

### Parshas Korach 5772

## SEEING IS BELIEVING — BUT ONLY FOR BELIEVERS

While Korach began with a bright future ahead of him — the Medrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah 18:3*) states that he was actually a great *chacham* (wise man) — his shortcomings got the better of him. This week's *parshah* relates how he became embroiled in controversy and rebellion, eventually ending with a precipitous fall (in the full sense of the word). The extent to which he strayed is both astounding and calamitous.

### KORACH THE APIKORUS

Chazal tell us (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:1*) that Korach had become a literal *apikorus* (heretic). What, exactly, constitutes an *apikorus*, and what was the nature of Korach's *apikorsus*? The term appears in the Mishnah in Sanhedrin (10:1), which states:

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְעַמְּךָ כָּלָם צְדִיקִים לְעוֹלָם יִירָשׁוּ אֶרֶץ... וְאֵלוּ שְׂאִי לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, הָאֹמֵר אֵין תְּחִיַּת הַמֵּתִים מִן הַתּוֹרָה, וְאֵין תּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֶפִיקוֹרוֹס.

“All Yisrael have a portion in the World to Come, as it states (*Yeshayah 60:21*): ‘And your nation are all righteous; they shall inherit the Land forever...’ The following people do not have a portion in the World to Come: One who denies the Biblical origin of the Resurrection of the Dead, one who denies the Divine origin of the Torah, and an *apikorus*.”

This Mishnah may almost appear contradictory; it begins by stating that “All Yisrael have a portion in the World to Come,” but then, the very next sentence states, “The following people do not have a portion in the World to Come.” The issue is clarified in light of the Rambam's legendary

comments on this Mishnah (*Peirush Hamishnayos*): The Rambam lists thirteen principles of faith, stating that these tenets are prerequisites for inclusion in the nation of Yisrael. One who accepts these articles of faith is considered part of Klal Yisrael; one who rejects any part of them, however, earns the title of *apikorus*, has essentially separated himself from membership in Klal Yisrael, and has forfeited his share in the World to Come. In other words, all *Yisrael* certainly do have a portion in the World to Come; but an *apikorus*, who denies any part of the thirteen principles, is no longer part of Klal Yisrael.

In any event, Korach went so far as to deny certain articles of faith. According to the Yerushalmi, Korach declared: “The Torah is not from Heaven, and Moshe is not a prophet.” In so doing, Korach contradicted Article #7 of the principles of faith, which asserts that Moshe was the greatest of all prophets, as well as Article #8, which focuses on the Divine origin of the Torah. (It is interesting to note how Korach's *apikorsus* corresponds to another well-known teaching of Chazal. The Gemara in Bava Basra [74a] relates how Rabbah bar bar Channah was shown the spot in the wilderness where the earth had swallowed the company of Korach. He beheld smoke rising from cracks in the ground and heard voices emanating from below, evidently from that congregation of sinners who had “descended alive to the netherworld” [*Bamidbar 16:33*]. Upon careful listening, he was able to discern what it was they were proclaiming: מֹשֶׁה אֱמֶת וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת [“Moshe is true, and his Torah is true”]! Apparently, from their abode of retribution, these pitiful souls finally repudiated the very heresy they championed in their lifetimes [*Chidushei Hagriz Al Hatorah Hachadashos 131*].)

One of the most astounding aspects of Korach's heretical statements is the individual who issued them. Here was

זכור ולעלוי נשמת  
אבי מורי ר' מאיר שמחה בן ר' יצחק זאב ע"ה  
פר"ן  
הונצח ע"י בנו יצחק זאב נ"י

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of מרדכי מנדל בן ברוך ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.

Korach, inherently a wise man, who beheld all of the extraordinary miracles of the Exodus wrought through the hand of Moshe and witnessed the Revelation at Sinai with his own eyes! And yet this same individual could turn around and declare that Moshe had no prophetic ability and that the Torah was not given from Heaven! How is such a remarkable turnaround even possible?

Perhaps an explanation can be culled from the following idea concerning the Song at the Sea, expounded by R' David Soloveitchik (*Me'orei Hamaadim*, vol. 1, p. 75):

### **KNOWING HOW TO LOOK**

After witnessing the wondrous events by the sea — how the waters had split, allowing Yisrael to cross through unharmed, while their Egyptian tormentors were drowned and forever silenced — the Jewish people recited the epic Az Yashir hymn. The Medrash makes a most surprising statement in clarifying from where Yisrael derived the ability to recite such a monumental song, one that clearly required the input of Divine inspiration: “Due to the great show of faith Yisrael displayed for Hashem, they merited that the Divine Spirit rested upon them, and they recited the song” (*Mechilta*).

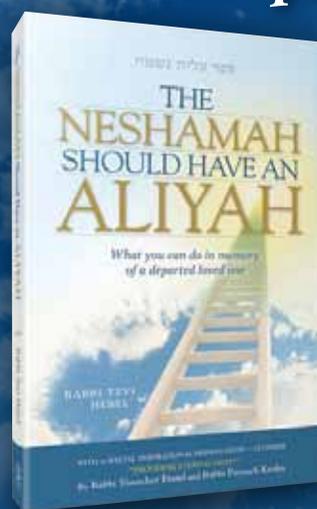
What is most noteworthy about this Medrash is the assertion that Yisrael displayed great faith at that moment, which enabled them to recite Az Yashir. But what faith was necessary then — hadn't they just witnessed everything with their own eyes? As the verses suggest: “And Yisrael saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore; and they witnessed the Great Hand, which Hashem wrought against Egypt... and they believed in Hashem, and in Moshe, His servant... At that point did Moshe and Yisrael sing this song...” (*Shemos 14:30, 31; 15:1*). What “leap of faith” was necessary after having witnessed some of the most wondrous acts ever performed?

R' David Soloveitchik explains that — yes — even here, faith was a necessary component. For such is the nature of man and his evil inclination; even when beholding the most amazing acts of Hashem, a person may still react with rationalizations. He can witness the sea splitting

and attribute the event to powerful winds or some other “scientific phenomenon.” In other words, one must be a true *ma'amin* — believer — to be able to *see* properly. Whether one beholds the uncommon overt miracles, or the everyday wonders that abound in Hashem's world, one must employ faith to recognize Hashem's Hand in the event. A Korach or a Darwin always stand at the ready to dismiss the most obvious signs of Hashem's Presence in the world; even if it means conjuring up some ridiculous assertion dressed up in sophisticated dialect.

But those with *emunah* (faith in Hashem) are not fooled. They see a sunset or a mountain or a bird flying, and they perceive the simple truth: that Creation came about through the Creator.

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