



Seeking Peace Parshas Korach

Sometimes a look is enough to understand the complete story. I will never forget those looks that I saw at the entrance to a synagogue in Toronto. Even before I shook the first hand I knew there was a serious problem. Something was amiss; there was a lot of tension in the air.

I waited a bit until I asked - what is wrong? I gathered that some incident had created a rift in the community. The community was facing the looming threat of a division.

I was a guest and it was not my place to step in, but I told myself that I was placed here by G-d for a reason, and therefore must work to resolve the issues at hand, as the Baal Shem Tov has taught us that if someone is shown something, it is because he has some relation to it. I have been guided by this principle for years- if I chance upon a place that requires my action, I must take it, even if uninvited.

I sat down with the community leaders after prayers and found the underlying cause of the issue. I mostly listened, and it quickly became apparent that each side was entrenched and was unwilling to listen to the other side.

I asked to convene the entire community. I did not prepare a speech, but beseeched the Heavens for guidance.

"It is a well-known tradition that Esav hated Jacob," I began, "but hatred among Jews? Amongst yourselves? This is not our way."

They sat in silence.

I told them that we learn about seeking peace from Moshe.

We learn from Moshe the path of peace. It is taught in Perkei Avos: "Any controversy waged in the service of G-d shall in the end be of lasting worth, but any that is not, shall in the end lead to no permanent result. Which controversy was an example of being waged in the service of G-d? Such

was the controversy of Hillel and Shammai. And which was not for G-d? Such was the controversy of Korach and all his company." ¹

Why relate to Korach and his company? It should say 'Moshe and Korach'? Our Sages teach us that Moshe was not part of the dispute. Moshe was humble and modest, and did not respond to Korach's accusations. Korach worked constantly to generate public upheaval by making false accusations against Moshe. The controversy was only with Korach and all his company, and did not involve Moshe.

"Dear Jews," I exclaimed, "look around and search for the good in each other, seek to see each person in a positive light and refrain from thinking negatively of your community members."

I asked each of them to fully forgive anyone else before going to bed; as recited in the prayer before sleep "I hereby forgive anyone who has angered or vexed me; or sinned against me; either physically or financially; against my honor or anything else that is mine; whether accidentally or intentionally; inadvertently or deliberately; by speech or by deed, in this incarnation or in any other – any Israelite; may no man be punished on my account."

We agreed to meet again after the morning prayers to celebrate our unity.

Next morning I experienced a celebratory atmosphere in the synagogue. All looked relieved as if they had removed from themselves a mass burden that weighed on their conscious.

I underscored that, according to some opinions, it was a Torah prohibition to generate a communal rift. Some say that the Torah telling us not to be like Korach counted as an actual commandment. We must strive for peace, I stressed.

We drank a *Lechayim*, and the rivals embraced each other. We then sang and danced in unison.



¹ 5:20.