

A Hold on Reality Through Torah She'be'al Peh

Parashat Korah

There is a certain existential handhold, without which existence, even for a single moment, would be impossible for a human being; it is one's hold on social and spiritual reality.

The self-preservation system sees to material and social reality. However, connecting to a social and spiritual reality requires awareness. The woman is charged with cultivating this awareness. The Rav is charged with cultivating spiritual connectedness: "Make thee a master." The Melech is charged with institutional connectedness. The Cohen is appointed over institutional-spiritual connectedness.

In the desert, B'nei Yisrael had social and spiritual connectedness. The desert was an ethereal place that had no need of material-political institutions. The spiritual connectedness encompassed all three belongings. Moshe and Aharon were the representation of personal and institutional belonging. They were "the messenger of the Compassionate One" and, simultaneously, "the messenger of the people."

No intermediary was necessary. They needed only a messenger. An intermediary indicates the autonomous reality of mediation – the intermediary makes an issue out of his mediating activity, inprinting his own personal stamp on each of the two sides, processing

them and giving them their meaning. A messenger does not make changes of any kind, nor is he meant to. Therefore, the messenger is different from the intermediary.

The Jew has no need of an intermediary. The agent through which the individual connects to the group is meant to merely enable encounter – to enable and to do nothing more, neither to change nor to add. The *meraglim* were meant to be messengers, but they appointed themselves as intermediaries and expressed their own view, though they had been required to transmit information and nothing more.

The *meraglim* had stumbled across institutional frameworks in the Land. These were difficult to relate to, to get hold of, to connect to – after the anti-institutional reality they had grown accustomed to in the desert. And they refused to accept Moshe as their hold on reality. They refused to accept the Rav.

In Korah, this issue finds expression: A total negation of the very fact of “institutionality”, of a framework. An attempt to make man himself into the handhold; they claimed that the hold on reality was found inside man rather than above him. This was a negation of authority of any kind, in any way: “And God is within them” rather than above them. The individual’s hold on reality would be the group at most: “All of the entire multitude are holy.”

The wife of Ohn ben Pelet saved him by preventing his dependency upon the social group, thereby preserving his private individual personality. Therefore Ohn ben Pelet was able to analyze the situation and to relate to events from his own point of view and from the perspective of his own interests. The wife of Korah did exactly the opposite. She pushed him into public involvement, which erased his personal quality. “Korah, who was intelligent, what was he thinking that made him pursue this nonsense?”

Korah’s claims regarding the lack of logic in the laws of *tsitsit* and *mezuzah* are connected to the logic of connectedness: Connecting the private individual to the group, rather than judging each issue on its own terms and merits, according to its own specifically applicable, causative thought process.

His excess of data and his excess of wealth are Korah’s undoing. When faced with a wealth of data, a person only deals with trying to connect to it. Therefore Korah was sent down to the netherworld, where he would have the leisure to deal with and to explore his own private situation without excessive connectedness. No longer would he connect to the outside, rather he would connect to height.

Punishment corrects: What does it matter what the other thinks of you? “One does not see one’s acquaintance in the next world.”

Mabloket, quarrel belongs to a blurring of the connectedness between an individual and society. In actuality, there is no room for *mabloket* in relation to truth, for after all there are no two truths but rather only one. Truth's place is above reality and not within it. In the Torah the difference between good and evil is found, and this is something one can examine by analyzing reality itself.

We find that the boundaries of *mabloket* are found where an individual relates to society: When an individual neglects his own private personality and seeks to conquer territory in society. The two quarreling sides are focused on ego, on the survival mechanism that seeks to grasp a holding for itself that is outside of itself, at the expense of the self.

Mabloket eliminates the self.

Instead of trying to connect *techelet*, the unique hue of blue found in *tsitsit*, to a quantitative framework – “a garment that is all entirely *techelet*, why should it require *tsitsit*?” – had he instead examined the substantive essence of the mitzva of *tsitsit*, he would have realized that the word *techelet* comes from *tachlit*, ultimate purpose, and is connected with Hazal's statement that “*techelet* resembles the sea, the sea resembles the sky, the sky resembles God's throne, etc.” Then he would have realized that one must connect one's hold on reality to the dimension of height, to the heavenly ultimate purpose, and then he would not

have resented and attacked authority, and he would have comprehended that authority is vital in order to attach reality to the dimension height.

Korah's denial of the Torah's moral teachings, of Moshe's teachings, was in fact a denial of Torah *she'be'al peh*. It was a denial of connectedness to a Rav, to a master, to a living, breathing wise teacher who transmits the rules of the Torah, who fits them to the private reality of the student. Korah thus committed the heresy of rejecting the Torah *she'be'al peh*. Therefore, when he repents in *gebinom*, he proclaims: "Moshe is truth and his Torah is truth."

Mahloket (Divisiveness)

"And Korah took..."

"This was a bad taking..." (Sanhedrin 109)

"He took himself to another side, to be separated (*neblak*) from within the multitude."

Belonging and freedom. Freedom within belonging. Korah removed himself from the "within" to become "without" – that is to say, on the outside. He separated himself, he severed the connection of belonging, as the leper must do – to be removed to the outside of the camp. This was a separation from the substance of the connection itself, rather than merely the separation from place that is required of the leper.

For this reason, his punishment was to enter within the earth. This gives legitimacy to Korah's claims, but within, and not without. To the very root and foundation. In the very depths of "within".

The causes of divisiveness and the means that serve it are:

A claim that is supposedly entrenched in logic, but that separates itself and places itself on the outside by virtue of exaggeration – by demagoguery: "A garment that is all entirely *techelet*." "A house that is filled with Torah scrolls."

Through this demagoguery, Korah incites the multitude with the accusation that Aharon is robbing the people of the priestly gifts.

This is the Cartesian approach: Intellectual egoism masked as objectivity. Granting legitimacy to a barren logic, which exists outside of the system of human / existential reality that is part of a three-dimensional structure possessing the dimension of height – authority.

The need for this three-dimensional structure applies even to values: The values of faith and awe of God are not adequate as values in themselves, unless one internalizes them within the self.

Quarreling between a couple is a confusion of authoritative roles, a confusion regarding relative authority, a deterioration of the orderliness of interaction, a lack of space

for personal expression on the part of one of the sides, and an invasion into the space of the other side. It causes the blurring of the self's uniqueness, a situation that threatens the wholeness of the self, and causes a lack of recognition of the self; it causes the couple to regress to the descending whirlpool of survival.

Korah had ideal conditions for expressing his self. He was intelligent, a scholar, wealthy, and of high birth. Yet “all this was not worth anything” to him because he did not focus on his own self, but rather on the other person's portion.

The danger of *mabloket* when it is wearing its robes of objectivity is that it seems to be a fight for the truth, and thus it is precisely the value-oriented, idealistic, qualitative people that it entraps.

Ohn ben Pelet's wife relied on their fear of God, knowing that they would never dare enter her home to call her husband to join them if she would stand at the entrance to her home immodestly dressed. In *mabloket*, ego steals in, with maximal cunning, and pushes the self aside.

“Moshe heard, and fell upon his face”, because he discovered that faith and belief in conventional, self-evident values, are no guarantee against the flames of divisiveness, unless one internalizes these values within the innermost spaces of the self.