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“If Only”

Reb Hirsch Leib Lippel was a respected Breslover chassid and *mashpiah*, one of the unique figures and *Baalei Mesorah* of Rebbe Nachman’s *kevutzah* who settled in Yerushalayim. When Reb Hirsch Leib was young, he tried his hand at a number of different jobs without *hatzlacha*. In need of *parnassa* to support his family, he went out and traversed the Ukrainian countryside, traveling from town to town in search of work.

At one of his stops, a Gentile farmer turned to him and asked, “Where are you rushing to, young man?” “I’m looking for work,” replied Rav Hirsch Leib, a bit harried. “I’m trying to find a livelihood.” The farmer calmly challenged him: “And in your city there is no work?” “Look, mister, it’s difficult to find work in my city,” the young man answered defensively, “you see, the market is small and the opportunities are limited because there is so much competition...”

The farmer looked at him deeply and said: “No, I’m afraid you are mistaken. A man who is diligent and has good fortune will always find work, even at home.”

Years later, when Rav Hirsch Leib became a leader of Chassidim, he would share with his young, impressionable students this poignant lesson and apply the message to ‘working’ in *avodas Hashem*. He would say, “When a *Yid* truly desires to serve Hashem,

he doesn’t need to go anywhere; he can serve Hashem wherever he is.”

Center stage in our sedra is the infamous Korach, a powerful influencer and charismatic scholar, and his claims and challenges to the Divinely inspired leaders of Klal Yisrael. Korach accuses Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon haKohen of unfairly monopolizing the institution of *kehunah*, the priesthood, and inappropriately raising themselves over the rest of the community:

רַב־לֶכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כָּלֶם קֹדְשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה' וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל־קֹהֶל ה'

“You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and Hashem is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above the assembly of Hashem?” (8:3)

Moshe responds with a challenge to settle the dispute through supernatural means. He proposes that the Divine intervention will manifest by means of their fire-pans. Then goes on to address Korach’s claims, pleading with him and his rebellious, ungrateful supporters:

הַמַּעֲט מִכֶּם כִּי־הִבְדִּיל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶתְכֶם מֵעַדְתּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַקְרִיב אֶתְכֶם אֵלָיו לַעֲבֹד אֶת־עֲבֹדַת מִשְׁכַּן ה' וְלַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה לְשָׁרְתָם: וַיִּקְרַב אֹתָן וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲחֵיהֶן בְּנֵי־לֵוִי אֹתָן וּבִקְשָׁתָם גִּם כִּהְנִיחָה:

Is it not enough that Hashem has distinguished you from the congregation of Israel to draw you near to Him, to perform the service in the Mishkan and to stand before the

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congregation to minister to them? He drew you near, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi with you, and now you seek the *kehunah* as well? (16:8-10)

Rebbe Yosef ben Ben Yitzchak Bechor-Shor of Orléans was a 12th Century Tosafist, a talmid of Rabbeinu Tam. He points to Moshe's deliberate avoidance of addressing the claim of *kulam Kedoshim*. Instead, Moshe reproves Korach and his followers for not being satisfied with their own *avoda* and roles in Klal Yisrael, namely to serve as *Leviim*.

Under the premise of the spirit of fairness, Korach seeks to present himself as a public advocate. Moshe Rabbeinu, however, understands Korach's true, jealous motivation and responds in kind:

From Moshe's specific response to Korach ("Do you seek the *kehunah* too?") we may infer that Korach was vying for the position and office of the *kehunah*, and professed to speak on behalf of the whole community so that they would accept his words and not suspect him of being motivated by self-interest.

The claim of *kulam kedoshim*, then, is Korach's 'red herring', an intentionally misleading rhetorical strategy, an attempt to cover for his actual selfish goal in usurping power and position. Moshe sees through the ruse and responds, הֲקִטְעַטְךָם, is it not enough for you that Hashem has distinguished you from the rest of the community... that you also desire the priesthood?" (In fact, from Moshe's choice of words) we see that Korach actually desired the position and *kavod* of being (not just "a priest" but "the *priesthood*", i.e.) the *Kohen Gadol* himself.

Rabbi Dr. Zvi Shimon, a *talmid chacham*

and professor at Bar Ilan University, sees Korach as the (all too familiar) and prototypical polished-yet-sinister politician who uses empty rhetoric. He pretends to champion the cause of the people when he is really interested only in self-advancement, honor and positions of power.

Rebbe Avraham Yaakov, the Sadigura Rebbe zy'a would often share that "a person can...complete their purpose in this *olam hatikun* as long as they don't say two words: אילו הייתי, "if only I was..." So often we are plagued by gnawing feelings of self doubt. Sometimes we might see another person's LinkedIn profile, or his or her professional advancement and *hatzlacha*, and the voice of Korach appears inside our head: "If only..." "If only I had a better position, if only I was somewhere else, had a different job, had more money, more political influence, more spiritual authority or charisma, a higher IQ, then I would be..."

In reliving the tragic drama of this week's sedra, may we remember to strive to be *our* individual best selves. May we be diligent and find our material success and spiritual satisfaction *wherever we are*. If we are humble and grateful for what we have, Hashem may give us the responsibility to hold more, but we can only complete our *tikkun* by discovering good fortune in whatever our role is right now. For "when a Yid truly desires to serve Hashem...he can do so wherever he is." ■



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