

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Korach

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“Moshe and His Torah Are אמת” "אמת" Represents Torah Mishnah and Gemarah

This week we read parshas Korach, which describes the supernatural feat performed by Moshe Rabeinu in order to punish Korach and his assembly (16,28):

“ויאמר משה בזאת תדעון כי ה' שלחני לעשות את כל המעשים האלה כי לא מלבי, אם כמות כל האדם ימותון אלה ופקודת כל האדם יפקד עליהם לא ה' שלחני, ואם בריאה יברא ה' ופצתה האדמה את פיה ובלעה אותם ואת כל אשר להם וירדו חיים שאולה, וידעתם כי ניאצו האנשים האלה את ה'.

ויהי ככלותו לדבר את כל הדברים האלה ותבקע האדמה אשר תחתיהם, ותפתח הארץ את פיה ותבלע אותם ואת בתיהם ואת כל האדם אשר לקרח ואת כל הרכוש, וירדו הם וכל אשר להם חיים שאולה ותכס עליהם הארץ ויאבדו מתוך הקהל, וכל ישראל אשר סביבותיהם נסו לקולם כי אמרו פן תבלענו הארץ.”

To prove his authenticity and to punish those that opposed him and denied his authority, Moshe calls upon Hashem to create a new reality—the mouth of the earth. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed Korach, all that stood with him, their households and their possessions. The people of Yisroel surrounding them, fled at their sound.

“Moshe and His Torah Are True”

The Gemorah (Sanhedrin 110.) teaches us that Korach and his assembly justify the verdict from the depths of the earth with their proclamation “משה ותורתו אמת”—Moshe and his Torah are true:

“אמר רבה בר בר חנה, פעם אחת הלכתי בדרך, אמר לי אותו סוחר ישמעאלי, בוא ואראה לך הבלועים של קרח, הלך וראה שני בקיעים שהיה יוצא עשן מהם... אמר לי [הסוחר], הקשב [לקולות מבטן האדמה], מה שמעת, ושמעתי שהיו אומרים כך, משה ותורתו אמת והם שקרנים, אמר לו [הסוחר], כל שלשים יום מהפכת אותם הגיהנם כבשר [שמתבשל] בתוך הקלחת, ואומרים כן משה ותורתו אמת והם שקרנים.”

Rabbah bar bar Chanah comes across an Arab merchant who shows him the spot where Korach and his assembly were swallowed by the earth. He points out two cracks in the ground emitting smoke. The Arab instructs him to listen closely to the voices heard from the depths of the earth. He hears them saying: “Moshe and his Torah are true and they are liars.” The Arab explains to Rabbah bar bar Chanah that Gehinnom returns them to that spot every thirty days like meat being stirred in a pot.

The Targum Yonasan comments beautifully on the end of the verse quoted above: And all of Yisroel surrounding them, fled from their frightening voices; they cried out and proclaimed, “Hashem is Righteous, and his verdict is just, and the Torah of His servant Moshe is true, and we are wicked for

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Korach

rebelling against him”; and the children of Yisroel fled out of fear that they, too, would be swallowed by the earth.

It is worthwhile examining two points concerning the story of the Arab merchant and Rabbah bar Chanah. (1) What is the significance of the two cracks in the ground emitting smoke from the fires of Gehinnom? (2) Why do Korach and his assembly vindicate the decree specifically with the proclamation: “Moshe and his Torah are אמת—true”?

“אמת” Spell בראשית ברא אלקים

Let us begin by explaining why Korach and his assembly accept their fate with the admission “Moshe and his Torah are אמת.” Firstly, it is well known that the Holy One chose to begin Torah she’b’chsav with the words (Bereishis 1,1): “בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ.” The Baal Ha’Turim comments that the final letters of the first three words spell “אמת”, teaching us that the Holy One created the world with “emes,” “truth.” An allusion to this is found in the possuk (Tehillim 119,160): “ראש דברך אמת”—Your Word begins with “emes.”

This can be understood based on the Midrash (B.R. 1,1): “The Torah says, ‘I was the artisan’s vessel of the Holy One’ . . . the Holy One would look in the Torah and create the world, and the Torah said “בראשית ברא אלקים”, and the only “ראשית” (beginning) is the Torah.” In other words: “בראשית”—with the Torah which is referred to as ראשית—“ראשית ואת הארץ”—“ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ”—the Almighty created the heavens and the earth.

The Kedushas Levi adds (Bereishis): the word “בראשית” can be broken down into “ב’ ראשית”, two “reishit”’s—referring to the two parts of the Torah (which is called “ראשית”), Torah she’b’chsav and Torah she’b’al peh—with which the Holy One created the world.

א’נכי מ’אימתי ת’נא Allude to the Words “אמת”

Next, let us introduce the words of the Chidushei Ha’Rim in Sefer Haz’chus (p. 83) concerning an allusion in the possuk (Tehillim 119,160): “ראש דברך אמת”—Your Word begins with “אמת” (“emes”). At the revelation at Har Sinai, the Holy One began giving Yisroel Torah she’b’chsav with the Ten Commandments which open with the words: “אנכי ה’ אלקיך”. Rabeinu hokadosh opens the Mishnayos with (Berachos 2.): “מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבית”. The opening words of the Talmud Bavli chosen by Rav Ashi are (ibid.): “תנא היכא קאי”. We see that the first letters of the words א’נכי ת’נא spell אמת. The elucidation of the possuk “ראש דברך אמת” is now clear—His Word, Torah she’b’chsav and Torah she’b’al peh, begins with the letters אמת.

Rav Tzaddok hokohen in Pri Tzaddik (Lag Ba’Omer), brings this same allusion in the name of his Rebbe, the author of “Mei Ho’Shiluach.” In addition, he utilizes this idea to explain Chazal’s words (Shabbos 55.): “חורתמו של הקב”ה אמת”—the Holy One’s seal is “emes.” The Torah, which is Hashem’s seal is represented by the word אמת, since it is an abbreviation for מ’אימתי ת’נא א’נכי.

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Korach

It is quite clear, now, why the Holy One, chose **בראשית ברא אלקים**—whose final letters spell **אמ"ת**—as the opening words of the Torah. He created the world utilizing Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh; this is alluded to by the word **"בראשית"**—he created the world with the two "reishit"s, the two parts of the Torah. Therefore, these three final letters, **אמ"ת**, also allude to the opening words of Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh, **א'נכי מ'אימתי ת'נא**. This ties in nicely with the formula of the blessing recited after the reading of the Torah: **"אשר נתן לנו תורת אמת וחי: עולם נטע בתוכנו"**—who gave us the Torah of "emes"...

"The Holy One's Seal Is אמת"—An Allusion to ת'נא מ'אימתי ת'נא

Let us attempt to explain the reason that Hashem chose **"אמת"** as His seal in a philosophical manner. Upon closer scrutiny, we find that it is impossible for one to be close to Hashem, unless one incorporates three fundamental principles, symbolized by **"אמת"**, into this relationship.

- a) One must have **אמונה**, faith, in the existence of Hashem; this belief is fundamental to the entire Torah. We have learned in the Gemorah (Makkos 23:, 24.):

"דרש רבי שמלאי שש מאות ושלוש עשרה מצות נאמרו לו למשה, שלש מאות וששים וחמש לאוין כמנין ימות החמה, ומאתים וארבעים ושמונה עשה כנגד איבריו של אדם... בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת שנאמר צדיק באמונתו יחיה."

We see that all of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos found in the Torah can be distilled down to the single fundamental principle of faith in Hashem; without it, we have nothing. The Maharsha writes that this is King David's meaning when he says (Tehillim 119,86): **"כל מצוותיך אמונה"**—all of your commandments are based on faith.

- b) One must accept upon oneself the yoke of Heaven and the yoke of the commandments. Without these, one would be free to do as he pleases. This is why the Mishnah teaches us (Berachos 13.):

"למה קדמה פרשת שמע לוהיה אם שמוע, כדי שיקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים תחלה ואחר כך מקבל עליו עול מצוות."

First, we recite the paragraph of "shema Yisroel," accepting upon ourselves the yoke of Heaven's sovereignty; next, we recite "v'haya im shamo," accepting the yoke of the commandments.

- c) One must engage oneself both in the study of Torah she'b'chsav and in the study of Torah she'b'al peh—as it is written (Joshua 1,18): **"לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפוך והגית בו יומם ולילה"**—words of Torah must not be absent from our mouths day or night; similarly, it is written (Tehillim 1,2): **"כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה יומם ולילה"**—once again, we are informed of the praise of one who occupies himself with thoughts of Torah both by day and by

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Korach

night. The Shaarei Orah explains (shaar 2): ... וּבִתְּוֵרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה, יוֹמָם הוּא תּוֹרַת שְׁבַע יָמִים...—by day, refers to Torah she'b'chsav, while by night alludes to Torah she'b'al peh.

These three fundamental principles are alluded to by the three opening verses of Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh, symbolized by אֱמוּנָה--אֱמוּנָה. The opening verse of the Ten Commandments--"אֱמוּנָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם"--is a commandment to have faith in Hashem. The opening words of the Mishnah--"מֵאֵימַתִּי קוֹרִיץ אֶת שְׁמֵךְ"--concern the commandment of reciting "krias shema," which is a declaration of the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven and of the yoke of the commandments. The words which Rav Ashi chose to begin the Talmud with--(Berachos 2.): "תֵּנָא הֵיכָא קָאִי דְקִתְּנִי מֵאֵימַתִּי... תֵּנָא אֶקְרָא קָאִי דְכִתִּיב בְּשִׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ"--discuss the obligation to engage oneself and connect the studies of Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh. This is precisely what the Tanna, there, has done. He cited a possuk from Torah she'b'chsav and proceeded to derive from it all of the pertinent halachos of Torah she'b'al peh.

In summary, this is why Hashem chose "אֱמוּנָה" as His seal. He is teaching us that anyone who desires to achieve a closeness to Hashem, must fulfill these three fundamental principles symbolized by the letters of "אֱמוּנָה". אֱמוּנָה teaches us that faith in the existence of Hashem is essential; מֵאֵימַתִּי teaches us that it is essential to accept upon oneself both the yoke of Heaven and the yoke of the commandments; תֵּנָא emphasizes the importance of engaging ourselves both in Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh. If one fails to fulfill these three conditions, he will leave this world lacking both Torah and mitzvos and his time on this earth will have been for naught, chas v'shalom.

Korach Denied Both Torah She'b'chsav and Torah She'b'al Peh

By opposing Moshe and separating himself from Moshe, Korach was denying Torah she'b'al peh. After all, Moshe was the leader and first of all the sages of Torah she'b'al peh. This is evident from the Mishnah (Avos 1,1): "מֹשֶׁה קִיבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי וּמִסִּינַי לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ, וְיְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנָיִם, וְזִקְנָיִם לְנֹבְיָאִים, וְנֹבְיָאִים מִסִּינַי לְיֹשׁוּעָה"--Moshe received Torah from Sinai and passed it on to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, . . . In the end, he denied Torah she'b'chsav, as well, when he proclaimed: "אֵינֶן תּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם"--Torah does not come from Heaven. This is based on a teaching in the Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 50.).

The Torah explicitly states (Shemos 12,49): "תּוֹרָה אַחַת יְהִי לְאִזְרָח וְלִגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם"--there shall be only one Torah both for the native citizen and the convert who dwells among you. Additionally, it states (Bamidbar 15,16): "תּוֹרָה אַחַת וּמִשְׁפָּט אֶחָד יְהִי לְכֶם וּלְגֵר בְּתוֹכְכֶם"--there shall be only one Torah and one set of laws for you and the convert who lives among you. We see, that if we do not believe in and adhere to the voice of the sages of the Torah she'b'al peh, everyone will interpret the law as it suits him, and we will no longer have תּוֹרָה אַחַת, one unified Torah. This is how the Chinuch (mitzvah 496) explains the rationale behind the scripture's admonition to heed the words of the sages (Devarim 17,11):

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Korach

“לא תסור מכל הדברים אשר יגידו לך ימין ושמאל” —you shall not deviate from their instructions, right or left.

“משרשי המצוה, לפי שדעות בני אדם חלוקים זה מזה, לא ישתוו לעולם הרבה דעות בדברים, וידע ארון הכל ברוך הוא שאלו תהיה כוונת כתובי התורה מסורה ביד כל אחד ואחד מבני אדם איש איש כפי שכלו, יפרש כל אחד מהם דברי התורה כפי סברתו וירבה המחלוקת בישראל במשמעות המצוות ותעשה התורה ככמה תורות...”

על כן אלקינו שהוא ארון כל החכמות השלים תורתנו תורת אמת עם המצוה הזאת, שצונו להתנהג בה על פי הפירוש האמיתי המקובל לחכמינו הקדמונים עליהם השלום, ובכל דור ודור גם כן שנשמע אל החכמים הנמצאים, שקבלו דבריהם ושתו מים מספריהם, ויגעו כמה יגיעות בימים ובלילות להבין עומק מיליהם ופליאות דעותיהם, ועם ההסכמה הזאת נכוון אל דרך האמת בידיעת התורה, וזולת זה אם נתפתה אחר מחשבותינו ועניות דעתנו, לא נצלח לכל”.

The Chinuch explains that since people possess such divergent opinions, it was necessary for the Almighty, in His Wisdom, to include this mitzvah among the commandments of the Torah. This mitzvah commands us to heed the voices of the sages of each generation. For, they represent the **אמת** of the Torah, due to their diligent efforts and studies, by day and by night. Without this guidance and consensus of opinion, we would be tempted and swayed in the wrong direction, and would be destined to fail.

Furthermore, the Mishnah teaches us (Avos 4,2): “**עבירה גוררת עבירה**”—one transgression leads to another; this is what happened to Korach. Once he decided to oppose Moshe Rabeinu, the foremost of the prophets and sages of Torah she’b’al peh, that transgression led him to deny Torah she’b’chsav, as well, by declaring: “There is no Torah from Heaven.” In other words, he denied the Torah of the sages on earth as well as the heavenly Torah, G-d save us.

This provides us with a nice explanation for why the Arab merchant showed Rabbah bar bar Chanah two cracks in the ground over the spot where Korach and his assembly were swallowed up. These two cracks allude to the fact that Korach created a schism both on the level of Torah she’b’al peh and on the level of Torah she’b’chsav. One who denies the legitimacy of the sages of Torah she’b’al peh, will eventually deny Torah she’b’chsav, too; for, the two are inseparable as stated in the possuk: “there will be only one Torah and one law for all of you.”

Alas, we stand enlightened and can rejoice in what we have learned and now understand. Korach and his assembly acknowledge the justice of the decree against them with the proclamation: “**משה**” —**אמת**—Moshe and his Torah are **אמת**. By so doing, they are admitting to the authenticity and veracity of the Torah she’b’chsav which is then elucidated by the Torah she’b’al peh. They are publicly declaring that Moshe, the first and foremost of the sages of the Torah she’b’al peh, and his Torah—the Torah she’b’chsav that was given to us on Sinai along with its explanations and elucidations in the Torah she’b’al peh—are **אמת**—are intimately connected, as alluded to by the first letters of **א'נכי מ'אימתי ת'נא**.