

PARSHAS KORACH - MR GERSHON HEPNER

In the final showdown between Moshe and Korach, Moshe gave Korach a chilling caution:

"If these people die like all people...then it is not Hashem Who has sent me. However, if Hashem will create a phenomenon, and the earth will open up and swallow them and all their belongings, and they will descend alive into the abyss, then you will know that these people have provoked Hashem." (16:29-30)

It appears that the main thrust of Moshe's stark warning was that Korach may soon meet a violent and dramatic demise. However, he prefaces this threat with a seemingly unnecessary introduction –

"If these people die like all people...then it is not Hashem Who has sent me."

This first half of Moshe's warning appears to be wholly redundant. After all, if Korach would not die by unnatural means, then Nature would surely take its eventual course, and in the fullness of time Korach would die a natural death. Why then, did Moshe make this first statement at all?

Many years ago I posed this question to Rabbi Cooper zt"l, and here is his explanation.

The Mishnah in Kiddushin (61a) teaches us in the name of Rabbi Meir, that a *tenai* (legal stipulation) must resemble that made by Moshe to the tribes who wished to stay on the eastern side of the Yarden. Moshe gave them permission to remain on the east bank of the river, on condition that they would 'do their bit', by fighting alongside their brethren in conquering Eretz Yisroel.

The main requirement in the formulation of a stipulation is that the *tenai* must be *koful* – doubled. This means that the wording of the *tenai* must spell out the consequences of both the fulfilment and also the non-fulfilment of the condition.

We see this in Mattos (32:29-30) where Moshe stated, *"If the children of Gad and Reuven will cross the Yarden with you...and the land shall be captured before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilad as an inheritance. But if they will not cross zealously with you, then they shall inherit in your midst in the land of Canaan."*

Moshe has detailed the outcome of each of the two possibilities; both if the tribes do assist in the war, and also if they do not.

Rabbi Cooper zt"l explained that the same is true here. Moshe has formulated a *tenai* – a legal condition – in his speech to Korach. In keeping with the halochos of a *tenai koful*, Moshe has presented both possible outcomes; that they may die either a natural death or a violent death.

Rabbi Cooper zt"l added that there is a further halochah of a *tenai*, namely that the *hein* option must be stated prior to the *lav* option. Rashi (Kiddushin 61a) defines the *hein* option as that which is expressed in a positive manner, while the *lav* option is that which is expressed in a negative one. When Moshe addressed the tribes, he first stated the option of crossing over the Yarden (positive), and only then spelled out the option of not crossing over the Yarden (negative).

Tosfos (Kiddushin 62a) differs with Rashi and defines the *hein* option as the preferred outcome of the *tenai*, and the *lav* option as the less favoured outcome. Clearly Moshe preferred that the tribes would cross over the Yarden and join the war effort, and so that is the option that was stated first.

Using the definition of Tosfos, we gain a startling insight into Moshe's true wishes. The first half of Moshe's speech deals with the possibility of Korach and his men dying a natural death after living a full lifespan. Seeing as Moshe specified this prospect first, it represents Moshe's preferred outcome of the situation – the *hein* option. However, Moshe goes on to say that if Korach and his men do live and die naturally, *"then it is not Hashem Who has sent me"*. The net result would be that Moshe would go down in history as being a fraud and a charlatan. Moshe paid no regard whatsoever to his own eternal reputation; he preferred to be labelled by the Torah as an impostor, as long as it would save Korach from a violent death, and would allow Korach to live out his days peacefully and in full. We see from here Moshe's true leadership qualities; he was prepared to sacrifice his own welfare for the sake of all others – even for the likes of Korach.

LE'ILUY NISHMAS MY GREAT GRANDFATHER, WHOSE YAHRZEIT FALLS ON 8TH TAMMUZ - HORAV REB YESHAYA NOSSON BEN REB MOSHE ZVI FREILICH HY"D.