

Parshas Nasso 5772

IN SEARCH OF A CAUSE

THE CONTRASTING ROLES OF THE NESI'IM AND KORACH, AND THEIR MANIFESTATION IN MODERN-DAY MOVEMENTS

One of the most fascinating aspects of any campaign season is the sheer number of people involved and the intensity and passion they display. Immense time and effort are invested by throngs of people on behalf of this or that candidate; many of these operatives are volunteers who not only won't receive payment, but will probably not ever meet or even see the individual for whom they have demonstrated such total devotion. The situation seems almost perplexing; what force propels so many people to expend their energies in such a manner?

The same can really be said for almost any of the myriad causes that have abounded in the world for all ages. Be it for a particular political party, a social movement, an environmental cause or what have you — there seem to be an almost endless supply of people who are willing to dedicate their lives to tree-hugging or protecting some obscure species of toad which is frankly not intelligent enough to know the difference (let alone show appreciation). What could possibly account for this almost religious participation in such activities, often undertaken by people with a completely secular orientation? Believe it or not, the key to understanding this phenomenon may be contained in an idea emerging from this week's *parshah*.

DIFFERENT DESTINATIONS

A substantial portion of the *parshah* focuses on the *Nesi'im*, the chiefs of the tribes of Yisrael, who offered the sacrificial gifts on the occasion of the dedication of the Mishkan (Sanctuary) (*Bamidbar ch. 7*). These were men of great

stature and character, well deserving of their venerated positions. Amongst their number were included such legendary figures as Nachshon ben Aminadav, who had distinguished himself with his singular display of faith at the Yam Suf (Red Sea) by being the first to plunge into its waters (prior to their splitting).

What may be surprising is the eventual fate of this prestigious group. The Torah later relates the episode of Korach's rebellion, which included a group of 250 "men of the assembly." According to the Rabbeinu Bechaye (*Bamidbar 16:1*), the very *Nesi'im* of our *parshah* were included amongst that group who rose up against Moshe and perished as a result. Their participation in this ill-fated challenge seems inconsistent with their otherwise righteous natures; how could they have been taken in by Moshe's detractors?

However, according to the Shelah Hakadosh (*parshas Korach*), there was a tremendous difference between Korach and his inner circle and the group of 250. This notion is borne out, first of all, by the different fates that these two entities met. The Torah relates how Korach's cronies (Dasan and Aviram) were swallowed up by the earth, whereas the group of 250 men (which included the *Nesi'im*) was consumed by a Heavenly fire. The Shelah points out how this distinction is manifest in the Mishnah in Sanhedrin (*10:3*), which speaks of the ultimate end of Korach's rebels:

עדת קרח אינה עתידה לעלות, שגאמר ותכס עליהם הארץ, בעולם הזה. ויאבדו מתוך הקהל, לעולם הבא.

"The company of Korach will not arise in the future (from the depths); as it states (*Bamidbar 16:33*): 'And the ground covered over them,' — a reference to their fate in this world; 'And they went lost from the midst of the congregation,' — a reference to their fate in the World to Come (where they

לזכר נשמת חיים צבי בן אברהם יצחק ע"ה

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

remain permanently ‘lost’.)”

It is noteworthy that the Mishnah — in stating that the company of Korach has no share in the World to Come — quotes only the verse relating the fate of those swallowed into the depths of the earth. It does not mention the group who perished through fire, an indication that this latter group — that is, the 250 men — did in fact merit a portion in the World to Come. Apparently, despite their inclusion in the general rebellion, they were viewed more favorably by Heaven.

THE ULTIMATE DRIVER

The Shelah explains that, in fact, the motives of the *Nesi'im* (and the other members of the group of 250) were in fact much more pristine than those of Korach and his cronies. Whereas the latter were merely following the dictates of envy and other base instincts, the former were actually striving for perfection. In joining the rebellion, the group

of 250 was not just trying to challenge Moshe’s authority and was not interested in mere enhanced prestige or exalted positions. They possessed a legitimate yearning for *ruchniyus* (spirituality) and sincerely desired greater opportunity to engage in Hashem’s service and to come closer to Him. Their mistake lay not in their inherent wishes, but in the misguided manner in which they went about presenting their claims. It was, indeed, a fatal mistake, but one that actually reflects their more elevated level. The Torah continually refers to this group as the ones “who sinned with their souls,” for this was the real nature of their activities. They were invested in matters of the soul; although punished for their missteps, they were eventually united with Hashem and merited the spiritual bliss of the World to Come.

The Steipler Gaon explains (*Chayei Olam, ch. 5*) that, in fact, every individual is imbued with such a force. As man is much more than a mere intelligent mammal, he possesses an inherent yearning for something more exalted than the physical plane; he has an instinctive desire for *ruchniyus*, like the 250 men. The only question — which each individual will answer through the course in life he chooses — is how he will channel these inner stirrings. If he follows the dictates of the Torah and immerses himself in *avodas Hashem* (service of the Almighty), he can reach dizzying spiritual heights and live a truly rich and fulfilling Torah lifestyle.

But if a person does not utilize these “spiritual instincts” for true *ruchniyus*, these inner yearnings may give him no rest. They were implanted within an individual for his own benefit; just as a person — who must eat to survive — possesses a strong instinctive desire for food, so, too, he has a “spiritual appetite” to spur him on to “consume” *ruchniyus*. If he chooses to bypass true *ruchniyus* in the form of Torah and *mitzvos*, he will be led by these instincts to find “spiritual meaning” elsewhere. And so it is possible, through neglecting the True Source, to channel these energies into foreign or man-made contrivances. This, explains the Steipler, is what leads some people to gravitate toward a life dedicated to advancing the cause of some political party or some other type of cause célèbre. It’s all a matter of how one chooses to utilize the powerful forces of spirituality in his possession.

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