

PARSHAS KORACH

תשפ"ו

This week's parsha discusses machlokes. It is a very serious thing.

Rashi explains that Korach separated himself from the rest of Klal Yisroel. He made divisions.

Along with Korach came Doson and Avirom – they are the perennial troublemakers. All the way back in Egypt – 40 years prior – Moshe Rabbeinu saw Doson and Avirom fighting with each other. And after Moshe rebuked them for it, they informed on him to Pharaoh. And now they are instigating more machlokes with Korach.

We have a number of different people involved in this conflict. Korach is a wealthy man who is overcome with jealousy. We have two professional baalei machlokes who just need an excuse to get into a fight, and then we have 250 sincere people who got drawn in by Korach's philosophy of democracy. Korach himself didn't believe it. Had he been picked as the Kohen Gadol from the start, Korach wouldn't be promoting democracy!

On the other side we have Moshe Rabbeinu. What do we know about him? He took Klal Yisroel out of Egypt, he split the Yam, everyone heard Hashem speaking to him at Har Sinai, yet now people are accusing him of making things up for his own glory! The reality is that some people cannot fathom that there can be great human beings who operate on an entirely different level of ruchniyus than they themselves are on. They need to pull everyone down to their level and equalize them.

Moshe Rabbeinu's face falls. He says: come the morning, there will be the test. Rashi says Moshe refers to "the morning" as a way of hinting that there are clear divisions in nature. There is morning and there is evening. There are men and there are women. There are Kohanim, Levi'im and Yisroelim. Each division has its own task. Our liberal society tries to deny these divisions and pretends everyone can be whoever they want to be at the drop of a hat – and then go back to who they were just as quickly. Everything is completely confused.

Then a strange thing happens. Moshe calls Korach over to try to make him realize how privileged he already is. Hashem, the creator and master of the entire world already chose shevet Levi to be elevated above the rest of Klal Yisroel. Isn't that special enough? Why do you have to be the most special of all to feel significant?

This is a common problem people have. They have to be #1 and will stop at nothing to get there – no matter the cost to themselves or others.

Yerovom ben Nevot is one of the worst reshaim in Jewish history. Hashem gave him a chance to do teshuvah. Hashem offered to walk together with him and Dovid Hamelech in Gan Eden. But he didn't want to be second to Dovid Hamelech.

Because of this, he split the kingdom and caused 10 shevotim to be lost, and he himself lost his olam haboh. Why? Because he couldn't tolerate being #2! He has to be #1! And the tragedy is that innocent,

sincere people fell for this egotism and were lost.

Moshe doesn't want machlokes. He is trying to diffuse the situation and calls Doson and Avirom to find a resolution. Moshe's overture is rejected.

So Moshe Rabbeinu has no choice but to carry out the test. The 250 people come with their incense pans. Moshe predicts that the earth will swallow Korach's camp as proof of Moshe's integrity. And in fact, the earth does swallow up Korach's camp and the 250 followers are burned up on the spot with a heavenly fire. Hashem shows that Moshe is right.

The next posuk is simply baffling: The people blame Moshe and Aharon for the whole thing!

Moshe can't respond. A plague begins killing people and Moshe sends Aharon to stop the plague with ketores. Then he makes another sign with the sticks of the shevotim to prove that Aharon is the true Kohen Gadol.

The basic lessons here are very important.

We have to recognize that certain people are operating on a higher level than most of us. They are able to rise above petty egos and self-interests and do things entirely l'shem Shomayim. We shouldn't always be cynical and try to drag them down to our level and assume they are just like us.

There are people who are baalei machlokes and will always try to involve themselves in controversies and stir up trouble. Stay far away from these people. They are toxic.

And there are people who are full of their own ego and cannot tolerate being #2. They will construct an entire philosophy – that they themselves don't believe – in order to topple any authority over them.

We need to learn to stay away from machlokes. If we somehow get drawn into one, let go of it as soon as you can and don't hold onto it. The Rambam writes in a letter that machlokes can knock even big tzaddikim off balance. It takes over – it controls a person to the point of irrationality. Be wary of people who are just itching for a fight.

Certain people are above politics and above personal interest. Moshe was able to daven for his enemies and try to make peace with them. But the rest of the nation couldn't recognize it.

These are critical lessons for life. The Torah makes a special issur not to be like Korach and to run away from machlokes.