

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Korach  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### **Korach – Giving our enemies another chance**

In this week's Parsha of Korach, we read about the challenge to Moshe and Aharon's leadership. Though Korach is the chief instigator, he is joined by a mixed group, including Datan and Aviram from the tribe of Reuven.

Who are Datan and Aviram? They appear numerous times in the Torah (although not always by name), starting at the beginning of sefer Shmot.

We first come across these two characters when Moshe goes out from the Egyptian palace in order to share the burden of his enslaved brothers.<sup>1</sup> Moshe sees an Egyptian taskmaster striking a Hebrew man. Moshe rescues the man by killing the Egyptian. He then buries the body in the sand. The next day, Moshe sees two Jews quarrelling and he steps in to break up the fight. In response, one of the quarrellers criticises Moshe and questions his authority to intervene in their dispute.

*“Do you plan to kill me like you killed the Egyptian?” (Shmot 2:14)*

The two Jews who were fighting were Datan and Aviram. They informed the Egyptian authorities that Moshe had killed an Egyptian and that is why Moshe was forced to flee from Egypt.

Rashi explains that Moshe understood why Bnei Yisrael had not yet been redeemed from slavery. It was because there were wicked informers like Datan and Aviram in their midst.

The Midrash tells us that Datan and Aviram were the ones at the end of Parashat Shmot that complained to Moshe when Paroah said that he is no longer giving them straw for bricks. They also rebelled at the Yam Suf. When Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, Datan and Aviram chose to stay behind. They then came with Pharaoh when he brought his army to attack Beni Yisrael at the Yam Suf. When they saw the sea splitting for the Jews, they realised that they had picked the wrong team. At the last minute they decided to join their brothers and came out of the sea safely with them<sup>2</sup>.

The Midrash also informs us that Datan and Aviram rebelled at the time of the manna<sup>3</sup>. The manna was divine training in emunah – every day Bnei Yisrael would receive exactly what they needed for that day (except for erev Shabbat and erev Yom Tov when they would receive a double portion). Each night they would go to sleep with nothing in the pantry. They were totally reliant on Hashem sending a fresh supply of manna the next day. In this way they would learn that all parnasah (livelihood) comes from Hashem. Bnei Yisrael were specifically commanded to not leave over any manna until the next morning so as to inculcate this important lesson of emunah. Datan and Aviram disobeyed Hashem's command and tried to leave over some of their manna and Moshe became angry with them.<sup>4</sup>

On the first Erev Shabbat after the manna started appearing, Moshe told Bnei Yisrael that they would receive a double portion and that no manna would fall the next day. Datan and Aviram saw this as a great opportunity to “expose” Moshe as a liar. They saved some manna and hid it in the field on Friday evening. On Shabbat morning they invited people to come with them to see that Moshe had

<sup>1</sup> Shmot Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Midrash Aggadah and Targum Yonatan.

<sup>3</sup> Rashi to Shmot 2:13 and Shmot Rabbah 1:29.

<sup>4</sup> Shmot 16:20 with Rashi.

lied and that manna had in fact fallen on Shabbat. However, the birds had eaten the manna and their plan was foiled.

After the debacle of the spies which we read about last week, some members of Bnei Yisrael said: "Let us appoint a leader (instead of Moshe) and return to Egypt".<sup>5</sup> Who were these people? The Midrash identifies them as Datan and Aviram.

As we can see, Datan and Aviram were the constant nemesis of Moshe and Bnei Yisrael. Whenever there is trouble or strife you can be sure that Datan and Aviram are somehow involved. In this week's parsha, Datan and Aviram are up to their old tricks when they join forces with Korach to challenge the leadership of Moshe and Aharon.

When confronted with the Korach affair, Moshe knew that he was in the right and that the rebels would be punished with death. What would we do if we were in Moshe's situation? Most likely, we would sit back and let the rebels suffer their fate. Finally, the wicked Datan and Aviram would be finished once and for all.

However, remarkably, Moshe deliberately seeks out Datan and Aviram in order to give them a chance to repent:

*"Moshe sent [a messenger] to call Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, but they said: 'We will not go up.'" (Devarim 16:12)*

Moshe sought reconciliation with words of peace. Rashi teaches us that from here we learn that it is not proper to persist in a dispute.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, we can learn from Moshe's behaviour the length to which we should go to achieve shalom, even if it means humbling ourselves and giving our enemies numerous chances. And even if we are certain that we are in the right.

If we really value peace, we will be more likely to go out of our comfort zone in order to achieve it. This may involve work on our part, to truly internalise the importance of peace.

Moshe's actions can also teach us that we should never rejoice at our enemies' downfall.<sup>7</sup>

We put this lesson into practice when we recite only a shortened version of Hallel on the last day of Pesach - our celebration is diminished somewhat because the Egyptians were killed in the sea. That is also the reason why we remove drops of wine from our cups on the Seder night when we mention the plagues. We are still grateful for receiving a salvation but we are careful not to take pleasure from the suffering of our enemies.

We are a nation that should reflect Hashem's middot – including that of compassion. And Hashem's Shechinah does not rest on our homes unless there is shalom.

Let's try something this week:

1. We should try extra hard to achieve shalom with our enemies, even if it involves doing something difficult like humbling ourselves or giving them a second (or third or fourth) chance.
2. When someone that we dislike suffers, we can try to overcome the natural human instinct to rejoice in their downfall by reminding ourselves how Moshe acted in this week's Parasha and trying to emulate him. And it can also help to remind ourselves that even our enemies are Hashem's creation and created in His image.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>5</sup> Bamidbar 14:4.

<sup>6</sup> Rashi to the pasuk; Midrash Tanchuma Korach 10; Gemara Sanhedrin 110a.

<sup>7</sup> See Pirkai Avot 4:24.