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Why Them and Not Korach? Messages from Camp Dror

One of the most striking moments in Parshat Pinchas is the request of the daughters of Tzelofchad. They approach Moshe with a claim that, at first glance, sounds like a challenge to the existing system:

לָמָּה יִגְרַע שֵׁם אָבִינוּ מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֵּן?
תִּנָּה לָנוּ אַחְזָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אָבִינוּ

“Why should our father’s name be diminished from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father’s brothers.” (Bamidbar 27:4)

Their request is ultimately affirmed by Hashem Himself:

כֵּן בָּנוֹת צִלְפַּחַד דְּבָרָת

“The daughters of Tzelofchad speak correctly.” (27:7)

But this raises an interesting question. We just read about another group that challenged the leadership and the status quo: Korach and his followers. They, too, came forward with a complaint. They, too, felt that something was unfair. Yet one group is praised and becomes part of the eternal Torah, while the other is swallowed up by the earth.

What did the daughters of Tzelofchad understand that Korach did not?

Part of the answer lies in the language each group uses. Korach’s challenge begins with an accusation:

וּמִדַּע תִּתְנַשְׂאוּ

“Why do you exalt yourselves?” (Bamidbar 16:3)

His focus is on what others have and why he does not have it. The daughters of Tzelofchad ask a different kind of question:

לָמָּה יִגְרַע שֵׁם אָבִינוּ

“Why should our father’s name be diminished?”

Their concern is not themselves. It is their father, their family, and their place within the larger story of the Jewish people.

But perhaps the deeper distinction is not simply the difference between two versions of “why.” It is the difference between asking, “Why don’t I have what I deserve?” and asking, “How can I contribute? How can I fulfill my responsibility?”

Korach saw leadership as a privilege. He looked at the positions held by Moshe and Aharon and wanted a greater share for himself. The daughters of Tzelofchad saw inheritance not as a privilege, but as a responsibility. They were not seeking honor. They were seeking a way to carry forward their father’s legacy and maintain their family’s connection to Eretz Yisrael.

That is why Hashem validates their request. Their challenge was not rooted in entitlement. It was rooted in commitment.

This distinction feels especially relevant as

camp season begins.

Camp is one of the few places where we live, almost around the clock, as a true community. It teaches us that healthy communities are built by people who ask, “How can I help?” rather than “What am I getting?”

I often tell campers this on pizza night. If everyone rushes to the table worried only about making sure they get enough slices for themselves, suddenly there isn't enough. Everyone feels pressured, everyone feels shortchanged, and the experience becomes about taking.

But something remarkable happens when people think differently. When everyone is looking around to make sure the next person has enough before taking for themselves, somehow there is enough. The atmosphere changes. The meal becomes about the community rather than the individual.

That is the difference between Korach and the daughters of Tzelofchad.

Korach looked at the community and asked what it owed him. The daughters of Tzelofchad looked at the community and asked how they could continue to be part of it. Korach pursued privilege; they embraced responsibility.

The lesson of camp—and perhaps the lesson of this parashah—is that strong communities are not built by people demanding a bigger piece for themselves. They are built by people who care about the whole pie.

When we shift our focus from privilege to responsibility, from “Why don't I have more?” to “How can I contribute more?”, we create the kind of community that allows everyone to thrive. That is true in the desert, true in camp, and true wherever Jews come together to build something larger than themselves. ■



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