

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXVIII: Korach (Num. 16:1–18:32)

Essay 8. Do not maintain a dispute

פְּרָק י"א דְּסִנְהֶדְרִין "וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה וַיִּלֶּךְ אֶל־דָּתָן וְאַבִּירָם", אָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ מִכָּאן שְׂאִין מַחְזִיקִין בְּמַחְלֻקַּת דְּאָמַר רַב כּל הַמַּחְזִיק בְּמַחְלֻקַּת עוֹבֵר בְּלֹא שְׂוֹנְאָמַר "וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה קְרַח וְכַעֲדָתוֹ פְּאֻשֶׁר דְּבַר ה' בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה לֹ"ו וְכוּ'. רַב אֲשִׁי אָמַר רָאוּי לְהַצְטָרֵעַ, כְּתִיב הִנֵּה לֹ"ו וְכִתִּיב הַתָּם "וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לֹ"ו עוֹד הִבְאֵנָה יָדְךָ בְּחִיקָךְ" עכ"ל. קִשָּׁה לְמָה בְּלֹא זָה אָמַר הַכְּתוּב "וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה קְרַח" וְלֹא כְּתִיב לֹא גְרִידָא כְּמוֹ "לֹא תִרְצָח: לֹא תִנְאַף" וְכוּ' שְׁלֹא כְּתִיב "לֹא תִרְצָח כְּפִלּוֹנִי" "לֹא תִנְאַף כְּפִלּוֹנִי".

Chapter 11 of tractate Sanhedrin:

“Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram.”¹ Reish Lakish says: From here [we learn] that one may not maintain a dispute, as Rav says: Anyone who maintains a dispute violates a prohibition, as it is stated: “And he will not be like Korach and his assembly, as the Lord spoke by the hand of Moses to him.”²

Rav Ashi says: [One who maintains a dispute] is fit to be afflicted with leprosy. It is written here: “By the hand of Moses to him,” and it is written there: “And the Lord said furthermore to him: Put now your hand into your bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprosy, as white as snow.”³ [I.e., the word “to him” appears in both verses, so by analogy Rav Ashi concludes that the punishment for maintaining a dispute is leprosy.]

-Sanhedrin 110a

A difficulty is why for this prohibition does Scripture say, “he will not be like Korach,” i.e., maintaining a dispute, and naming the perpetrator, and it doesn’t just state the prohibition alone. I.e., why not just say, “don’t maintain a dispute,” as we find for the verses, “Do not murder. Do

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¹ Num. 16:25.

² Num. 17:5.

³ Ex. 4:6.

not commit adultery,”⁴ for it isn’t written, “Do not murder like so-and-so. Do not commit adultery like so-and-so.”

וניש לומר שְׂבֵא הַפְּתוּב לְהַשְׁמִיעֵנו טַעַם חוֹמֶר הַחֲטָא שֶׁל כָּל מִי שֶׁמְחַזֵּיק בְּמַחְלוּקַת בֵּין אִם יִהְיֶה עֶלּוּב אוֹ עוֹלָב, וּמִמִּילָא אָנוּ מַגִּיעִים לַסּוֹף טַעוּתוֹ וְטַפְשׁוּתוֹ שֶׁל קֶרַח, שֶׁהָרִי כָּל אֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לוֹ עַל פְּנֵיו צָלָם וְדַמוֹת אֱלֹהִים וְנִמְצָא שְׁמֵי שְׂמִבְנָה חֲבִירוֹ מְבִנָּה הַשְּׂכִינָה הַעוֹמֶדֶת עָלָיו, וְאָמְרוּ ז"ל בְּשִׁעָה שֶׁאָדָם מְצַטְעֵר שְׂכִינָה מֶה אוֹמֶרֶת קִלְנִי מֶרְאִשִׁי, קִלְנִי מִזְרוּעֵי נְכוֹ, וְאִף אִם יִחְזוֹר נָה הַנְּעֻלָב וַיִּבְנֶה אוֹתוֹ יִהְיֶה חוֹטֵא, שֶׁהָרִי מְבִנָּה אוֹתוֹ צָלָם וְדַמוֹת שְׁיֵשׁ לוֹ לְהַעוֹלָב.

It can be said that the Scripture has come to inform us of the severity of the sin of anyone who maintains a dispute, whether he is the insulted party or the insulting party. In any case, we arrive at the end of Korach’s error and foolishness, for every Jew carries the image and likeness of G-d. Thus, it’s found that one who insults his fellow is insulting the Shechinah that stands over him.⁵ [The rabbis] of blessed memory said, when a person distresses the Shechinah, what does it say? “I am distressed about My head, I am distressed about My arm.” I.e., the Shechinah feels the insult casts upon each Jew. Even if the insulted party turns around and insults [the initial aggressor], then he will be a sinner, because he has insulted the image and likeness of G-d that is within the initial insulting party.

וְעוֹד שְׂאִינוּ רִשְׁאֵי, שְׂאֵם הַמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים דְּהֵיִנוּ דְּיוֹקְנוּ שְׂנֵתְבִנָּה עִמּוֹ מוֹחֵל עַל עֶלְבוֹנוֹ, הוּא אֵין לוֹ לְהִיּוֹת יוֹתֵר חָשׁוּב מִבוֹרָאוֹ, "הַאֲנוּשׁ מְאֹלֹה יִצְדָק" בְּתַמִּיהָ? וְדִי לְעֶבֶד לְהִיּוֹת כְּרֵבוֹ, וְלִכֵּן אָמַר הַפְּתוּב וְלֹא יִהְיֶה תוֹעֵה כְּמוֹ קֶרַח שֶׁחָשַׁב לְהַתְרַעַם עַל מִשָּׁה וּמִמָּה נִפְשָׁף הִיָּה מְבִנָּה הַמְּקוּם בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

Furthermore, [the insulted party] is not allowed to retaliate, for if the King of Kings, that is, His likeness that was dishonored with [the insulted party], forgives the insult, [the insulted party] should not consider himself to be more important than his Creator. “Can man be more righteous than G-d?”⁶ It’s enough for a servant to be like his master, and therefore a person should forgive an insult just as G-d would. Therefore, Scripture says not to err like Korach, who thought to argue with Moses, and whichever way you look at it, by doing so, Korach was insulting to the Omnipresent, may He be Blessed.

⁴ Ex. 20:13.

⁵ The translator has wondered about the Zera Shimshon’s distinction that the insulted victim carries the image and likeness of G-d, for that is also true of the victims of other prohibitions. It could be that other prohibitions, such as the cited cases of murder and adultery, are typically conducted in private, whereas interpersonal disputes frequently become public knowledge. The dispute between Korach and Moses was known to everyone, and could have destroyed the entire Israelite community, which may be why the Torah named a specific perpetrator with regard to the prohibition against maintaining a dispute.

⁶ Job 4:17.

ועוד אף בזו טעה קרח שאפילו תימא שהקב"ה לא צננה למנשה דבך זה ומלבו בדה אותו, מפל מקום הואיל שראה שהקב"ה שותק ומחל ולא עכב על ידו ואדרבא שרתה השכינה על ידיהם במשכן, הנה לו לשתוק גם הוא. והיגו האי דאמרינו בפרק ג' דנדריים אמר רב רב הונא, כל אדם הכועס, אפילו שכינה אינה תשובה פנגדו, שנגמר "רשע פגבה אפו" וכו'. ועוד אמר רב אשי ראוי להצטרע. וקשה מה ענין צרעת עם המחלוקת.

Even in this, having a complaint against Moses, Korah was wrong, for even saying that the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not command Moses this thing, installing Aaron as High Priest, and that his heart concocted this, in any case, he should have been silent. That is because he saw that the Holy One, Blessed be He, was silent and forgiving of Moses' decision and did not prevent him, and to the contrary, that the Shechinah rested in the tabernacle created by their hands. Thus, [Korach] too should have been silent.

As it said in the 3rd chapter of tractate Nedarim, “Rabba bar Rav Huna said: Anyone who gets angry, at that moment even the Divine Presence is not important to him, as it is stated: ‘The wicked, arrogant as he is, thinks, He does not call to account; G-d does not care.’ (Ps. 10:4).”⁷

Also, “Rav Ashi says: [One who perpetuates a dispute] is fit to be afflicted with leprosy.” A difficulty is what is the connection between leprosy and a dispute?

ויש לומר דהואיל שמי שמתזיק במחלוקת מזלזל בכבוד שמים ואינו חושש לצלם הקדוש שיש לו ולחבירו, אם כן מדה פנגד מדה יסתלק מעליו הצלם הקדוש, וכמו שתרגם אונקלוס מצורע סגירו, ואמרו בזוהר מאי סגירו, סגירו בכלא, שסגרו מעליו כל אורות הקדושה, ומשום הכי "בדד ישב מחוץ למחנה" הקדוש, "וּטְמֵא טְמֵא יִקְרָא" כי בהסתלק הקדושה תחול הטומאה.

It can be said, that one who maintains a dispute disgraces the honor of Heaven and does not fear the Holy image that he has and that his fellow has. If so, as a measure-for-measure punishment, the Holy image is removed from him, and as Onkelos translated “leprosy” as “closed.”⁸

It is said in the Zohar, “What is the plague of leprosy? Closed in every respect,⁹ that all of the lights of holiness are closed from him. Because of this, “that person shall dwell apart—in a dwelling outside the camp,”¹⁰ “and he shall call out, ‘Impure! Impure!’”¹¹ This is because when the holiness departs, the impurity will begin.

⁷ Nedarim 22b.

⁸ E.g., Onkelos Lev. 13:9.

⁹ Zohar, III:46a.

¹⁰ Lev. 13:46.

¹¹ Lev. 13:45.

ועוד שמי שמחזיק במחלוקת ורוצה להנקם ממי שבזה אותו או חרפו, על כרחך צריך לומר שמפני שבנין זה בא אליו שלא פדין משום הכי רוצה להנקם ממנו. ואם היה חושב בדעתו שיש דין ויש דיין ואין אדם גורף אצבעו למטה אלא אם כן נגזר עליו מלמעלה לא היה לו להנקם ממי שעשה לו אותו החירות, יען הפל היה ברצון האל וזה לא היה אלא שלים המקום, שבכל הקב"ה עושה שליחותו, וכמו שמצינו בדרך שאמר "ה' אמר לו קלל" וכו'. נמצא שלפי דעתו עוב ה' את הארץ פדעת השטים הראשונים ונקרא כופר בעיקר ממש, וזהו "כל הכועס אפילו שכינה אינה חשובה כנגדו", ולהפך מי שמוחל.

Furthermore, the one who maintains a dispute and wants to take revenge on the one who insulted him or dishonored him, must necessarily say that it's because this insult came to him unlawfully that he wants to take revenge on him. But if he thought in his mind that there is justice and there is a Judge and no one pokes his finger below unless it was decreed on him from above, he would not take revenge on the one who did the same thing to him. That is because everything was the will of G-d, and [the original insulter] was only a messenger from the Omnipresent, for in everything, the Holy One, Blessed be He, can appoint an agent. As we find regarding David, "he is abusing [me] only because the L-rd told him to abuse David; and who is to say, 'Why did You do that?'"¹² It is found that [one who maintains a dispute] must have the opinion that G-d left the earth, like the opinion of the early fools, and that is considered apostasy. This is the meaning of, "Anyone who gets angry, at that moment even the Divine Presence is not important to him." The opposite is true of one who forgives insults.

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¹² II Sam. 16:10.