Torah Lessons for the Home

Rabbi Shimon Gruen

| Parshas Korach |

Emotional Logic

Arguments Abound

Rashi tells us that Korach had many arguments to support his position. Moshe Rabeinu taught that a tallis must have a strand of *techeiles* in it to effect a mitzvah. Even if the entire tallis is of *techeiles*, it would still need a strand of *techeiles* hanging from it.

But it would seem that Korach had a powerful argument, didn't he? He was a big *lamdan* and he argued with logic; if one strand *patturs* an entire tallis, why would a tallis of *techeiles* require an additional little thread? What difference does the individual make? This was in line with his philosophy of "כל העדה כולם קדושים, *All of the congregants are holy* ומדוע תתנשאו על קהל ה', *so why do you elevate yourself over the congregation of G-d?"*

Korach did not come alone by the way, two hundred and fifty of the esteemed community members were with him. *"Nesi'ei eidah, kri'ei moed, anshei Shem - Men of rank, members of the assembly, prestigious"*. They were all arguing with logical arguments, and yet we do not find that Moshe addressed their concerns or attempted to refute them.

Would Logic Help?

We think it would have been easy to put their arguments to rest. After all the entire mitzvah is to add a thread to the tallis, regardless of what the tallis is made of. We all understand that we can be surrounded by lambs on the fourteenth of Nissan, yet the mitzvah of Korban Pesach is to slaughter the lamb in a prescribed manner. Looking at lambs all day long will not get you anywhere as far as the Torah is concerned. So what do I care if you wear ten *tallisos* made of *techeiles*? As long as you haven't added that one thread, you have not fulfilled the mitzvah.

That's what we think. We think we're that much smarter than Korach. But Moshe Rabeinu knew better. He knew that it wasn't the pilpul that needed to be addressed here. He understood that all of Korach's halachic arguments were not actually as they seemed. It was all about deep underlying emotions, it wasn't about the halacha after all!

Feelings are Rationalized

This is a very important lesson about relationships. Very often feelings are rationalized. Deep emotional hurts are verbalized in a misleading way; it looks like there is logical debate, when in truth, the underlying issue is purely emotional.

Whenever Sury* wanted to visit her parents, her husband Moishy* put up a great fight.

He was always finding reasons not to go. "It will get too late, the kids need their sleep, I can't miss my *chavrusa*," etc. Sury always thought she needed to argue with Moishy and explain away each of his arguments. Finally she realized that it was not about this argument or the other; Moishy just didn't enjoy going!

Different Languages

When we mistake the emotional for logical and create a debate, there is no telling how far it will go. When people are debating ideas, they may have different positions, but each one can hear the other side. One speaks American English while the other speaks British English. There may be some misunderstandings, but ultimately it can be smoothed out.

But if the debate is fueled by emotion rather than logic, there is no understanding one another! One is speaking French, and the other, German. They will not smooth things out no matter how long they argue; they're speaking different languages! You couldn't explain the mitzvah of tzitzis to Korach because he was not speaking the language of Torah, he was speaking the language of resentment towards Moshe!

Words: The Tip of the Iceberg

Emotions are very personal. No two people will ever experience the same episode in the same way. If you've read my book *How to Get Along with Everyone*, you know that some people are more emotionally inclined than others. Even if two people experience the same depth of emotion, their reactions and feelings will differ. That's why you can never argue successfully about something another *feels* strongly about.

The Chazon Ish wrote that "It is not my way to debate with anyone." He explained that so much of an argument is below the surface. All of our opinions are formed by so many underlying issues, it is really impossible to argue with what comes out of one's mouth. There's just so much more that's hidden underneath….

The Stone Cold Logician

Sometimes people misinterpret this. I often hear people complain about somebody, "You can't get anywhere with him – he's so logical. As much as I try to talk to him and get him to understand how I'm feeling, he keeps getting technical and logical and bringing proofs. He's all logic. No emotions." Unfortunately, I've heard that expression many times and it's really a mistake.

When somebody is overly logical, which means that you can debate with them for an hour and they'll still be stuck on their position; is that logic or is it emotion? Does it make sense to be that stubborn?

When you see someone who's often stuck in repeating himself, and proving himself, is that logical? It may come across as logical. That person may not even realize how illogical he's being – but that's not logic. It's emotion.

The Real Cause

I heard this story from the son of the Skolyer Rebbe. He said that someone was once offended and got into a heated argument creating a scene during davening. After *davening*, his father, the Skolyer Rebbe z"l called him over and said, "Take this money and put it under that person's door." He told his father, "*Tatte ehr hut nisht geshrigen vegen gelt* – He wasn't carrying on about money. Why are you sending him money?"

His father told him, "*Venn ah yid shreit, shreit ehr fin taash!* – When a yid complains, it's his pocket complaining!" You see somebody who's complaining about something – he's passionate, he's debating, so what do some people do? They start arguing with him.

But actually, he's carrying on because he's emotionally irked, or he's financially challenged or stressed... When you address those emotions or you give him the money, all of a sudden, he'll stop disrupting in *shul*. He wasn't complaining because of what you think. He was screaming because something was *kvetching* him.

Hypersensitivity

When you try to make someone comfortable, show them that you understand them, and address the underlying emotions, you'll probably get

a lot further. Sadly, people fall into the habit of debating emotions, and they just keep doing it. You can see people making this mistake for twenty years in a row. They keep having arguments every day without understanding where the angst is really coming from.

If someone keeps getting offended by you, then yes, it could be that they're hyper-sensitive. But recognize that you can't debate away hyper-sensitivity. If someone is very sensitive, that's a feeling they have, and you can't change someone's feelings. If there is a behavior in someone else we would like to change, we first need to recognize that it's emotions we need to address, not debates.

Asserting Control

Recently I was dealing with a situation between a father and his *bachur*. This *bachur* was trying to explain to his father how wrong his parenting style was. "None of my friends are controlled by their fathers. You're always on top of me." The father started debating about it. It turned into a whole powow.

What he didn't realize was that the father's control over him was not because he *believes* that it's proper to control an 18-year-old son. His constant need to assert his authority was because the father felt he was not in control. He didn't feel that he was respected and that his opinions were taken seriously.

If the son would show his father the proper respect this would be a mute point.

All of the father's arguments about, "Well, today's generation…" and "I can't trust you" and "Look how you proved yourself," that's all just backing the way he *feels*.

What Is It Really About?

I was also dealing with a situation, not so long ago where one child was unfortunately very challenged in Yiddishkeit. One of the brothers was doing much better connecting with that sibling than the parents. He was taking care of that brother, understanding him, and having an influence on him.

The parents were constantly knocking him for relating so well to the other one. "Who do you think you are?", "I think you're making mistakes", "You're actually encouraging him to do the wrong thing." It was very challenging.

When I got involved, I tried to explain what was happening to this older, well meaning brother. I said, "I see how you're treating your brother and you're doing a great job. I don't think that your parents are necessarily disagreeing with what you're doing. I think they're feeling challenged by the fact that you have such a good relationship with your brother and they don't. When you start giving them more credit and involving them, they'll start understanding you and appreciating what you're actually doing for them by staying connected to your brother. Try it out."

That's what happened. It worked. All of a sudden, he became the "go-to person", whom his parents actually involved. He was the one they turned to and discussed things with. He became their successful middleman to get across to that child in a healthy way.

What Did Moshe Do?

When we turn to these "debates" and start debating about a tallis made of *techeiles*, you don't get anywhere. Being "right" and proving your point is not going to get you anywhere. What happened with Moshe Rabbeinu in the end? Did he make Korach see the truth? No.

Moshe Rabbeinu knew that Korach was doing something very wrong, so he did what he had to do with Korach and that was the end of him. That's also a lesson. Do what you have to do, but don't debate. That's even worse. Aside from anything that we're disagreeing about, the very fact that we're now disagreeing about who is right and wrong just escalates everything to the next level and makes it even more emotionally challenging. You're probably going to be causing more damage by creating a new issue of who's right and wrong. That's an important lesson that we can learn here from Moshe Rabbeinu.

Chinuch: Don't Explain Everything

Regarding *chinuch habanim*, parents want to feel in control. They feel challenged by their children's behavior (they're tantruming or being *chutzpadig)* and it has to be dealt with.

Very often, we get technical and start explaining to a child just how *chutzpadig* and how inappropriately they're behaving. And then it becomes an issue, "But everyone does… but everyone in my class said… but you don't understand because you're older." So are you getting anywhere by "explaining"?

Is your child feeling challenged by you? Is your child feeling emotionally comfortable? Is his resistance and his logical rationalizing of what he's doing coming from a place where he's disagreeing with you and you have to now prove to him how wrong he is?

So there's something about being able to overlook the logic. Look toward the emotion. Look at what's triggering it and usually you'll be getting much further.

* * *

-Q&A-

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org

Question:

My son is taking forever to get ready for bed every night. Everything is a whole ritual and takes so much of our time and energy. We've already tried explaining the proper way to him, but he just turns it into an argument. What can we do?

Answer:

There's a way of "pushing" and a way of "pulling". Why are you pushing someone to do something? Pushing someone to do something means: I'm standing behind you and pushing you towards something that you don't want to do.

Pulling someone, on the other hand, means standing in front of him and attracting him towards what you want him to do. It's a lot more effective. It's also much healthier and much more long-lasting than standing from behind and pushing him towards somewhere he doesn't want to go to.

Even if you could do it and it works in the end, you could manipulate him and force him to do your bidding, is that what you really want? This is a general idea about motivating people – about pulling them versus pushing them.

In this case, instead of pushing the child, tell him that you're hanging something on the wall.Take a quarter and tape it to the wall on top of your child's bed and say, "Now it's 9:00. If you're in bed by 9:25, then you can take the quarter down from on top of the bed where it's hanging and it's yours. If you're not in bed by 9:25, then I'll walk into your room at 9:25 and take the quarter off the wall, nothing else. You don't have to." It was just an incentive. It's there for you. All you have to do is get ready, end up in bed and take the quarter off the wall.

It worked. Believe it or not, the child was drawn to go to the bathroom and brush his teeth and take a drink, all in the allotted time, because there was a quarter at the end of the line (for some children you might have to use two quarters!). And that's something you may have to remind the child every day, but the idea is: don't push someone to do something difficult – make it interesting. Let them want the end result and iy"H, it's hopefully become easier and easier.

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