

Korach 5781

BS"D Parashat Korach 5781

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Excerpt from my book "Reflections from Yerushalayim"

Choice versus Virtue

One day during the three weeks preceding the Six Day War, I gave a lift to a soldier. During our conversation, I told him to relax because HaShem will perform perceptible miracles for us. The soldier responded, "How do you know that HaShem prefers us to the Arabs?" I answered, "because we are the Creator's Chosen People."

In Tractate Bava Batra 74a, we are informed that the Talmudic sage Rabbah bar bar Chanah was once in the Sinai Desert where he heard from beneath the ground the voices of Korach and his assembly proclaiming, "Moshe and his Torah are truth".

An Arab who was there (some claim that it was the Prophet Eliyahu) related that it wasn't just on that day that the voices could be heard, but that at the start of every lunar month, Korach and his assembly appear there from out of Gehennom (Hell) and cry out, "Moshe and his Torah are truth".

Question: There were sinners who preceded Korach, so why is it that only he and his assembly return monthly to the scene of the crime to confess their error?

I suggest: In Parashat Vayera, HaShem revealed Himself to Avraham saying, "Take your son, your only son, the one you

love – Yitzchak” (Bereishiet 22:2). The Talmud in Sanhedrin 89b explains the verse:

HaShem: Take your son.

Avraham: I have two sons – Yitzchak and Yishmael.

HaShem: The only son to his mother.

Avraham: Both of them are only sons to their mother.

HaShem: The one you love.

Avraham: I love them both.

With this utterance, Avraham declared that he loved Yishmael as well; because both of his sons were God-fearing and worthy to become the spiritual heirs of faith in the one HaShem. Moreover, Yishmael was the older of the two. Our sages revealed that it was Yishmael who slaughtered the three cows for the meal that Avraham prepared for the three angels.

HaShem immediately answered him: “Yitzchak!”, by which He meant, “Bring Yitzchak as a burnt offering, for he is your spiritual heir and not Yishmael.”

When Avraham, Yitzchak and his lads made their way to Mount Moriah, Avraham instructed Yishmael and the second lad to “remain here with the donkey” (Bereishiet 22:5). Our sages understood from Avraham’s words that Yishmael would be considered spiritually “like a nation with the character traits of an obstinate donkey”.

At that moment, Avraham understood that in the confrontation between merit derived from good deeds (the elder Yishmael) and innate virtue (Yitzchak), HaShem preferred innate virtue.

Scripture states, “HaShem, the Eternal One of Israel, does not deviate from His words” (I Shmuel 15:29).

For reasons known only to HaShem, out of all the seventy basic

races in His world, He chose the Jewish People to be the standard bearers of His sanctity. Even if we would ever disappoint the Creator, who is not indulgent and who punishes strictly, the Jewish People will live on forever.

Korach refused to accept Aharon's selection as High Priest, arguing that he was more worthy of the position in light of his numerous merits. At that moment, Korach was attacking the foundation upon which all stands – that it is HaShem's prerogative to choose whom He wishes, and we must not question His choice. Whoever questions one choice made by HaShem paves the way to questioning, as well, the selection of Israel as HaShem's Chosen People.

In every generation, the question raised by that soldier is asked: "How do we know that HaShem will make us victorious?"

In the past we asked, "Will HaShem save us from the Greeks? From the Romans? From Christianity? From murderous Islam?"

The answer is simple: "Yes, because HaShem chose the Jewish People!"

And since this question is repeated in every generation, it was decreed upon Korach and his assembly that each month they must proclaim the simple truth that "Moshe and his Torah are truth" – that HaShem chose Israel.

Similarly, HaShem chose Moshe to lead us out of Egypt and to be His emissary in receiving the Torah, and He chose Aharon to serve as High Priest. He chose Eretz Yisrael to be the homeland of the Jewish nation, and Mount Moriah in Yerushalayim to be the "stairway to Heaven." He chose the Jewish people to ascend to the eternal "world to come" and to merit techi'at hamaytim (resurrection of the dead), He chose for us a life of kedusha (sanctity) through the 613 mitzvot and left the gentiles to struggle with their seven Noachide mitzvot.

It is the Creator's sole prerogative to declare that not all people were created equal. So just as a mineral cannot grow as can an entity of the vegetable world, and a vegetation is not ambulatory as a species of the animal world, and an animal cannot perform as a human being, so too a non-Jew cannot ascend to the spiritual heights of a descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov if he does not convert halachically to the Jewish nation.

From the Shacharit liturgy:

אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
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Blessed are you, O HaShem, who chooses His People Israel, lovingly.

Shabbat Shalom,

JLMM Jewish Lives matter More.

Nachman Kahana from Yerushalayim

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