

Korach

by Benjamin Gee - Tuesday, July 02, 2019

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In conflict there are no absolute winners...

What's the most unfair accusation recorded in the Torah?

I believe that the answer is in parashat Korach. On the day after the conclusion of the Korach rebellion, the nation came to Moshe and Aaron and they cried out to them and they said “atem hamitem et am Hashem” - you have killed the people of the Lord.

What was the context? Korach had led his rebellion, and he and his followers numbering some two-hundred and fifty, had laid down the gauntlet. Fascinatingly, Moshe who was ‘anav mi’kol adam’ - more humble than any other person – recognised that this was an occasion on which he would need to show his authority. After all, Korach was not just rebelling against Moshe and Aharon - he was rebelling against Hashem, who had chosen them to be the leaders.

Remarkably it was Moshe’s idea to challenge them and to say that if they continued to rebel, a miracle would happen. The earth would swallow them up - and that's exactly what happened – indicating that Hashem was with Moshe and Aharon all the way. This was further confirmed when Aharon’s rod miraculously produced blossoms and fruit.

So the day after the rebellion, when the dust was starting to settle, surely the people should have come to Moshe and Aharon to ask ‘are you ok? It must have been a terrible ordeal for you! Yasher koach! Well done for the leadership that you have shown! Thank God Korach is not our leader. Thank God he won’t be providing an irresponsible spiritual legacy for us’. But there was nothing of that! Instead the people came and they said to Moshe and Aharon: ‘you killed Korach and his followers!’

From here we learn a very important lesson about conflict. In conflict there are no absolute winners. We learn this in parashat ‘Vayishlach’ when Yaakov is just about to meet up with his twin brother Eisav, the Torah tells us “vayira Yaakov meod vayatzer lo”, Yaakov was afraid and he was sorely distressed. Rashi comments he was afraid lest he be killed, he was sorely distressed lest he be forced to kill another.

When there is conflict nobody can sit back and enjoy it. And we further recognise that sometimes in conflict you might be right! You might be doing absolutely the correct thing, you might have the support of Almighty God and yet your reputation might suffer. As a result, people might not properly understand what has happened and they may accuse you of the worst of crimes.

So therefore, from parashat Korach we learn that sometimes, conflict, a ‘machlochet’, is important. Sometimes it's the right thing to do. Sometimes it's a mitzvah! However we should only engage in it when it's really necessary and when it is a last resort.

Shabbat Shalom

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