

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Korach 5768

And Moshe was very angry, and he said to Hashem, "Do not look at their offering." (16:15)

Rashi explains that every Jew has a share in the tamid, the public offering brought each morning and afternoon. Moshe prayed that the portions of the tamid offering belonging to Korach, Dasan and Aviram should not be accepted by G-d; they should not be consumed by the fire.

Why was Moshe so concerned that G-d not accept any offering from the rebels, even an offering unrelated to their challenge to him? The Ohr Hachaim explains that the Torah says that Hashem is "G-d of faithfulness, doing no wrong" (Devarim 32:4). This means that He does not withhold anyone's reward, and compensates even the wicked for the few good deeds they do. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 96a) says that the wicked Nevuchadnetzar became powerful due to the four steps he took with the intention of rewriting King Merodach's letter with G-d's name at the beginning instead of at the end. Moshe feared that Korach, Dathan and Aviram had some merit from their few mitzvos and would thus escape punishment and be able to continue in their heretical rebellion; therefore he prayed that G-d not give them credit for their portion of the offerings.

The Tanna Devei Eliyahu (Chapter 24) lists several wicked men who enjoyed great success in life due to a small good deed they had done: Esav shed three tears and so he received Mount Seir, a land of abundant rain; Elifaz honored his father and so he begot Amalek; Yeravam rebuked Shlomo Hamelech and so he ruled over the Ten Tribes; Agag cried that he was about to be killed without leaving any descendents, and so he begot Haman; Nevuchadnetzar walked four steps for G-d's honor and became a powerful ruler. This is comparable to a man who finds a lost garment near a town, and comes to the center of town and announces his find,

asking the owner to come forward and claim it. The townspeople are impressed with his righteousness and piety and make him their leader. Eventually he uses his power to destroy the entire land.

Although the analogy is not exact – unlike the townspeople who were fooled, G-d knows the future and is aware that the wicked will use their power for evil deeds – the Tanna Devei Eliyahu's point is that not only are the wicked rewarded for their few good deeds, but that reward is often success and power which enables them to perpetrate even greater wickedness. Thus Moshe feared that G-d would pay back Korach, Dasan and Aviram for their few mitzvos, even if that reward meant that their rebellion would last longer and lead more people astray. He therefore prayed that their mitzvos not be accepted.

In Berachos 10a we read that some bullies were bothering Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Meir prayed that they should die. His scholarly wife, Beruriah, told him that he should rather pray for them to repent, as it says (Tehillim 104:35), "May the sins be gone from the earth" – not the sinners but the sins. But in the prayer against the heretics, we say, "May all the heretics perish in an instant." Why don't we pray for the heretics to repent?

The Gemara in Avodah Zarah 17a quotes the verse, "All who go to it (i.e. heresy) will not repent, and they will not achieve the paths of life" (Mishlei 2:19). Asks the Gemara: if they will not repent, surely they will not achieve the paths of life, so the second half of the verse is unnecessary! The Gemara answers that it means that even if the heretic does repent, he will die right away. The Maharsha explains that G-d does this out of His

great mercy on the repentant heretic. Heresy is hard to resist, and G-d knows that if he were to live, he would be likely to revert back to his old ways. Therefore he causes him to die right after repenting so that he can go straight to the World to Come.

According to this we can understand why we pray for heretics to perish, not to repent. Actually, we are praying for them to repent, but we know that even if they repent they will have to die right away lest they revert back to their old ways.

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Besides the benefit of this to the heretic himself – that he will be sure to go to the World to Come – there is a benefit to us in his dying. If he lives and reverts back to his heresy, he will be even more powerful than before, since he will be armed with the merit of the good deeds he did during the time he repented - G-d does not withhold the reward of any good deed, even from the wicked. (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, Chapter 68)



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