

The Path To Follow

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

Moshe's Humility

Iwonder: How could Korach have drawn so many Jews to fight with him against Moshe, to speak *Lashon Harah* about him, and to slander him by saying that he had invented the *mitzvot*? Could it be that all of Israel forget what had happened to Miriam, who was struck with leprosy for having spoken ill of her brother Moshe by saying that he had married a Cushite? At that point, the Holy One, blessed be He, told Aaron and Miriam: "Not so is My servant Moshe. In My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles. At the image of Hashem does he gaze. Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe?" (*Bamidbar* 12:7-8). Furthermore, *Ruach Hakodesh* said: "Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth" (v.3)! I would like to explain this by first citing a statement of the Sages: "The reverence for your Rav [should be] as the fear of Heaven" (*Pirkei Avoth* 4:12), which teaches us that it is forbidden for a person to have a light-hearted attitude towards his Rav. He must not joke with him like with anyone else, but should stand before him with reverence and respect. Just as a person must respect G-d, he must also respect his Rav. Since we often find ourselves in our Rav's home, the Sages have taught that even under such circumstances, we must reflect upon the fact that our Rav leads us to eternal life, and we must be careful not to do anything that would diminish his honor.

They have warned us with the following teaching: "Whoever quarrels with his Rav, it is as if he has quarreled with the *Shechinah*.... Whoever expresses resentment against his Rav, it is as if he has expressed it against the *Shechinah*.... He who imputes [evil] to his Rav, it is as if he has imputed [it] to the *Shechinah*" (*Sanhedrin* 110a).

Furthermore, a Rav will sometimes draw closer to his students in order for them to learn from him. In fact a Rav who is stern with his students is not a like a Rav who demonstrates kindness towards them, for students will learn from one but not the other. This is why the Sages warned us concerning the respect that a Rav deserves, and that if he draws closer to his students, it is not for them to grow accustomed to him and become proud. In their eyes, he should seem as if he were far from them. He is only drawing closer to them for their good, in order for them to learn from him, not so that his proximity becomes detrimental to them and they end up becoming insolent.

We may object by pointing out that the Sages said that when Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was on his deathbed, he called for his firstborn Rabbi Gamliel and said to him: "My son, conduct your rule with men of high standing, and cast bile among the students" (*Ketubot* 103b). The Rambam explains this to mean that a student must not be ashamed if his friends can understand something after studying it once or twice, whereas he needs more times to understand it, for if he is ashamed of that, he will enter the Beit HaMidrash and leave without learning anything (*Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:4). Hence the early Sages said, "A timid person cannot learn, neither can the short-tempered teach" (*Pirkei Avoth* 2:5). To what does this apply? It applies to situations in which students do not understand something because it is too intricate, or because they are not intelligent enough. If a Rav realizes that they do not understand a subject because they are being lazy, he should be upset with them and shame them. It is in this spirit that the Sages have said that a Rav must be stern with his students. It is therefore not fitting for a Rav to act casually before his students,

nor to laugh before them or eat and drink with them, so that they may revere him and quickly learn from him.

He Was Not Stern

The Torah testifies that Moshe was the humblest man on the earth. This teaches us that he was never stern with the Children of Israel, even though they deserved it. This is why all the people learned the Torah from Moshe at first, for he did not appoint judges over them, as we read: "It was on the next day that Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood by Moshe from morning till evening. Moshe's father-in-law saw everything he was doing to the people, and he said, '...You will surely become worn out, you as well as this people who are with you' " (*Shemot* 18:13-18). The Aggadah says in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua: "They will exhaust you and make you give up. Rabbi Elazar of Modin said, 'They will make you waste away and wither you like a fig whose leaves wither' " (*Mechilta, Amalek* 2).

In fact Moshe tended not to be stern with the Children of Israel, with the result being that they treated him without respect. That is how Korach managed to attract so many Jews to him against Moshe, to the point that they treated him in a shameful way. Furthermore, it is written (*Sermons of the Ketav Sofer, Tevet* 8) that Moshe was only punished at the waters of Meriva, and G-d did not allow him to enter Eretz Israel, because he had said: "Listen *na*, O rebels" (*Bamidbar* 20:10). Now the term *na* always indicates a supplication (*Berachot* 9a). Since Moshe did not speak to them harshly or sternly when he should have, he was punished for it.

Aaron's humility was also great, as the Sages have said: "I bestowed greatness...upon Moshe and Aaron, yet they said: 'We are nothing' [*Shemot* 16:8]" (*Chullin* 89a). The Sages also teach us how Aaron made peace among the people: He would go to the two opposing parties and speak good of one to the other, until peace reigned among them (*Avoth d'Rabbi Nathan* 12). This is why Korach and his followers erred in regards to Moshe and Aaron; it is why they became used to them and failed to treat them with the same respect as Hashem. They did not fulfill the teaching, "The reverence for your Rav [should be] as the fear of Heaven," for his humility was too great.

We therefore find that Rashi states, "*Korach took* [*Bamidbar* 16:1]: He took himself to one side to dissociate himself from the congregation in order to contest the priesthood." We need to understand what the expression "to one side" means. Were there two sides, such that he took one? Rather, Korach compared himself to Moshe and Aaron, as if Moshe and Aaron were on one side and he was on another – equal to them – and that Moshe and Aaron were not greater than him and he was not greater than them. Since that was what Korach thought, he denied the Torah and Hashem, as our Sages have said: "Korach was an unbeliever who said, 'The Torah does not come from Heaven' " (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 10:1). Why did he say this? It was because whoever denies his Rav will eventually deny G-d, and whoever ridicules his Rav will eventually ridicule Hashem.

Concerning the Parsha

Why Separate Them?

It is written, “Separate yourselves from amid this assembly” (*Bamidbar* 16:21).

Why did the people have to be told to “separate yourselves”? The Holy One, blessed be He, can kill and keep people alive without requiring them to separate. He can kill the many while saving a single person among them, as it is written: “A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right, but it shall not approach you” (*Tehillim* 91:7). In that case, why were the people told to “separate yourselves”?

Rabbeinu Bechaye provides us with the following answer:

It was in order to prevent the evil atmosphere of this catastrophe from attaching itself to them, as it is said in regards to Lot’s wife: “[She] looked behind him and became a pillar of salt” (*Bereshith* 19:26). Alternatively, it may be because of the Sages’ teaching that when strict justice is in effect, it makes no distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

We may say that this was said in honor of the *tzaddikim*, meaning that Hashem would not punish Korach’s followers as long as the *tzaddikim* were among them.

On That Day Only

It is written, “The ground that was under them split open. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households” (*Bamidbar* 16:31-32).

In this description of the ground slitting open, the Ramban sees a unique historical event. The ground often splits open during an earthquake, but when that happens, it remains open and the chasm becomes filled with water, like a pond.

The Ramban points out, however, that since the ground opened up and closed again immediately – like someone who opens his mouth to swallow something and then closes it up right afterwards (as it is written, “and the earth closed upon them” [v.33]) – it was a new occurrence that happened on that day only, as if it had been created out of nothing!

For the Sake of Heaven

It is written, “The earth covered them over, and they were lost from among the congregation” (*Bamidbar* 16:33).

In his book *Menorat HaMaor*, Rabbi Yitzchak Aboab states the following:

The nature of man is such that people want to live together, to serve one another, and to help each other in regards to their work and their needs. Hence the stability of the world depends on drawing closer, on fraternity and love existing between people, and on peace reigning among them. This is why all disputes that arise among them are harmful to the community.

For words of Torah, a group of students is required. If they discuss an issue and are not in agreement for the sake of Heaven, for the sake of arriving at the truth, this is called serving G-d. This protects the Halachah from mistakes and ensures that issues have been thoroughly explained. Even if there is a difference of opinion among Torah students, their intentions should be sincere, in order to find the truth of the Halachah, not just to argue.

Even when it comes to words of Torah, a person who maintains a

dispute is doing damage, and the destruction of the world proceeds from him. Peace and patience befit all things, and Hashem will bless His people with peace.

Redeeming the Firstborn

It is written, “Nevertheless *padoh tiphdeh* [you shall surely redeem] the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of an impure animal *tiphdeh* [you shall redeem]” (*Bamidbar* 18:15).

This is surprising: Why does the verse, in regards to man, use the double expression *padoh tiphdeh* (literally “redeeming, you shall redeem”), whereas for animals it simply uses the term *tiphdeh* (“you shall redeem”)?

The book *Luach Erez* answers this question by noting that in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* 305:9), it is said that if a man puts away five *selayim* to redeem his son, but loses them, he is still obligated to give money to the *kohen*. However to redeem an animal, the law is that as soon as a man puts money away to redeem it, it has already become profane (*i.e.*, even *before* giving the money to the *kohen*). If the donkey’s owner redeems it with a sheep, but the sheep dies before having been given to the *kohen*, he is exempt.

These laws are alluded to in the verse before us: “*padoh tiphdeh* [you shall certainly redeem] the firstborn of man” – twice, for if the redemption money is lost, you must redeem him again. As for the firstborn of an impure animal, “*tiphdeh* [you shall redeem]” – once, for the redemption has already become the responsibility of the *kohen*.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Earth, Symbol of Humility, Defended Moshe’s Honor

It is written, “The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, all the people who were with Korach, and all the property” (*Bamidbar* 16:32).

We may ask why Korach was punished in this particular way, namely that the earth opened its mouth and swallowed him along with everything he had!

The Gemara states, “When one makes himself as the desert, which is free to all, the Torah is given to him as a gift” (*Nedarim* 55a). Now our Sages explain that the earth is the preeminent symbol of humility.

According to this, we may say that Korach was punished in such a drastic way – that the earth opened its mouth and swallowed him alive – because he claimed that Moshe was “exalting himself” over the community of Hashem. In reality, Moshe (as the Creator personally testified) was “exceedingly humble,” and furthermore he was more humble “than any person on the face of the earth” (*Bamidbar* 12:3).

Korach was the one who wanted to exalt himself over the community of Israel by seeking public honor. That is why he was punished by the earth, which as we have said is the symbol of humility. The earth defended the honor of Moshe, the most humble of men, comparable to the earth itself, and punished Korach for having prided himself and sought to dominate the Jewish people.

The Sephardic Superintendent

It is written, "He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked" (*Bamidbar* 17:13).

The following story took place before the start of the First World War, at a time when the Ottoman Turks controlled Eretz Israel. In Jerusalem there was an old Jew whom everyone knew by his first name, Yitzchakito, meaning Yitzchak.

Nobody knew his family name or any other details of his life, nor was there anything special about him that drew people's attention. He was already long known in the old city as a solitary individual, a man without family who earned a living as a water drawer and carrier.

Although he was Sephardic, Yitzchakito was connected to the Ashkenazim, especially to the residents of the old *yeshuv*. Since they provided him with clothes, he even began to resemble them, and they would include him in all their activities. In the end, they employed him as a superintendent at the Talmud Torah and at the yeshiva for youngsters.

He ate with the boarders, and for a bed he used an old couch that the students sat on. When his work was finished and he had some free time, he would stay in his corner looking at a book. Sometimes he would listen to the students at the yeshiva as they studied and discussed words of Torah.

One day, it was discovered that several elderly kabbalists had gathered in one of the rooms of the hospice. There they revealed that a massive war was about to break out, one that would bring about tremendous suffering. At that point Yitzchakito disappeared for about 15 days. When he returned, people saw that his eyes were red because he had shed many tears and had not slept. He did not answer any questions that people asked him, and after a certain time the incident was forgotten.

One day the inhabitants of the city gathered in the streets to observe an odd spectacle. The sun was slowly dimming, to the point of resembling the moon. Then it became dark, and darkness almost completely overwhelmed the day. A few nights later, a star with a long tail was seen in the sky, resembling a broom.

The non-Jews were afraid. They beat on pans and drums to "chase away the cat that had covered the sun."

Yitzchakito again disappeared on that day, only to return a few days later. People could once again see that he had not slept for several nights, and that he had shed many tears. This time as well, he had no intention of satisfying the curiosity of those who knew him, and he abstained from giving clear answers to those who questioned him.

Then came a messenger who went through the streets proclaiming that His Majesty the Sultan had joined the Central Powers against the powerful Allies, and that henceforth certain restrictions would be imposed on the citizens of the country. The situation was growing worse with each passing day.

The war grew increasingly difficult and lasted for years. In the meantime, the Turks exploited the inhabitants of the land: They exhausted all their food supplies, emptied the natural resources of the land, and brought poverty and want to the people.

Because of the difficult conditions and hunger that existed, mostly in Jerusalem, illnesses and epidemics ravaged the city. Typhus and cholera wreaked havoc and claimed many victims, and people could

not escape it. The authorities ordered all doctors to report every case to a government committee specifically charged with health issues. The sick were moved to a special building on the side of the Mount of Olives, where they were placed in quarantine. Nobody was known to have made it out alive.

One morning, dozens of students from the yeshiva's Talmud Torah fell ill at the same time. It's not difficult to imagine the agony of the Rosh Yeshiva, who did not know what to do. He realized that the sick placed in quarantine were immediately poisoned and secretly buried in one of the gardens to the side of the Mount of Olives, not even obtaining a Jewish burial. Even the families of the sick were not told of their fate.

The Rosh Yeshiva sought the advice of the Rav of Jerusalem and the head of the community, Rabbi Moshe Dayan, who decided to shelter the sick youngsters in a hall on the top floor of the yeshiva. He strictly prohibited anyone who was aware of the situation from revealing anything about it. Since the primary treatment for their illness was to rub the body with moist cloths, the Rosh Yeshiva and his assistants hurried to wet cloths and began to treat the sick.

Then something extraordinary happened. It was witnessed by Rabbi Yechezkel Ben David, a longtime resident of Jerusalem, who at the time was a young student at the Talmud Torah.

His condition was critical at the time, and he felt his strength leaving him. He already saw death approaching, and all his friends felt the same thing. All of a sudden, the heavy door to their hall was forcefully opened and Yitzchakito appeared in the doorway.

Nobody had seen him for two days, which was normal for him. That's why, despite the serious condition of the sick, they were happy to see him. He approached the first sick boy, the one closest to him, and said: "What are you doing in bed? Get up! Get dressed and return to your learning!"

Amazingly enough, he immediately got up and stood on his feet! He took a few steps, and people saw that he felt almost as if he were sleep-walking. Yet Yitzchakito pressed him, and after a few minutes he left the room.

Yitzchakito went to one youngster after another, and to each one he said the same thing. When he came to Yechezkel Ben David (as he himself testified), he raised his voice and ordered him to get up and stand on his feet. Miraculously, he immediately felt his strength returning and that his illness had passed. He quickly got out of bed, found his clothes, and got dressed.

Half an hour later, all the boys were in the dining hall, speaking with great emotion about the miracle that Yitzchakito "the superintendent" had performed for them. Since the Rosh Yeshiva had left to attend to some affairs, the students waited for him to return in order to tell him what had happened and to share this incredible incident with him.

One of them eventually suggested that they ask Yitzchakito – insofar as he was a "hidden *tzaddik*" who possessed *Ruach HaKodesh* – to give them all a blessing, for the Sages say: "The *tzaddik* decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, executes."

Deciding to do just that, they returned to the upper floor, to the hall where they had previously lain ill, and looked for Yitzchakito. However it was useless, for they could not find him anywhere.

They looked for him all throughout the day, even once the Rosh Yeshiva had returned and they told him about the incredible story of the superintendent who had saved them from certain death.

Yitzchakito, the Sephardic superintendent who concealed himself, had disappeared from the horizon. He was never to be seen again.

Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Shneur Kotler

The *gaon* Rabbi Shneur Kotler *Zatzal*, the son of the *gaon* Rabbi Aharon Kotler *Zatzal*, merited becoming the Rosh Yeshiva of Lakewood in New Jersey, like his father before him, and educating numerous students. American Jewry owes a great debt to Rabbi Shneur for the light that he brought to Jewish communities throughout the United States. Rabbi Shneur was born on account of a blessing from the Chafetz Chaim, as his father Rabbi Aharon Kotler relates:

“In the first years following my wedding, I still did not have any children. My father-in-law, the *gaon* Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer *Zatzal* was in Radin studying with the Chafetz Chaim, and he asked him for a blessing for me. The Chafetz Chaim gave his blessing, and I had a son and daughter. A few years later, my father-in-law was again in Radin, and he asked him for another blessing for me. This time, however, the Chafetz Chaim did not give one.”

When Rabbi Aharon Kotler related this story to Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky *Zatzal*, he continued by saying with heartfelt emotion: “The Chafetz Chaim had to have a reason for not giving me a blessing to have other children.”

Will I Leave You?

Rabbi Shneur and his father Rabbi Aharon were miraculously saved from the clutches of the Nazis during the Holocaust, and by the grace of G-d they were able to reach Eretz Israel. Not long afterwards, Divine providence guided them to America, where they made tremendous efforts to bring life to the world of Torah.

Even before the start of the Second World War, Rabbi Shneur had been engaged with a young woman from his town. The harsh combat and terrible suffering that ravaged his birthplace led to the extermination of millions of pure Jewish souls in that bitter time, and the future of the survivors was shrouded in haze. Nobody knew what had become of his immediate family.

The book *Tuvcha Yabiu* describes what happened during that time:

Not many people were aware of the letter sent by Rabbi Shneur's fiancée after the war. They were engaged even before the war broke out, and once the fighting stopped it turned out that both of them had miraculously survived.

Shortly after their reunion, Rabbi Shneur received a letter from his fiancée, who wrote that for her part, she was releasing him from the obligation to marry her. The reason that had prompted her to make this decision was all the suffering she had experienced during the war, meaning that she was no longer in good health. She therefore informed her fiancé that she absolutely did not want him to marry her.

What did Rabbi Shneur, who became the Rosh Yeshiva of Lakewood after the passing of his father, say to her?

“You lost your father during the war, you are neither as rich nor as healthy as before, and you have also experienced tremendous suffering. Do you think that I, your fiancé, will leave you at such a time?”

It is said that they married under auspicious circumstances, and they were able to have children despite health concerns. One of their children is the *gaon* Rabbi Malkiel *Shlita*, who today is the Rosh Yeshiva of the Lakewood yeshiva. He directs the largest Torah establishment in the Jewish world.

It is in this way that worlds are built, by seemingly unimportant things. However these things symbolize the greatness of the human soul, the daughter of the Creator.

A Moving Response

The author of *Tuvcha Yabiu*, the *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein *Shlita*, recounts another story that enables us to understand from where Rabbi Shneur inherited these amazing character traits:

“I remember an incident that occurred when I was in the Etz Chaim Talmud Torah, an incident that caused a great stir among all the students. The *gaon* Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer *Zatzal* was saying goodbye to his son-in-law Rabbi Aharon Kotler and grandson Rabbi Shneur Kotler as they were returning to America to build the great Lakewood yeshiva.

“As we know, Rabbi Aharon Kotler and his son, Torah giants, had been saved by miracles from the clutches of the Nazis, and after a short stay in Israel they left for America. Rabbi Aharon Kotler was among those who built the Torah world on American soil. His son, Rabbi Shneur Kotler, was engaged at the time, and the wedding was to take place as soon as they arrived in America.

“Great emotion could be seen in Rabbi Isser Zalman as his son-in-law and grandson departed. They descended the stairs towards the car that awaited them below to take them to the airport.

“The students of the Talmud Torah noticed that Rabbi Isser Zalman had not walked down all the stairs to the street, but had accompanied Rabbi Shneur and his father only to the middle of the stairs that led from his apartment to the street. It was there that he kissed them and parted ways. The students of the Talmud Torah wanted to know why he had not accompanied them all the way to the car, something that surprised them.

“He then gave them an answer that moved all their hearts: ‘Not all of my grandson's friends were able to reach the point where he is today. Most of them were murdered and sacrificed for the sanctification of the Divine Name. Therefore how can I descend to the street and kiss them before the eyes of everyone, demonstrating my joy in this way? There are many families that will never have such a moment!’ ”

Such were the sensitivities of a Torah giant!

According to His Convictions

The amazing ability to find peace in every situation that life puts a person in can be seen in the writings of Rabbi Shneur Kotler himself. As he explains on the verse, “He shall not leave the Sanctuary” (*Vayikra* 21:12), our Sages have learned from here that the *Kohen Gadol* brings an offering when he is an *onen* (Rashi). Rabbi Shneur asks: Why does an ordinary *kohen* not carry out the sacred service when he is an *onen*? At such a tragic moment, the heart of man is filled with mourning and his head is immersed in pain, to the point that it is not fitting for him to carry out the sacred service. Nevertheless, the Torah has decided that the *Kohen Gadol* must carry out his service and not leave the Sanctuary!

He answers this question by saying: See how great are the demands of one who has been chosen as the *Kohen Gadol*, such that even in a case of *aninut* [mourning] he must remain calm and be capable of perfectly carrying out the sacred service with the required joy. This is the basis for the commandment, “He shall not leave the Sanctuary,” meaning that a *Kohen Gadol* must rise above events and remain sanctified in regards to his service. From here we learn that the ability to maintain one's composure even in difficult times is among the duties of the complete man.

These explanations befit the one who gave them, a man who lived according to his convictions.

Guard Your Tongue!

What is Talebearing?

A talebearer is a person who goes from one person to another and says: “This is what So-and-so said about you,” or “this is what So-and-so did to you,” or “this is what I heard that So-and-so did or wants to do to you.” Even if such remarks do not contain anything derogatory, and even if the person being spoken about would volunteer the information himself – be it because the information is true, or because the speaker's intentions were completely different – it is still called talebearing. – *Chafetz Chaim*