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PARSHAT KORACH פרשת קרח

DVAR TORAH SALT AND THE LEVIIM

After the Korach episode, Hashem reaffirms Aharon and his descendants' special position as Kohanim. Hashem lists those items that are to be given to the Kohanim by the Israelites, and seals it with a covenant. Hashem calls His covenant with Aharon over the priestly gifts as "ברית מלח עולם" – "an eternal covenant of salt" (Bamidbar 18:19). Why is the covenant described as "a covenant of salt"?

Rashi gives a straightforward explanation. Because salt lasts, never decaying or rotting, it is the ideal image for an eternal covenant. Hashem similarly made a "covenant of salt" with David and his descendants – they are to be the royal line for all generations (II Divrei Hayamim 13:5).

But according to the author of Kedushat Levi, Harav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov, זצ"ל (1740-1809), salt was specifically chosen because the nature of salt alludes to the Kohanim and Leviim. Salt is a symbol of one of the central messages of the Korach episode.

Korach wanted to wipe out the distinction between Leviim and Kohanim. He campaigned that all of the Leviim should be able to do the service previously limited to Aharon and his sons. Hashem's lesson to Korach and the people of Israel was that it is important to have two different levels, Kohanim and Leviim. What is the distinction between them and why are both needed?

He explains (drawing from mystical sources) that Kohanim are connected with the trait of chesed, lovingkindness, whereas Leviim are connected with gevurah – restraint, judgement, and might. Korach wanted unbridled chesed, unchecked by the borders and discipline of gevurah. Hashem taught him and the people of Israel that judgement, borders, and restraint are essential for the world. Chesed must be mixed with gevurah to form rachamim (mercy, the combination of lovingkindness and restraint).

Salt is the ideal image for this mix. The Kedushat Levi quotes the Ramban, who refers to salt as the "fire within the water." Salt includes within it the characteristics of both water (chesed) and fire (gevurah and din). On a national level, salt symbolizes that Kohanim need to be balanced with Leviim.

This comment sheds light on a comment the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 98:5) makes about Korach. The Midrash says that when Yaakov, before passing away, rebuked his son Levi and said, "When they gather, my honor will not join up with them" (Bereishit 49:6), he referred to Korach's assembly. Besides Yaakov's objection to discord and strife, he might have had an additional reason to keep his name disconnected from the Korach rebellion. Whereas Avraham is associated with chesed, lovingkindness, and Yitzchak with gevurah, restraint, Yaakov is associated with the balance between them, rachamim, mercy (see Kedushat Levi on Chayei Sarah). Yaakov would not let himself be associated with Korach, who, in effect, objected to Yaakov's essence.

Korach's descendants righted the wrong; they balanced off the Kohanim and served as great Leviim - "These (Leviim) stood on the platform: Heiman the singer, son of Yoel, son of Shmuel, son of Elkanah ... son of Evyasaf, son of Korach, son of Yitzhar, son of Kehat, son of Levi, son of Yisrael" (I Divrei Hayamim 6:18-23).

SOURCE GUIDE: RAIN IN SUMMER

This week's Haftarah tells how, before his death, the prophet Shmuel gathered together the People of Israel, spoke with them, and expressed his disappointment about their request for a king. To prove his point, he prayed to G-d to bring down rain in the middle of summer in the Land of Israel. This source guide deals with the association with our Parshah that this episode evokes.

A. Rain in the Summer,

There is a strong parallel between the central dramatic episode of our Parshah and that of the Haftarah. In our Parshah, Hashem answers Moshe Rabbeinu's prayers; and the earth miraculously swallows up Korach's rebellious group. Here are the two miracles – first, that of our Parshah:

<p>1. Bamidbar 16:28-30 (28) Moshe said, "Through this you shall know that Hashem sent me to do all these deeds, that it was not from my heart. (29) If these people die the death of all men, and what is visited upon every man is visited upon them – it is not Hashem that sent me. (30) But if Hashem creates something new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they go down to the depths alive – then you will know that these men have provoked Hashem.</p>	<p>במדבר טז:כח-ל (כח) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּזֹאת תִּדְעוּן כִּי ה' שְׁלַחְנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים הָאֵלֶּה כִּי לֹא מִלְּבָבִי. (כט) אִם כְּמוֹת כָּל הָאָדָם יָמָתוּן אֵלֶּה וּפְקֻדַת כָּל הָאָדָם יִפְקַד עֲלֵיהֶם לֹא ה' שְׁלַחְנִי. (ל) וְאִם בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא ה' וּפְצְתָה הָאֲדָמָה אֶת פִּיהָ וּבִלְעָה אֹתָם וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם וַיִּרְדּוּ חַיִּים שְׁאֵלָה וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי נִאֲצָו הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה אֵת ה'.</p>
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In our Haftarah, Hashem answers the Shmuel's prayers and rain falls in the middle of a dry summer:

<p>2. I Shmuel 12:17-22 (17) "... Is it not the time of the wheat harvest today? I will call out to Hashem and He will give forth thunder and rain; and you will know and see that your evil is great in the eyes of Hashem, to request a king." (18) Shmuel called out to Hashem and He gave forth thunder and rain on that day; and the entire nation exceedingly feared Hashem and Shmuel. (19) And all the people said to Shmuel, "Pray for your servants to Hashem your G-d so we will not die, for we have added to all of our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king."</p>	<p>שְׁמוּאֵל א' יב:יז-כב (יז) "... הֲלוֹא קָצִיר חֹטִים הַיּוֹם אֶקְרָא אֵל ה' וַיִּתֵּן קִלּוֹת וּמָטָר וַיְדַעוּ וַיֵּרְאוּ כִּי רָעַתְכֶם רַבָּה אֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם בְּעֵינֵי ה' לְשֹׂאֵל לְכֶם מֶלֶךְ." (יח) וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוּאֵל אֵל ה' וַיִּתֵּן ה' קִלּוֹת וּמָטָר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיִּירָא כָּל הָעָם מְאֹד אֵת ה' וְאֵת שְׁמוּאֵל. (יט) וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הָעָם אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל, "הֲתִפְלֵל בְּעַד עַבְדֶּיךָ אֵל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְאֵל נְמוֹת כִּי יִסְפְּנוּ עַל כָּל חַטֹּאתֵינוּ רָעָה לְשֹׂאֵל לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ."</p>
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The parallel between those two episodes – in both, the nation's prophet asks for an overt miracle in front of the entire Nation of Israel – leads us to explore other thematic parallels between the Parshah and Haftarah.

B. Opposition to Moshe and Shmuel

Ironically, Moshe and Shmuel, both extreme examples of personal integrity, are both compelled to defend themselves against accusations of self-interest:

<p>3. Bamidbar 16:15, 28 (15) Moshe was exceedingly upset, and he said to Hashem, "Do not accept their offering. I have not taken a donkey from a single one of them, and I have not done wrong to a single one of them." ... (28) Moshe said, "Through this you shall know that Hashem sent me to do all these deeds, that it was not from my heart."</p>	<p>במדבר טז:טו, כח (טו) וַיַּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל ה', "אֵל תִּפְּן אֵל מִנְחָתָם לֹא חִמּוֹר אֶחָד מֵהֶם נִשְׂאתִי וְלֹא הִרְעַתִּי אֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶם" ... (כח) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, "בְּזֹאת תִּדְעוּן כִּי ה' שְׁלַחְנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים הָאֵלֶּה כִּי לֹא מִלְּבָבִי."</p>
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<p>4. I Shmuel 12:2-5 (2) "And now, behold the king is walking before you, and I have become old, and my sons are here with you, and I have walked before you from my youth until this day. (3) Here I am; respond to me before Hashem and before His anointed; whose ox did I take, or whose donkey did I take, or</p>	<p>שְׁמוּאֵל א יב:ב-ה (ב) "וַעֲתָה, הִנֵּה הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיכֶם וְאֲנִי זָקֵנִי וְשִׁבְתִּי וּבְנֵי הַנֶּגֶם אֹתְכֶם וְאֲנִי הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לִפְנֵיכֶם מִנְעֻרֵי עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. (ג) הֲנִי עֲנִי בִּי נִגְדָה ה' וְנִגְדָה מְשִׁיחוֹ – אֵת שׂוֹר מִי לְקַחְתִּי וְחִמּוֹר מִי לְקַחְתִּי וְאֵת מִי</p>
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<p>whom did I rob; or whom did I oppress, or from whose hand did I take a ransom and I ignored it, and I shall restore to you." (4) And they said, "You did not rob us, nor did you oppress us, neither did you take anything from anyone's hand." (5) And he said to them, "Hashem is a witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand, and He said, "(I am) witness."</p>	<p>עֲשִׂיתִי אֶת מִי רְצוֹתִי וּמִיֵּד מִי לְקַחְתִּי כֶּפֶר וְאֲעִלִּים עֵינַי בּוֹ, וְאֲשִׁיב לָכֶם. (ד) וַיֹּאמְרוּ, "לֹא עֲשִׂיתָנוּ וְלֹא רְצוֹתָנוּ וְלֹא לְקַחְתָּ מִיֵּד אִישׁ מֵאוֹמֵהוּ." (ה) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם, "עֵד ה' בְּכֶם וְעֵד מְשִׁיחוֹ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי לֹא מָצָאתֶם בְּיַדִּי מֵאוֹמֵהוּ." וַיֹּאמֶר, "עֵד."</p>
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Korach made personal accusations against Moshe and Aharon, and the Nation of Israel's request for a king was also a personal rejection of Shmuel as the national leader; but it is very surprising that Moshe and Shmuel would both pray for extreme miracles if their entire goal was to remove suspicions about their personal integrity. There is different reason both requested miraculous vindication.

C. Opposition to Hashem

Both Moshe and Shmuel saw through any accusations against them, and showed the true nature of the rebellions. Moshe makes it clear that Hashem is the only decision-maker about who is a Levi and who a Kohen; Aharon and Moshe are simply not involved at all. They are really rebelling against Hashem:

<p>5. Bamidbar 16:8-11 (8) Moses said to Korah, "Please listen, sons of Levi. (9) Is it not enough that the God of Israel has distinguished you from the congregation of Israel to draw you near to Him, to perform the service in the Mishkan of the Lord and to stand before the congregation to minister to them? (10) He drew you near, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi with you, and now you seek the Kehunah as well? (11) Therefore, you and your entire company who are assembled are against Hashem, for what is Aharon that you should complain against him?"</p>	<p>במדבר טז:ח-יא (ח) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל קֹרַח, "שְׁמַעוּ נָא בְּנֵי לֵוִי: (ט) הֲמַעֲטַתְּ מִכֶּם כִּי הִבְדִּיל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶתְכֶם מֵעֶדְת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהִקְרִיב אֶתְכֶם אֵלָיו לַעֲבֹד אֶת עֲבֹדַת מִשְׁכַּן ה' וְלַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה לְשִׁרְתָּם? (י) וַיִּקְרַב אֹתָךְ וְאֶת כָּל אַחֲיֶיךָ בְּנֵי לֵוִי אִתָּךְ, וּבִקְשַׁתֶּם גַּם כֹּהֲנָה. (יא) לָכֵן אַתָּה וְכָל עֲדַתְךָ הַנֹּעְדִים עִלְיָהּ. וְאַהֲרֹן מִה הוּא כִּי תִלְיִנוּ עָלָיו?"</p>
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Rashi explains Moshe's concluding sentence. Korach's rebellion is against G-d, not Aharon. The Rashbam also makes this clear:

<p>6. Rashi on Bamidbar 16:8-11 Therefore – Because of this you and your entire assembly who gathered with you are going against Hashem; for I acted as his messenger to grant priesthood to Aharon. This argument is not against us. Rashbam on Bamidbar 16:8-11 Therefore you and your entire assembly – They are the ones who are gathered together against Hashem.</p>	<p>רש"י על במדבר פרק טז פסוק יא לכן - בשביל כך אתה וכל עדתך הנועדים אתך על ה' כי בשליחותו עשיתי לתת כהונה לאהרן ולא לנו הוא המחלוקת הזוה. רשב"ם על במדבר פרק טז פסוק יא לכן אתה וכל עדתך - הם אותם הנועדים על ה'.</p>
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Shmuel, likewise, makes it clear that Israel's request for a king was not merely a rejection of Shmuel's leadership, but of forging a national relationship with the Divine King:

<p>7. I Shmuel 12:11-12 (11) "... And Hashem sent Yerubaal, and Bedan, and Yiftach, and Shmuel, and He saved you from the hand of your enemies that surround you, and you dwelt in safety. (12) And when you saw that Nahash, the king of Ammon came upon you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall rule over us.' But Hashem your G-d is your King."</p>	<p>שמואל א' יב:יא-יב (יא) "... וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' אֶת יִרְבֵּעֵל וְאֶת בְּדַן וְאֶת יִפְתָּח וְאֶת שְׁמוּאֵל וַיִּצַּל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד אֹיְבֵיכֶם מִסָּבִיב וַתֵּשְׁבוּ בְטָח. (יב) וַתִּרְאוּ כִּי נָחַשׁ מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן בָּא עֲלֵיכֶם וַתֹּאמְרוּ לִי לֹא כִּי מֶלֶךְ יִמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ וְה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מֶלְכְּכֶם."</p>
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This explains why Moshe and Shmuel both request that G-d bring about an overt miracle. They pray for direct Divine communication to the People. G-d must respond to Korach's rejection of G-d's choice of the Kohanim, and only He can respond to the Nation of Israel's request for a human king instead of their much more direct relationship with Hashem the King through Shmuel His prophet.

D. Moshe's and Shmuel's Predicament

There was another reason an open miracle was necessary. Both Moshe and Shmuel were in a difficult predicament. Any attempt to prove their point to the nation would seem self-serving. Moshe knows that his own brother is G-d's chosen Kohen; but Korach and his group suspect nepotism. Shmuel knows that the nation's request was improper; but it seems like he wants to himself hold on to national leadership. So both Moshe and Shmuel needed an outside source of truth that would remove any doubts; they needed a source of pure objectivity. They had no recourse other than requesting that G-d do an open miracle.

EVERLASTING DISPUTES BY RABBI FYVEL SHUSTER

Parshat Korach discusses מחלוקת, dispute, controversy, argument. In Pirkei Avot we learn, "כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם, כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם, כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם – שאינה לשם שמים אין סופה להתקיים – If it is not for the sake of Heaven it will not last. What is an example of a dispute for the sake of Heaven? It is the dispute of Hillel and Shamai. What is an example of a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven? It is that of Korach and his assembly" (Avot 5:20).

The Sfat Emet deals with the following question: Why would we want a dispute to last? Machloket – disagreement, argument – is something which we sense is negative. However, he answers, a dispute for the sake of Heaven is exactly how שלום and שלימות, peace and wholeness, are created.

Shalom is not simply the state of neutrality. Shalom is the state of wholeness, when two opposing views join to create a whole.

In learning Torah, he says, each person has a דעה אחרת – a different way of looking at and understanding Torah. A person must not merely see his own way, but must seek the truth, taking into account his friend's opinion as well. This is what brings shalom and peace.

In the same way, he stresses, shalom bayit, the peace between husband and wife, is not the peace of two who are exactly similar, but two who are different, man and woman.

ה' יברך את עמו בשלום – We pray that "Hashem should bless His nation with peace" (Tehillim 29:11).

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at www.darchenoam.org & +972-2-651-1178
5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem

To dedicate a Shapell's Classic Daf Keshet contact
emuna@darchenoam.org

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Rabbi Eliezer Kwass.

