue *techeiles* thread of the *tzitzis*, it reminds us of the sea, which in turn reminds us of the sky, which reminds us of Hashem's throne of glory and helps us strengthen the realization that Hashem sees all of our actions and doings. Additionally, the verse by *tzitzis* (Bamidbar 15:39) warns us "and you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes." This indicates that straying after one's eyes is a product of straying after one's heart. One's already-developed attitudes and wants will lead

the eyes to interpret things in a way which promotes what the heart desires.

This provides additional meaning to the connection between the story of Korach and the mitzvah of *tzitzis*, because Korach's downfall came about through his mistaken vision and understanding of his future destiny, which was borne out of his desire for honor.

Rabbi Friedlander gives the following eye-opening example of how a person's previous attitude can shape his attitude to current events: Someone who observes the persecution of the Jews throughout the ages can look at the situation and see a challenge to the power of Hashem and His *hashgacha* (supervision). However, another observer will look at this situation and wonder, "How can it be that a nation so persecuted and oppressed survived over two thousand years of exile when other, stronger and prominent nations disappeared off the face of earth?! This miraculous existence is the greatest testament to G-d's power and supervision of the world."

Let us take this lesson to heart and realize the impact of our attitudes and viewpoints not only for the past, but also how we view and react to circumstances in the future!

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