

פרשת קורח

Even had the Torah not have been so specific, it is likely that we would have come to the conclusion on our own.

How many times have we witnessed the self-effacement of Moshe Rabbenu Olov Hashalom!

When we first meet Moshe Rabbenu as an adult and see him as a permanent resident of the royal household of Egypt, we see that he does not hold himself in esteem. We read (Sh'mos Perek 2/Posuk 11):

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסַבְלָתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרָיִם מַכֵּה אִישׁ עִבְרָיִם מֵאֶחָיו:

It was in those days that Moshe grew and he went out to his brethren and he saw their suffering; he saw an Egyptian man hitting a Hebrew from his brethren.

Rashi makes sure that we understand what we are reading:

ויגדל משה - שמינהו פרעה על ביתו:

Moshe grew – Par'o appointed Moshe to be the head of the royal household.

וירא בסבלתם - נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם:

He saw their suffering – He concentrated his eyes and heart to be troubled for them.

Davka on the day that he rose to a position of uncontested leadership in the House of Par'o – on that day he risked everything¹ so as not to be aloof. On that day, he made his commitment to B'nei Yisroel.

¹ We read in Parshas Yisro (Sh'mos Perek 18/Posuk 4):

וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר כִּי אֵין... לִקֵּי אָבִי בְּעֶזְרִי וַיִּצְלַנִּי מִחֶרֶב פְּרֹעֶה:

The name of one son was Eliezer because 'the G-d of my father was my help and He saved me from the sword of Par'o.'

Rashi writes:

ויצלני מחרב פרעה - כשגילו דתן ואבירם על דבר המצרי ובקש להרוג את משה...

He saved me from the sword of Par'o – When Doston and Aviram revealed the matter of the Egyptian, Par'o sought to kill Moshe

The ensuing events regarding Doston and Aviram and the women, daughters of Yisro at the well, teach how Moshe's care for his own honor and dignity did not seem to have any impact upon him whatsoever.

And when we come to the *s'neh*, the 'burning bush', its introduction provides a further emphasis. We read there (ibid. Perek 3/Posuk 1):

וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתָנוּ כֹּהֵן מִדִּין וַיִּנְהַג אֶת הַצֹּאן אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֵא אֶל הַר הָאֵל...לְקִים חֹרֶבָה:

Moshe was shepherding the sheep of his father-in-law Yisro and he led the sheep past the wilderness and he came to the Mountain of G-d, to Chorev.

Midrash Sh'mos Rabba (Parshata 2/2) writes:

מֹשֶׁה לֹא בָחַן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶלֶּא בְּצֹאן, אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ כִּשְׁהִיָּה מֹשֶׁה רַבִּינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם רֹעֵה צֹאנוּ שֶׁל יִתְרוֹ בְּמִדְבַר בְּרַח מִמֶּנּוּ גְדִי וְרַץ אַחֲרָיו עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לַחֲסִית כִּיּוֹן שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לַחֲסִית נִזְדַּמְנָה לוֹ בְּרִיכָה שֶׁל מִים וְעַמֵּד הַגְּדִי לִשְׁתוֹת, כִּיּוֹן שֶׁהִגִּיעַ מֹשֶׁה אֶצְלוֹ אָמַר אֲנִי לֹא הֵייתִי יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁרַץ הֵייתִי מִפְּנֵי צִמָּא עֵיף אֶתְּהָ הִרְכִּיבוּ עָלַי כְּתִיפוֹ וְהָיָה מֵהַלֵךְ, אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יֵשׁ לָךְ רַחֲמִים לְנַהוֹג צֹאנוּ שֶׁל בֶּשֶׂר וְדָם כִּךְ חֵיִךְ אֶתְּהָ תִרְעֶה צֹאנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Moshe – Hashem tested him specifically with the sheep. Our Rabbis said that when Moshe Rabbenu of blessed memory was shepherding Yisro's sheep in the wilderness, a kid ran away from him and Moshe ran after it until it came to the cliff. A pool of water was happened for it and the kid stopped and drank. When Moshe got there he said, 'I didn't know that you were running because you were thirsty; you must be thirsty'; he lifted the kid up on his shoulder and walked.

Hashem said, 'You have the requisite mercy to lead peoples' sheep in such a way, by your life you will shepherd My sheep, Israel.'

This was not only an act of mercy on Moshe's part; it was an act that for others would be considered degrading.

Carrying an animal on one's shoulders, instead of leading it, can be humiliating. That is one of the reasons that is attributed to the fact that when a person steals

and then either sells or slaughters an ox he pays five times the animal's value and when he does the same for a sheep he pays only four times its value.

We read (ibid. Pere 21/Posuk 37):

כִּי יִגְנֹב אִישׁ שׁוֹר אוֹ שֶׂה וּטְבָחוֹ אוֹ מְכָרוֹ חֲמִשָּׁה בְּקָר יִשְׁלַם תַּחַת הַשׁוֹר וְאַרְבַּע צֹאן תַּחַת הַשֶּׂה:

When a person steals an ox or a sheep and he slaughters it or sells it, five cattle he shall pay in place of the ox and four sheep in place of the sheep.

Rashi writes:

חמשה בקר וגו' - אמר רבן יוחנן בן זכאי חס המקום על כבודן של בריות, שור שהולך ברגליו ולא נתבזה בו הגנב לנושאו על כתפו, משלם חמישה, שה שנושאו על כתפו, משלם ארבעה הואיל ונתבזה בו.

Five cattle etc. – Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said, ‘Hashem is considerate regarding people’s dignity. The ox walks and so the thief wasn’t debased by carrying it on his shoulder – he pays five. The lamb that he has to carry on his shoulder – he pays four because he was debased by it.

If we even have some level of compassion for a thief while he is committing his crime, shouldn’t we expect a far greater measure for someone who is doing Mitzvos? But, Moshe paid himself no regard.

And more. At the time of the Eigel, Moshe offered to ‘sacrifice’ himself on behalf of Israel – even though they were at fault and he suffered because of them.

We read in Parshas Ki Siso (ibid. Perek 32/Posuk 32):

וְעַתָּה אִם תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם אֵין מַחְנִי נָא מִסְפָּרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ:

And now, if You will bear their sin; and if not, please erase me from Your book that You wrote.

And, previous to this declaration, Hashem had told Moshe (ibid. Posuk 7):

וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּךְ הָדָד כִּי שָׁחַת עִמָּךְ אֲשֶׁר הָעֵלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

Hashem spoke to Moshe, ‘Go and go down because your people that you brought up from the Land of Egypt have corrupted.

Rashi writes:

לך רד - מגדולתך, לא נתתי לך גדולה אלא בשבילם. באותה שעה נתנדה משה מפי בית דין של מעלה:

Go, go down – from your greatness. I Hashem gave you greatness only because of them.

At that moment, Moshe was excommunicated by the Heavenly Court.

Sefer Vayikro provides its own testimony as to Moshe's humility at its onset. The first verse of that book reads:

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:

He called to Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the *Ohel Moed* saying:

Rashi writes:

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה - הַקּוֹל הוֹלֵךְ וּמְגִיעַ לְאָזְנוֹ, וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שׁוֹמְעִין.

He called to Moshe – The voice went and reached the ears of Moshe. No one else of Israel heard it.

And what was the nature of that Divine voice? Rashi writes further:

יְכוֹל מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהַקּוֹל נִמּוֹךְ, תִּלְמוּד לֹמֵר (יִחְזַקְאֵל י/ה²) כְּקוֹל א... ל ש... דִּי בְּדַבְּרוּ:

I may think that the voice did not extend because it was a low voice. That is what the verse teaches 'like the voice of Almighty G-d when He spoke.

And in our *Sefer B'midbar* we saw, among other incidents, Moshe Rabbenu's reaction to those who prophesized his death.

We read in *Parshas Bha'alosecha* (Perek 13/P'sukim 26-28):

וַיִּשְׁאַרוּ שְׁנֵי אַנְשִׁים בְּמַחֲנֵה שָׁם הָאֶחָד אֶלְדָּד וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי מֵיָדָד וַתֵּנַח עֲלֵהֶם הָרוּחַ וְהֵמָּה בְּכַתְּבִים וְלֹא יָצְאוּ הָאֵהָלָה וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ בְּמַחֲנֵה: וַיֵּרֶץ הַנֶּעַר וַיִּגַּד לְמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְדָּד וּמֵיָדָד מִתְנַבְּאִים בְּמַחֲנֵה: וַיַּעַן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נֹון מִשְׁרֵת מֹשֶׁה מִבְּחָרָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי מֹשֶׁה כְּלָאִם:

Two men remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the second was Meidad and the spirit rested upon them and they are in

² The entire verse reads:

וְקוֹל כְּנָפֵי הַכְּרוּבִים נִשְׁמַע עַד הַחֲצֵר הַחִיצוֹנָה כְּקוֹל א... ל ש... דִּי בְּדַבְּרוּ:

The sound of wings of the *Keruvim* was heard until the outer courtyard; it was like the sound of the voice of Almighty G-d when He spoke.

the writings and did not go out to the Tent [*Ohel Moed*] and they prophesized in the camp. The lad ran and he told Moshe and he said, 'Eldad and Meidad are prophesizing in the camp'. Yehoshua bin Nun, from among his young men, said, 'My master Moshe – lock them up'.

What was their prophecy? Rashi writes:

לפי שהיו מתנבאים משה מת ויהושע מכניס את ישראל לארץ:

Because they were prophesizing, "Moshe is dying and Yehoshua will bring Israel into the Land.

And what was the reaction of Moshe Rabbenu? We read it in the verse that follows (29):

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה הַמִּקְנָא אֶתָּה לִי וּמִי יִתֵּן כָּל עַם ה' נְבִיאִים כִּי יִתֵּן ה' אֶת רוּחוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם:

Moshe said, 'Are you jealous for me? It should be that all of the people of G-d should be prophets – that Hashem should place His spirit upon them.'

Thus, in that same Parsha, it is almost an understood fact, even without a special Posuk, that Moshe was uniquely humble, even when he was being criticized by his brother and sister. We read (ibid. Perek 12/Posuk 3):

וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עֲנִיו מְאֹד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:

The man Moshe was more humble than any person upon the face of the earth.

And so it with more than a little surprise that we read the words of Moshe Rabbenu to the Ribbono Shel Olom regarding Korach and his followers.

The Posuk in this week's Parsha reads (B'midbar Perek 16/Posuk 15):

וַיִּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל ה' אֵל תִּפְּן אֶל מִנְחֹתָם לֹא חָמֹר אֶחָד מֵהֶם נִשְׂאתִי וְלֹא הִרְעֵתִי אֶת אֶחָד מֵהֶם:

Moshe was very angry and he said to Hashem, 'Do not turn to their grain offering; I did not take one donkey from them and I did not treat any of them badly.'

What is the context of this verse?

Moshe repeatedly attempted to dissuade Korach and his followers from their rebellion. Moshe's final effort was made with a particularly brazen refusal as we read in the preceding verses (12-14):

וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לִקְרֹא לְדָתָן וְלָאֲבִירָם בְּנֵי אֶלְיָאֵב וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא נַעֲלֶה: הַמַּעֲט כִּי הֶעֱלִיתָנוּ
מֵאֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וּדְבַשׁ לְהִמִּיתָנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי תִשְׁתַּחֲרַר עֲלֵינוּ גַם הַשְׁתַּחֲרַר: אָף לֹא אֶל
אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וּדְבַשׁ הִבִּיאָתָנוּ וַתִּתֵּן לָנוּ נַחֲלֹת שָׂדֵה וְנָכְרִים הָעֵינִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָהֵם תִּנְקַר
לֹא נַעֲלֶה:

Moshe sent to call Dason and Aviram the sons of Eliav; they said, 'we will not go up. Is it not enough that you brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness and you also are taking great offices over us? And, also to a land flowing with milk and honey you did not bring us and give us an inheritance of fields and vineyards; will you pierce the eyes of these men men? We will not go up!'

While we regret the strong and offensive tone with which they spoke to Moshe Rabbenu, we are not shocked. The history of these individuals is not hidden from us. We may be saddened by their evil ways and greatly disturbed by the tone and conversation in which they rebuffed this peaceful gesture of Moshe Rabbenu; but we are not shocked. Sadly they had not changed their ways.

But, we are shocked by the words of Moshe Rabbenu. If I translate the Posuk without seeking its meaning I sense that Moshe's response was emotional – he was very angry and it would appear that he was lashing out at them wishing to remove even the merits that they accrued by their own personal service.

Besides the pertinent question of how could Moshe Rabbenu seek to deny Korach and his followers the merits for their service to G-d, even more so we are without words. If the conversation would have been about a 'regular' person, we might have expressed ourselves saying, 'he was being petulant, throwing a tantrum'.

Of course Moshe Rabbenu wasn't doing anything of the sort. But we do need to understand – what, in fact, was he doing³?

³ Seforno writes here:

זֶה כִּי אֵינִי מוֹחֵל עַל עֵלְבוֹנִי וְאֵין לִמְחֹל לָהֶם בְּלֵעֵדֵי זֶה כְּאִמְרָם עוֹנוֹת שְׁבִין אָדָם לְחִבְרֵי אֵין יוֹם
הַכְּפוּרִים מִכֹּפֶר עַד שִׁירְצָה חִבְרוּ.

Rashi seems to obviate the issue partially, at least, by giving what seems to be an unexpected translation of the word ויחר, which we rendered as 'he was angry'. Our rendition of ויחר is certainly reasonable because that term appears in one form or another throughout Tanach and it does mean anger. In fact, Rashi himself explains this term as anger in another location. We read in *Oz Yashir* (Sh'mos Perek 15/Posuk 8):

וּבְרוּחַ אַפְיֶךָ נִעְרְמוּ מַיִם נִצְבּוּ כְמוֹ יַד נִזְלִים קִפְאוּ תְהִמּוֹת בְּלֶב יָם:

With the wind of Your nostrils the waters piled up; they stood erect like a fluid wall; the depths solidified in the heart of the sea.

Noting that *af*, referring to 'nostrils', is often used with the term *Charon*, like the word ויחר in our verse, Rashi writes:

...וכל אף וחרון שבמקרא אני אומר כן, (דברים ז/ד⁴) חרה אף, כמו (איוב ל/ל⁵) ועצמי חרה מני חורב, לשון שריפה ומוקד, שהנחירים מתחממים ונחרים בעת הקצף...

This [prayer] is because I do not forgive the insult against me. And You, Hashem, You should not forgive them either – in consonance with the Mishnah in Masseches Yoma that teaches that Yom HaKippurim does not bring forgiveness for [sins against another individual] until the offender appeases the one whom he offended.

See the elaborate commentary of Rav Yehuda Copperman ZT"l to this passage in which he attempts to understand the intent of the Seforno as reflecting Moshe's strong reaction to the inappropriate behavior of Korach and his followers rather than a 'personal' reaction on the part of Moshe Rabbenu.

It appears that the intent of this commentary of Seforno must continue to be explored.

If Seforno's commentary here appears to be critical of Moshe Rabbenu, there are some early sources that support it.

In a version of Midrash D'vorim Rabba cited by *Torah Sheleima* to our verse (page 33), note #121, we find that Moshe suffered Divine reprisal for these words. The note

Every usage of *af* and *Charon* in Tanach I say this, such as ‘the anger of the nostrils’ and ‘my very-self burned from dryness’ – are all expressions of fire. The nostrils heat up and flare at the time of anger.

Thus, when Rashi renders the word *ויחר* differently in our verse, it is a cause for investigation.

He writes:

ויחר למשה מאד - נצטער עד למאוד:

Moshe was very angry [our translation] – He was extremely pained.

to that citation refers us to Masseches Sotah (13 b) that contains a criticism of Moshe Rabbenu for earlier words he said to the rebels.

We read in our Parsha (ibid. Posuk 7):

ותנו בהן אש ושימו עליהן קטרת לפני ה' מחר והיה האיש אשר יבחר ה' הוא הקדוש רב לכם בני לוי:

Place in the incense pans fire and place upon them incense before Hashem tomorrow; the man whom Hashem will choose, he is the one who is holy; you have taken too much upon yourselves, Levites.

The Gemara there writes:

אמר רבי לוי: ברב בישר, ברב בישרוהו; ברב בישר - רב לכם, ברב בישרוהו - רב לך.
Rabi Levi said, ‘Moshe announced [to Korach and his followers], ‘You have too much’ and Hashem announced to him, ‘you have too much’.

The Divine pronouncement is found in the beginning of Parshas Voeschanan when Hashem tells Moshe not to request to enter Eretz Yisroel. We read (D’vorim Perek 3/Posuk 26):

ויתעבר ה' בי למענכם ולא שמע אלי ויאמר ה' אלי רב לך אל תוסף דבר אלי עוד בדבר הזה:
Hashem was angry at me because of you and He did not listen to me; Hashem said to me, ‘You have too much, do not continue to speak to Me about this matter.’

⁴ The entire verse reads:

כי יסיר את בנך מאחרי ועבדו אלהים אחרים וחרה אף ה' בכם והשמידך מהר:
He will turn your son away from after Me and they will worship other gods and the anger of Hashem will be against you and He will destroy you quickly.

⁵ The entire verse reads:

עורי שחר מעלי ועצמי חרה מני חרב:

We will shortly see the source of Rashi's explanation but first we need to find a justification as to why he did not translate the word ויחר as 'he was angry'.

The contemporary *Leket Bahir* on Rashi brings supporting evidence justifying Rashi's deviation from the standard and accepted translation of ויחר referring to anger.

His proof is the absence of our Posuk from being included in Chazal's criticism of Moshe's unwarranted anger. Midrash Sifre to Parshas Mattos (157) writes:

משה רבינו לפי שבא לכלל כעס בא לכלל טעות.

Moshe Rabbenu – when he became angry he erred.

The absence of our episode appearing as an example of this phenomenon in that Midrash indicates that the term ויחר here does not refer to anger⁶.

Rashi's source for his commentary is the Midrash Tanchuma which he already endorsed at the beginning of our Parsha as a very worthy basis for understanding the unfolding events in Parshas Korach.

He wrote there (Perek 16/Posuk 1):

פרשה זו יפה נדרשת במדרש רבי תנחומא:

This Parsha is interpreted nicely in the Midrash of Rabi Tanchuma.

My skin blackened from upon me; my very-self burned from the dryness.

⁶ *Leket Bahir* argues that there is also another text where the term *Charon* does not mean anger.

We read in Sefer Yona (Perek 4/Posuk 9):

ויאמר א...ל'קים אֶל יונה ההיטב חרה לך על הקיקיון ויאמר היטב חרה לי עד מות:

G-d said to Yona, 'Is your anger good and correct for you regarding the bush that died?' Yona said, 'My anger is good for me – almost until my death.

Leket Bahir argues that there in Sefer Yona as well the term *Charon* refers to being disturbed and upset-but not angry.

However, it is not clear at all that other commentators agree with him and the Targum there certainly supports the meaning of the term חרה as 'anger'.

What is the specific Midrash regarding our verse upon which Rashi bases his commentary? We read there (Parshata 7):

ויחר למשה מאד נצטער לחדא, למה הדבר דומה? לאדם הדן עם חברו ומתוכח עמו
אם משיבו יש שם נחת רוח ואם אינו משיבו יש בו צער גדול.

Moshe was very angry – He was extremely pained. This is like an instance when a person is discussing something with another person and is debating with him. If the other responds, then he feels good about the discussion. If he doesn't respond to him, he is greatly pained.

The intent of the Midrash, and Rashi's intent since he adopted it, needs to be understood.

I could understand the Midrash to mean that Moshe Rabbenu was *personally* insulted because he felt that he was being ignored. Moshe Rabbenu wished to enter into a conversation, a dialogue, with Korach and his followers and they just ignored him.

If I continue on this vein of interpretation and take the situation away from Moshe Rabbenu Olov Hashalom and apply it to myself – I would say that his ego was harmed; his self-respect was damaged.

A person does not want to be thought of as being worthless when one expresses an opinion with thoughtful words and they are completely disregarded; that is very insulting.

However, the likelihood of this being the explanation of Moshe's severe reaction is most weak. We have already seen that we cannot take our fragile feelings and apply them to Moshe Rabbenu. He was unique in his humility and in his self-effacement and the faults of others cannot be assumed to be attributable to him.

Let us see some other selections from Chazal and examine them for their relevance to Rashi's commentary here. *Midrash HaGodol* writes on this verse:

שנתכרכמו פניו באותה שעה ואמר רבון העולמים גלוי וידוע לפניך שלא עשיתי אלא
לכבוד שמך ולכבוד תורתך...

Moshe's face turned green [from distress] and that moment [when Doston and Aviram responded] and he said, 'Master of the Universe, it is revealed

and known before You that I didn't do any of this except for the honor of Your Name and for the honor of Your Torah.

What is the double honor to which Moshe is referring – G-d's Name and His Torah?

I could understand that 'His Torah' refers to the Divine Mitzvos which include the appointments of Moshe, Aharon and *Eltzaphon* to positions of importance and leadership.

To what is the 'honor of His Name' referring? Perhaps we can seek the answer in the Zohar HaKodosh (Chelek I 17 a-b) who writes:

ולא חייש ליקרא דלעילא ואכחיש עובדא דבראשית כיון דחמא משה דהוה מכחיש עובדא דבראשית ואתדחא איהו לבר כדין ויחר למשה מאד, ויחר למשה על דאכחישו ליה דלא אסכים ההוא מחלוקת, מאד על דאכחישו עובדא דבראשית ובכלא אכחיש קרח בעילא ובתתא דכתיב (במדבר כו/ט⁷) בהצותם על ה' הא תתא ועילא

Korach and his followers were not concerned [or moved] about being called to go up [to Moshe who summoned them]. Korach denied Divine Creation. When Moshe saw that Korach was denying the fact of Creation and that Korach had Halachically pushed himself outside of Jewish People, then 'Moshe was very angry'.

Moshe was angry because they denied meeting with him and he did not want *machlokes*.

Moshe was *very* angry because Korach denied Divine Creation. He denied everything – above [in Heaven] and below [on earth]. That is what it says, 'when they incited against G-d' – below and above.

That is, the entire Posuk discusses two types of incitement – against Moshe and Aharon, that is the 'incitement below' and against HaKodosh Boruch Hu which is the incitement above.

⁷ The entire verse, part of the census in Parshas Pinchos, reads:

וּבְנֵי אֱלִיָּאב נְמוּאֵל וְדָתָן וְאָבִירָם הוּא דָתָן וְאָבִירָם קְרִיאֵי הָעֵדָה אֲשֶׁר הִצּוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן בְּעֵדַת קֶרַח בְּהִצְתָם עַל ה':

The sons of Eliav were *Nemuel*, *Doson* and *Aviram*; that is the Doson and Aviram who were called to lead the congregation; they incited against Moshe and against Aharon in the Congregation of Korach, when they incited against G-d.

Although we translated the term ויחר here as 'he was angry'; Rashi would translate it as 'he was pained'.

The Zohar HaKodosh teaches us that there were two levels to the distress that Moshe Rabbenu felt.

The first level did not have the emphasis of מאוד, 'exceedingly', because it was on the earthly leaders, Moshe and Aharon. Already in our Parsha, at its beginning, Moshe deflected the criticism of Korach and his followers against Aharon's leadership as the *Kohen Godol* by saying (B'midbar Perek 16/Posuk 11):

לִכֵּן אַתָּה וְכָל עֲדַתְךָ הַנִּעַדִים עַל ה' וְאַהֲרֹן מֵהוּא כִּי תִלִּינוּ עָלָיו:

Therefore you and all of your congregation who have gathered together against G-d – and what is Aharon that you are levelling complaints against him.

Moshe doesn't mention his own name because if he says 'what is Aharon', implying that Aharon is unimportant, surely Moshe sees himself as being even less important.

Of course the context is vital. In another conversation Moshe would not express himself in such a way regarding Aharon. But in the context of criticizing for 'gathering against G-d', certainly Aharon, and all the more so Moshe, can be relatively disregarded. As bad as it was to criticize Aharon, it was *exceedingly* far worse to criticize Hashem.

And thus, as much as Moshe was distressed about the rebellion against that which was 'below', he was exceedingly distressed regarding the rebellion above.

There is nothing personal at stake; there is no ego that is being threatened. It is the very rule of G-d, above and below, that is being challenged.

There is an additional approach to understand לַמֶּשֶׁה מְאֹד ויחר that can shed light on the very strong reaction that Moshe Rabbenu had to Korach and his followers.

The Torah makes it very clear that Moshe Rabbenu attempted to dissuade עַדַת קֹרַח, 'The Congregation of Korach', from their path, the path that led to their ultimate destruction.

Moshe's attempts to dissuade that *Congregation* were undertaken despite the disgraceful way that the rebellion began. Rashi, in his very first commentary on our Parshas Korach, tells us of one of the versions of that which initiated the rebellion. We read:

...הלבישן טליתות שכולן תכלת. באו ועמדו לפני משה. אמרו לו טלית שכולה של תכלת חייבת בציצית או פטורה. אמר להם חייבת. התחילו לשחק עליו, אפשר טלית של מין אחר חוט אחד של תכלת פטורה, זו שכולה תכלת לא תפטור את עצמה:

Korach dressed all of the 250 rebels in garments that were made totally from *techeiles*. They said to Moshe, 'A garment that is made totally from *techeiles* – does it require *tzitzis* or not?' Moshe said to them, 'It requires *tzitzis*'. They began to laugh at him and said, 'Is it possible that a garment that is not totally *techeiles* can be worn when there is one *techeiles* string that allows it and that one that is totally *techeiles* cannot allow itself to be worn [without *tzitzis*]?'

How are we⁸ to understand this situation?

We read in Sefer Mishlei (Perek 7/P'sukim 7-8):

יִסֵּר לֵץ לִקְחָהּ לֹא קָלוֹן וּמוֹכִיחַ לְרָשָׁע מוֹמוֹ: אֵל תּוֹכַח לֵץ פֶּן יִשְׂנֵאֲךָ הוֹכַח לְחָכָם וַיֵּאֱהָבֶךָ:

One who rebukes the mocker takes shame for himself; one who rebukes the wicked, his defect. Do not reprimand⁹ the mocker lest he hate you; rebuke the wise and he will love you.

⁸ I considered writing 'How was Moshe to understand this situation?' but I did not do so.

Although it is clear that we will be examining what Moshe did and what angered or pained him, we must always be careful to seek maximum humility when discussing great people.

And, since, the Torah shares these episodes for us to learn, we are asking how we should view the situation, not daring to place ourselves within the considerations that Moshe Rabbenu had.

⁹ It is clear that the correct English translation for expressions of תּוֹכַח is 'rebuke'. We translated its parallel word, יִסֵּר, that appears first in the verse as 'reprimand'.

On our Posuk, Malbim writes that the two terms are synonymous and thus, both could be translated as 'rebuke'. However, in his commentary to Mishlei Perek 3

In his commentary to that verse, the Vilna Gaon writes:

יסר ללץ יקח לו קלון - כי שני מיני רשעים הם: בדיבור ובמעשה. וזה אשר בדיבור נקרא לץ. ודרך הלץ לבזות את חבירו. ואם תיסר ללץ, תקח לך קלון כי יבזה אותך:

One who reprimands the mocker will take shame – there are two types of wicked people: one who is wicked in speech [alone] and one who is wicked in deed.

The one who is wicked in speech is called a לץ-mocker. The way that a mocker behaves is to disparage another person. [The Posuk teaches] that if you reprimand the mocker, you will take shame for yourself because he will disparage you.

Vilna Gaon explains that if one does not ‘start up’ with the mocker, he will not start up and attack.

ומוכיח לרשע מומו – זהו רשע במעשה. אם תוכיח אותו תקח לך מום, כלומר עושה לך רע בפועל...

One who rebukes the wicked, his defect – This refers to the one who is wicked in deed. If you rebuke him, you will take his defect. This means that he will actively do you evil.

Vilna Gaon explains that even if one does not ‘start up’ with the wicked, he will initiate confrontation.

After the appearance of Korach and his men, an appearance that both mocked Moshe Rabbenu verbally and in deed because they actively demonstrated that they despised his decisions, what occurred?

The Torah tells us of Moshe’s initial response. We read (Perek 16/Posuk 4):

(Posuk 11) he distinguishes between the two and writes that תוכחה is the rebuke between equals and מוסר is that which a greater person says to a lesser person. [Malbim gives another explanation there that the term יסורים-afflictions is part of the implication of מוסר].

We will bring the Vilna Gaon immediately. He writes in a section that we do not bring that the term מוסר is specifically appropriate for the mocker and the term תוכחה is particularly appropriate for the wicked person.

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל עַל פָּנָיו:

Moshe heard and he fell upon his face.

Why did he fall down? Was it from shock because of their *chutzpah* in word and in deed? Was it because they were blasphemous? Was it because he was personally insulted and mortified?

Those are not the reasons why Moshe fell on his face, as Rashi teaches. He writes:

ויפול על פניו - מפני המחלוקת, שכבר זה בידם סרחון רביעי, חטאו בעגל (שמות לב/יא¹⁰) ויחל משה, במתאוננים ויתפלל משה (במדבר יא/ב¹¹), במרגלים (שם יד/יג¹²) ויאמר משה אל ה' ושמעו מצרים, במחלוקתו של קרח נתרשלו ידיו...

He fell onto his face – because of the argument. This was their fourth ruination. They sinned with the *Eigel*, and it says there “Moshe supplicated”. They sinned with the complainers and it says there ‘Moshe prayed’. They sinned with the spies and it says there, ‘Moshe said to Hashem, “Egypt will hear’.

Now with the dispute with Korach, Moshe’s hands became unempowered...

In face of public debasement and derision, Moshe continued to worry about Israel alone. Even in the rebuke that he offered, Moshe wanted to increase the chance that the rebels would back down.

He said (Posuk 5):

¹⁰ The entire verse reads:

וַיִּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת פָּנָיו ה' אֵלָיו... וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה ה' יִחַרְהָ אַפְּךָ בְּעַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכַח גָּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה:

Moshe supplicated before the Face of Hashem his G-d and he said, ‘Why should You Hashem be angry at Your People that You took out of the Land of Egypt with great strength and a strong hand?’

¹¹ The entire verse reads:

וַיִּצְעַק הָעָם אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וַתִּשְׁקַע הָאֵשׁ:

The people cried out to G-d and Moshe prayed to Hashem and the fire sank.

¹² The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי הֶעֱלִיתָ בְּכַחְךָ אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה מִקֶּרְבוֹ:

Moshe said to Hashem, ‘Egypt will hear that You brought up this people with Your strength from its midst.’

וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל קֹרַח וְאֶל כָּל עֵדָתוֹ לֵאמֹר בִּקֶּר וַיֵּדַע ה' אֶת אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וְאֶת הַקְּדוֹשׁ וְהַקְּרִיב אֵלָיו
וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר בּוֹ יִקְרִיב אֵלָיו:

Moshe spoke to Korach and to his entire congregation saying, '[Tomorrow] morning Hashem will make known who is His and who is the holy person and He will draw that person near to Him and him Who He chooses - He will draw near to Him.

Why 'tomorrow' morning? Why not have Hashem indicate His chosen ones immediately?

Rashi explains:

בקר ויודע וגו' - עתה עת שכרות הוא לנו ולא נכון להראות לפניו והוא היה מתכוין לדחותם שמא יחזרו בהם:

[Tomorrow] morning and Hashem will make known – 'Now is [evening] and a time of drunkenness for us and it is not appropriate to appear before him.'
Moshe's intent was to push away the confrontation – perhaps they would retract.

Of course, that hope of Moshe, or retraction and *teshuva* did not materialize.

What was it that pushed Moshe Rabbenu over the brink and caused him to cease offering an opportunity for retraction?

As we saw above, it was the response that Moshe received from the rebels.

אף לא אל ארץ זבת חלב ודבש הביאתנו ונתת לנו נחלת שדה וקרם העיני האנשים ההם תנקר לא נעלה:

And, also to a land flowing with milk and honey you did not bring us and give us an inheritance of fields and vineyards; will you pierce the eyes of these men? We will not go up!

Midrash *Lekach Tov* to our Posuk explains these words of Dason and Aviram as follows:

העיני האנשים ההם תנקר. כינה הכתוב שלא דברו אלא כנגד משה ואהרן.

Will you pierce the eyes of these men – The Posuk wrote their words as an euphemism. Their words were aimed at Moshe and Aharon themselves.

Whether they meant their words literally or figuratively, the response to Moshe's offer of a pardon and a chance to retract was harsh and derogatory. They said, 'we will blind you, pierce your eyes'.

Perhaps they meant that Moshe and Aharon were blind and perhaps they meant an actual physical threat.

But, whatever their precise intent was, the words of Mishlei came back to haunt Moshe Rabbenu. We read:

יִסֵּר לֵץ לִקְחַת לוֹ קִלְוִין וּמוֹכִיחַ לְרָשָׁע מוֹמוֹ:

One who rebukes the mocker takes shame for himself; one who rebukes the wicked, his defect.

Korach, Dason, Aviram and *On ben Peles* were blinded by their greed. That they thought that they could all be *the* Kohen Godol was irrational blindness. That is what Moshe intimated to them when he told them of the test of *Ketores*, and as Rashi explains (Posuk 6):

אנו אין לנו אלא ה' אחד, ארון אחד ותורה אחת ומזבח אחד וכהן גדול אחד ואתם מאתים וחמישים איש מבקשים כהונה גדולה?

We have only One G-d and one Aron HaKodesh and one Torah and one altar and one Kohen Godol – and you, you two hundred fifty people, all want to be *the* Kohen Godol?

They were blinded and they projected their blindness upon Moshe Rabbenu in front of all of Israel. What did the throngs hear in their mood of rebellion? They heard that Moshe and Aharon refused to see the truth because such accusations take upon a life of their own, no matter how illogical that they are.

And that is precisely what Rashi writes in his commentary to Mishlei there:

ומוכיח לרשע מומו - מום הוא למוכיח שזה מחרפו ואינו שומע לו זו היא אזהרה שאסור לדבר עם המסיתים מדרך הישרה אפילו להוכיחם ולקרבם:

One who rebukes the wicked, his defect – It becomes a defect for the one who rebukes. The wicked person who receives the rebuke shames the one who gives the rebuke and doesn't listen to him all.

This verse is a warning not to speak to those who instigate people to turn away from the straight path – not even to rebuke them or to attempt to draw them close.

ויחר למשה מאוד

Moshe was extremely angered and extremely pained.

Moshe Rabbenu who was overwhelmed by this fourth public סרחון, 'rotten' action of Israel and was not sure that his prayers for their salvation would be accepted by G-d. His position as *Rabbenu* undermined. The defect of קרת was now cast upon him. How could he hope to lead his flock that had strayed if he is perceived as a sightless leader?

Parshas Korach, with Sefer Mishlei, provides us with stark warnings in our private and public spheres of caring for our fellow Jews. We are called upon to do our utmost that our caring and concern does not backfire and undermine not only our specific actions but our entire standing and ability to influence and to lead.

It is true, Korach and followers are an extreme example. But Moshe Rabbenu is the most extremely capable and gifted leader that we have. Is there not from which to learn?

Besides the specific type of incident here and its focused message, we can expand upon it and extend its message.

There is a danger in placing wonderful people who have chosen Torah for themselves upon a public pedestal. Many, many times people regale over the fact, publicize and accord great public honor when famous individuals, politicians, musicians and others who are very much in the public eye have become religious and Torah observant. Those sincere people certainly deserve to be respected and held in great esteem.

Sadly enough though, there are not a few of those public personages who eventually rebel against Torah and Mitzvos and not only resume an irreligious life, but criticize and castigate their previously held religious beliefs and practices. Not only is their lifestyle irreligious, the message that they give forth is anti-religious. In fact, such is a particular case happening this very week in Eretz Yisroel.

It backfires!

It is not enough to be motivated by good will to our fellow Jew and to just 'do' for their benefit. If we care about them, then let us daven for them. If we care about them truly, let us decide the best way to make a true impact upon their lives and use them carefully as an inspiration.

At the same time, can we ignore the pain of our Teacher Moshe? Can we ignore his anguish? Since we know that the anguish of Moshe Rabbenu is not personal or petty, we know that it is objectively true. The objective truth of Moshe's anguish is his unparalleled concern and worry for the fate of Israel.

We, too, have to feel that anguish. We must be replete with admiration for those who have made giant personal steps in taking upon themselves a commitment to G-d and to the Jewish People. At the same time, experience has to teach us regarding whom to revere, a level far-beyond respect, and whom to admire, but not place upon a pedestal.

May we seek to rise to that same concern and worry for our individual brothers and sisters and for Am Yisroel as an entirety and pray for the *siyata diShmaya* to avoid error and having the defects of our enemies appear to be ours so that we can serve HaKodosh Boruch Hu and His People according to His Will.

Shabbat Shalom

Chodesh Tov

Rabbi Pollock

