

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Korach 5769

There shall not be any more like Korach and his company. (17:5)

The Sefer Chareidim 4:42 writes: Whoever holds onto a dispute transgresses a negative commandment, as it is said, “There shall not be any more like Korach and his company.” But in the next paragraph (4:43) he writes: Whoever does not hold onto a dispute against those who are on the wrong path is punished for all their sins, and transgresses a negative commandment: “Do not bear sin because of him” (Vayikra 19:17). We see from this that failing to fight against the wicked is a greater sin than unnecessary fighting, because although both are negative commandments, failing to fight the wicked carries the additional penalty of punishment for the sins of the wicked.

One reason why fighting the wicked is important is that peace is not good for the wicked. Peace allows them to focus on accomplishing their goals. This is what Chazal state (Sanhedrin 71b): “Death for the wicked is good for them and good for the world. Death for the righteous is bad for them and bad for the world. Wine and sleep for the wicked is good for them and good for the world. For the righteous, it is bad for them and bad for the world. Scattering the wicked is good for them and good for the world. Scattering the righteous is bad for them and bad for the world. Gathering the wicked is bad for them and bad for the world. Gathering the righteous is good for them and good for the world. Peace for the wicked is bad for them and bad for the world; peace for the righteous is good for them and good for the world.” Rashi comments, “When the wicked are separated from each other, they cannot conceive of evil counsel and help one another.” Similarly, David Hamelech prayed (Tehillim 92:10), “Let all evildoers be split apart!”

But there are some statements of Chazal that seem to indicate that Hashem wants the wicked to be at peace. Rashi on Bereishis 11:9, quoting Bereishis Rabbah 38:6, says, “Which was worse, the Generation of the Flood or the Generation of the Dispersion? The Generation of the Flood did not raise their hands against Hashem, while the Generation of the Dispersion did. Yet the Generation of the Flood was drowned while the Generation of the Dispersion did not perish from the world. But the reason is that the Generation of the Flood were robbers and there was fighting among them, and therefore they perished. The Generation of the Dispersion treated each other with love and companionship, as it says, ‘One language and unified words’ (Bereishis 11:1). You learn from this that fighting is hated and peace is great.”

In Deretz Eretz Zuta 9, it says, “Rabbi Elazar Hakapar used to say: Great is peace, and hated is dispute. Great is peace, for even if Jews worship idols and there is peace among them, the Divine

Presence cannot harm them, so to speak, as it says, 'Ephraim is joined together with idols, let him be' (Hoshea 4:17).

The answer is that certainly it is bad for the world when the wicked cooperate with each other peacefully. But since peace is a good trait and Hashem does not withhold the reward for any good deed, the wicked are rewarded for their peace, although that reward itself ends up being to their detriment. This is similar to all the reward Hashem grants the wicked in this world, which results in their downfall in the World to Come, as it says, "And He pays back His enemies to their face, to destroy them" (Devarim 7:10).

This concept – that Hashem rewards every little good deed of the wicked – is expressed in our Parsha. The Torah says, "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 Prophet Yishaya said (57:21), "There is no peace, said my G-d, for the wicked." The Midrash comments: From here we see that the Holy One, blessed is He, loves the wicked. This seems to make no sense - if G-d loves the wicked, why doesn't He give them peace? The Chida (Kisei Rachamim, Avos Derabbi Nosson Chapter 12) explains: "When the wicked are in one organization, they can destroy the world and commit terrible sins. Through G-d's great mercy, there is no peace among them, and thus the number of sins is decreased. This is what it means that the Holy One, blessed is He, loves the wicked – he splits them up for their own good, so that they should not have so many sins."

This is how Hashem punished the Generation of the Dispersal: He did not kill them, since they deserved to live in reward for their internal peace. Instead, He split them up with disputes, causing them to lose that good trait of peace, and as a result they were no longer able to destroy the world and commit sins. The dispersal was good for them and good for the world. (Vayael Moshe 2:53)

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