

PARSHAS PINCHAS



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IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO RELY ON HASHEM

HOW WERE BNEI KORACH SAVED?

In this week's parsha, after the *mageifa*, Hashem tells Moshe to count the people once more. When we get to *Shevet Reuven*, the Torah mentions once more the death of Doston and Aviram, and then states, ובני קרח לא מתו – the children of Korach did not die.

The Chida, in his sefer *Nachal Kedumim al ha-Torah*, on this pasuk, brings something remarkable. He writes that he heard from the *chacham hashalem*, the elder sage Rabbi Moshe Gukel of Yerushalayim, that he was told in a dream an explanation of a *passuk* in Tehillim, perek n.

The kapitel begins: *Kavoh kivisi Hashem, vayet elai vayishma shavasi*. I hoped in Hashem; I waited and continued waiting for His salvation. Not merely *kavoh*, but *kavoh kivisi*. I never stopped hoping. Even when I saw no way out, I remained *mekaveh el Hashem*. And Hashem inclined toward me and heard my cry.

Rabbi Moshe Gukel was told that these pesukim are speaking about the Bnei Korach. As the earth opened its mouth to swallow Korach and his assembly, the Bnei Korach had a *hirhur teshuvah*. At that moment they turned to Hashem in hope and cried out to Him.

The kapitel continues: *Vaya'aleni mibor sha'on mitit hayaven. Vayakem al sela raglai, konen ashurai*. He raised me from a roaring pit, from the mire of mud. He set my feet upon a rock and established my steps.

The Chida explains that these words describe what happened to the Bnei Korach. Although they descended into the earth when it opened, Hakadosh Baruch Hu prepared a secure place for them within the abyss. As Rashi says, נתבצר להם מקום גבוה – a high place was fortified for them. “He raised me from the pit” refers to their rescue, and “He set my feet upon a rock” refers to the solid place Hashem established for them, from which they ultimately emerged.

The *pasuk* then says: *Vayiten b'fi shir chadash, tehillah l'Elokeinu*. He placed in my mouth a new song, a praise to our God. What was this *shir chadash*?

The Chida says that the Bnei Korach sang a brachah that had never before been uttered. It was either the brachah of ברוך מוריד שאול ויעל – Blessed is the One Who brings a person down to the depths and raises him up again. That was their “new song,” a praise born from an experience no one had ever lived through before.

NEVER LOSE HOPE!

And in Tehillim, Dovid Hamelech concludes: *Yiru rabim veyira'u veyivtechu baHashem*. Many will see, they will fear, and they will place their trust in Hashem. When people witness this extraordinary miracle and reflect upon it, they will learn what the power of even a moment of teshuvah can accomplish. The Bnei Korach were already falling into the abyss. Yet because they turned their hearts back to Hashem, He saved them at the very last moment.

Everybody knows the Chazal: אפילו חרב חדה מונחת על צווארו של אדם אל ימנע עצמו מן הרחמים. Even if a sharp sword is already resting upon a person's neck, he should never despair of Divine mercy.

The Bnei Korach remain one of the greatest sources of chizuk. No matter what situation a person finds himself in – even if he feels as though he is already in the pit, already in the mud – he must never lose hope. As long as a person continues to be *boteach* baHashem, salvation can come from a place he never imagined.

YESHUAS HASHEM K'HEREF AYIN

There's an amazing story of a Yid who lived in Manchester, England. He was an elderly Jew who said Kaddish with a very unusual *hislhavus*, with extraordinary emotion.

A talmid chacham came to that shul and witnessed this elderly Jew saying Kaddish with such intensity. He asked some of the regular daveners about it, and they told him that this had been his practice for years, but nobody knew the reason.

So he decided to ask the man himself. He approached the elderly gentleman and said, “Could I ask why you say Kaddish with such *hislahavus* and emotion?”

The man replied, “Let me tell you my story.

“Hakadosh Baruch Hu decreed that during World War II I should end up in some of the worst concentration camps. The things that I saw and witnessed, I cannot describe with my mouth. We lived constantly waiting for the final moment, when we would be called to line up and be marched into the gas chambers and then sent to the ovens.

“Personally,” he said, “I was *zocheh* at that time, when everybody had lost hope, to strengthen myself in *bitachon baHashem*. In that Gehinnom, in that turbulent pit, I worked on *bitachon*. All day I repeated to myself: *Yeshuas Hashem k’heref ayin* – the salvation of Hashem comes in the blink of an eye. “I said it so often that my friends stopped calling me by my name. They called me ‘Yeshuas Hashem.’ That’s what I became known as. ‘Hey, Yeshuas Hashem!’

“Then, in one of the camps, the day finally came. We were lined up and marched off toward the gas chambers. We were among the last groups in that camp, so we knew exactly what awaited us. We were under no illusions that we were heading to showers or some spa. They marched us into a waiting room right outside the gas chamber. At the open doorway stood a Nazi guard, a ruthless fellow, making sure none of us escaped. He couldn’t wait for the order to send us into the gas chambers.

“The dread in the room was overwhelming, and we all knew what was coming. I felt a tap on my shoulder, I turned around, and one of my friends said to me, ‘Nu, what do you say now?’ As if to say, ‘What happened to all your *bitachon baHashem*?’ In spite of everything, and in spite of what I was facing, I gathered my remaining strength and shouted out as loud as I could, *Yeshuas Hashem k’heref ayin!* And then I added the Chazal: אפילו חרב אפילו חרב – even if a sharp sword is resting on a person’s neck, he should never despair of mercy.

“I had barely finished saying those words when we noticed the guard had pulled a piece of paper from his pocket, and it slipped from his hand. It was a light piece of paper, and instead of falling straight down, it drifted away and settled just outside the door to the room.

“The *rasha* looked at me. I was standing closest to the door, and he wanted one more opportunity to humiliate me. He barked a few choice words and ordered me to go retrieve the paper and bring it back. All the while he kept his eyes fixed on me to make sure I didn’t escape. I stepped outside, bent down to pick up the paper, and suddenly—clank!—the door slammed shut and locked behind me.

“I was left outside, just me and the Nazi. He tried with all his might to pull the door open, but he couldn’t. He was holding onto me, trying desperately to drag me back to where he could finish the job, but he couldn’t, so I saw my opportunity and I ran for my life. I ran straight into the nearby woods.

“And until this very day,” he said, “I still hear the voices of my friends crying through that door: ‘Don’t forget us! זמא קדיש פאר אונז! Say Kaddish for us!’ And they went *b’mesiras nefesh* to be *mekadesh Shem Shamayim*.

“Every time I say Kaddish, I think about my friends I left behind. They are the ones I have *kavanah* for, that Hashem’s Name should be sanctified through their sacrifice.”

This is what Dovid HaMelech meant. *Yiru rabim veyira’u, veyivtechu baHashem*—many will see and stand in awe, and they will place their trust in Hashem. *Ashrei hagever asher sam Hashem mitvacho*—fortunate is the person who places his trust in Hashem. *V’lo fanah el rehavim v’satei chazav*—he does not turn toward the arrogant and toward the falsehoods that people pursue and believe in. *Rabbos asisa Atah Hashem Elokai*—many are the wonders that You have done. Your works are wondrous, and Your thoughts are always directed toward us. *Ein aroch eilecha*—there is none comparable to You. *Agidah va’adabeirah, atzmu misaper*—to recount and describe them is impossible, for they are too numerous to tell.

This is one of the great lessons of the parsha. Never to succumb to *yeiush*, and never to surrender to the negative thinking that surrounds us all the time. When you read a story like this, when you hear a story like this, stop and reflect on it.

TRUST ONLY IN HASHEM

This is true no matter what situation you find yourself in. A fellow called me this week. He's going through a very difficult *nisayon*. He has cancer in his nose, and the doctors have told him that he needs an especially aggressive course of radiation treatment. I told him, "I understand exactly what you're going through. Did they make the mask for you yet?" "The mask is already prepared," he said. I said, "They're going to lay you on a table and strap that mask tightly onto your face. You'll feel it pressing down on you. A person can become claustrophobic. Then they're going to hit you with very high-intensity radiation." He said, "That's exactly what they're telling me."

Then he added, "They're also telling me that I'm going to lose my beard." I could hear how painful that was for him. "My beard is very precious to me," he said. I asked him why. He said, "This is Reb Chaim Kanievsky's beard." I said, "What do you mean?" He told me that for several years he went to Reb Chaim. The first couple of times, Reb Chaim didn't say anything. Then one year Reb Chaim looked at him and said, "Nu, what's with the face? What's with the beard? Grow a beard." At first he treated it the way many people would. Maybe Reb Chaim just meant it as a nice thing, a *shaynkeit*. But one of Reb Chaim's close associates told him that Reb Chaim meant exactly what he said.

So he grew a beard. Now, years later, the doctors were telling him that the treatment would take it away. The doctors were trying to reassure him, but as he put it, *dos iz nisht a vort fun fashions. Dos iz a vort fun religion.*

I told him, "Don't accept their predictions as an absolute certainty. This is exactly what the pasuk means when it says, *v'lo fanah el rehavam v'satei chazav*—don't turn toward the arrogant and don't place your faith in things that people assume must happen. You don't have to lose a single hair from your beard."

Then I told him, "I was in the same parshah." At one point, I was supposed to become the beardless Rosh Yeshivah. I remember when my doctor gave me the news. "It's not dangerous," he said. "You'll just lose your beard. It's not so terrible. You'll look younger. You'll look better."

I told this fellow, "Don't be intimidated by their predictions. I'll tell you how I got through the treatments." When they strap you into that hard plastic mask, they don't use soft material. They tighten it over your face and secure you to the table. Your eyes are compressed. Your mouth is compressed. The moment they finished strapping me down, I would tell them, "Just let me know when to start." And as soon as the treatment began, I was somewhere else entirely.

I would think only about the pasuk: *Yishlach devaro veyirpa'em, vimaleit mish'chisosam* – Hashem sends forth His word and heals them. As I lay there, I pictured Hakadosh Baruch Hu issuing a decree from Heaven: *Yehi refuah* for this person. And again and again I repeated those words. I was completely in the zone. The technicians asked me afterward, "How was the treatment?" I answered, "What treatment?" They'd say, "No, how was it?" I'd tell them, "I wasn't here." "What do you mean you weren't here?" "I left before you started." One of them once asked me, "Where did you go?" I said, "*Yishlach devaro veyirpa'em, vimaleit mish'chisosam*. I went to my Doctor." I remember the nurse looking at me as if to say, "This fellow must really be sick." Then she asked, "Did it hurt?" I said, "Hurt? No pain. No pain."

The doctors also warned me that I would lose my voice for as long as two years. They told me there was a strong possibility that my voice box would be damaged. Every week I met with the doctor. He would begin each appointment the same way. "I understand if you can't talk." I said, "Doc, why can't I talk?" "What?" "Why can't I talk?" "No, you're not supposed to be able to talk." "Is it against the rules to talk?" "No. You're just not able to." "Well, I am able to."

And every week he would tug on my beard. I told him, "Doc, nothing's coming out. I'm sorry. You're not getting anything." Week after week he would shrug his shoulders. Finally he said to me, "That's the depth of the Jewish connection. That's the depth." "What do you mean?"

He said, "I'm a religious man. A very religious man. I'm the head of this department, and I've treated thousands of patients. I know the Jewish religion has a deep connection with the Lord. I know it exists. I had never witnessed it before. Now I'm seeing it." I told him, "Hopefully before this is over, you'll see even more of it." And Baruch Hashem, day after day, Hakadosh Baruch Hu remains with us. *Atzmu misaper*—His kindnesses are too numerous to recount.

Every one of us has to enter that mode. Whatever people tell you, take their words lightly. Plug yourself into Hashem. Then you can be *zocheh* to *Kavoh kivisi el Hashem, vayet elai vayishma shavasi*—I placed my hope in Hashem, and He turned toward me and heard my cry.

❧ IN CONCLUSION ❧

The words “Uvnei Korach lo meisu,” are one of the greatest sources of chizuk for every person. They teach us that even if we feel we are already in the pit we must never lose hope. The Chida explains that the hope-saturated words of Tehillim (kapital mem) describe how Hashem saved the Bnei Korach. We learn that a moment of teshuvah can accomplish miraculous yeshuos, but even more so, we learn the lesson of hope in the yeshuah of Hashem. The Yid who lived in Manchester, England was known for his constant repeating, “Yeshuas Hashem k’heref ayin” when he was in the camps. And his yeshuah came. We, in our daily battle against yiush and other challenges, must learn not to give in to the falsehoods that people follow, believe in and try to offer to others. Instead of negative prophecies, predictions and prognoses, we have to keep remembering: “Ein aroch Eilecha,” There is none comparable to Hashem. This week (bli neder) if I hear a negative message, I will take those words lightly, and I will speak words of bitachon, reinforcing myself that when I place my hope in Hashem, He will turn to me and He will hear my cry.