

Shabbos Shelach 80 – Pirkei Avos Chapter Three-Round 2 6 21 20

We have been disconnected for nearly one hundred days. We feel desperate to reconnect.

The excitement we each have sensed when coming across someone we barely had any contact with over this time, is palpable.

What is it exactly that we miss from each other?

Why do we feel good when we are again in each other's company?

Is there a gauge to know when our 'connection' is genuine or not?

Read on and discover the secret to achieving healthy bonding.

The Entertainer

The entire nation was emotionally swept up by Korach and his cohorts 'altruistic' attempt to stand up for their honor, unifying them in rebellion against the leadership of Moshe and Aharon.

Hashem suddenly appears to the entire assembly at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting declaring His intent to wipe them all out in an instant. Moshe once again intercedes on their behalf by calling out to אלקי הרוחות, *the G-d of the spirits*, beseeching Hashem to only hold accountable the instigator and not the entire assembly.

This unusual description of the 'G-d of the spirits' appears in one other instance. When Moshe requests of Hashem to appoint an heir to his leadership, he addresses Hashem as, the 'G-d of the spirits', once again.

What רוחות - *spirits* are intimated here?

The Talmud relates how the very learned sage Geniva, was once walking towards Rav Huna and Rav Chisda. As he was heading their way they debated whether they should stand up to honor him since although he was a great Talmid Chochom but he had a reputation of being extremely contentious. When he approached them he inquired about the nature of their argument. Not wanting to insult him they claimed they were discussing a matter related to the רוחות, implying the literal meaning of רוחות - the winds. (גיטין לא.)

The 18th century great sage and impassioned advocate of *chassidus*, Reb Yaakov Shimshon of Shepetovka, a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch, questions how was it permitted for these sages to resort to lying in order to cover up their conversation. He suggests that

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although Geniva understood them to be speaking about the winds, in truth they were honestly referring to the very issue at hand.

The Mishna in Avos (3 13) refers to two רוחות - spirits: כל שרוח הבריות נוחה הימנו רוח המקום נוחה הימנו, *If the spirit of one's fellows is pleased with him, the spirit of the Omnipresent is pleased with him.*

They were truthfully talking about 'spirits' and the need to respect only one whom possesses both ירוחותי - spirits; one whose positive actions delight the spirit of one's fellow man that assures that the spirit of the Omnipresent is pleased with him too.

Similarly, in seeking an appropriate candidate to handle the nation, Moshe makes reference to the 'G-d of spirits', intimating the need for someone who is not only erudite and devout, but personable and liked by his constituents, for only then will Hashem be pleased with him as well.

But how is this idea relevant to the impending decree against the rebellious nation and Moshe's appeal to the 'G-d of the spirits'?

How was Korach able to capture the hearts and minds of the entire nation, nearly steering them away from their love and allegiance to Moshe and Aharon?

Clearly Korach was a brilliant and charismatic figure, an accomplished member of the tribe of Levi who merited the exalted role to carry the Holy Ark. He begins his provocation by claiming he is the champion of the people, who understands and appreciates each one of their inherent holiness who deserves to aspire equally to any role they may choose in serving Hashem. He clearly 'connected' with the people. Their spirits were most pleased in his devotion to, and admiration of, them.

How is it then that Hashem was not pleased with him? Doesn't the Mishna assert that if one can win over the hearts of the people then the spirit of G-d is evidently with him?

In many editions of Avos, this Mishna is accompanied with an additional statement made by Rebbi Dosa ben Harkinas, who said: *Late morning sleep, midday wine, children's chatter, and sitting in the assemblies of the ignorant, remove a man from the world.*

There seems no apparent connection between these two halves.

Humans are wired for connection. When we experience authentic connection to a person, a group, an ideal or to a people, there is an unexplained satisfaction of belonging. When we connect out of devotion to one another, wanting to share values and noble goals, the bond is real and creates an inner joy in the awareness of that. But so often we seek connection artificially, creating an illusion of bonding that only lasts as long as the mirage can be maintained, before it inevitably disappears.

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'*Late morning sleep*', the Abarbenel teaches, is a metaphor for those who seek a bond with a mate, willing to jeopardize daily duties for a few fleeting moments of intimate connection.

'*...midday wine*', relates to our quest for friendship that is often developed over food and drink in an atmosphere of 'chilled' existence, detached from any defined and purposeful objective, other than the need to bond and experience the resulting pleasantness it brings.

'*...children's chatter*', is a euphemism for purposeless humor and laughter that is a great connector, not only among the eager audience who enjoys a good laugh together, but certainly to the performer as well.

'*...and sitting in the assemblies of the ignorant*', refers to empty causes that bring together large numbers of people to root or rally for their 'team', creating a contrived objective that allows them to rejoice together over goals and victories that produce nothing of value, merely a sense of connection and belonging.

Korach pined for this elusive sense of connection. It was evident in his unhealthy relationship and dependence he had to his wife, who stoked his passion for honor by inciting him against Moshe, as we are taught, and in his succumbing to her provocations.

The Talmud relates how he enticed the two hundred and fifty leaders of the assemblies, men of renown, with drink and food, devising an atmosphere of camaraderie, that he would utilize in capturing their favor and allegiance in pursuit of his personal goals. (סנהדרין נה.)

Korach used derisive humor in the famous routine as depicted in the Midrash where he retells the story of a widow who had two daughters and one field. When she came to plough, Moshe tells her she can't plough with an ox and an donkey together; she came to sow, he tells her about the laws restricting mixed seeds; she came to reap and stack the corn, he tells her to leave the gleaning, the forgotten sheaf and the corner of the field for the poor; she came to thresh, he instructs her regarding tithes. Yet she accedes.

She eventually sells her field, purchases with the proceeds two lambs to clothe herself from its shearing and enjoy its products and discovers she must give away the firstborn and the shearing to the Kohen. She decides instead to slaughter the animal only to find out she must relinquish the shoulder, two cheeks and maw. In utter frustration she declares the animal *cherem* - taboo, whereupon Aharon reveals to her that all *cherem* items become the property of the Kohen.

Korach mockingly describes how Aharon took them, departed and left her weeping with her two daughters. Such was the lot, he bellowed, which befell this unfortunate woman!

Korach rallied his followers with the promise of exquisite and inspired connection. Under the united party banner of כל העדה כולם קדושים, *For the entire assembly - all of them - are holy*, he declares, "we must unite!"

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The Mishna in placing Rebbi Dosa's warning immediately following the dictum of 'spirits', is teaching us not to be deluded by those who seemingly captivate the hearts of their cohorts as being representative of *one who the spirit of people are 'pleased' with*. It is not their inner good essence that has captured the hearts of man, merely their artificial connection that is fueled by self-promotion. Only one, who the spirits of the people are pleased, as the Mishna affirms, *הימנו*, from 'them' - their true selves, and not their false devices, is one who will gain the stamp of approval from Hashem.

Moshe points to this flaw when demanding Korach be held accountable for his deceptive 'spirit' by summoning the 'G-d of the spirits' who will see through this facade in realizing that the people aren't truly bonded with Korach, and only the sinner, Korach, should be punished.

May all our interactions be inspired by an honest desire to connect and express each one of ours greatness, reflecting solely the will of Hashem, and not deceive ourselves by entertaining the false notion that we can find happiness in vacuous bonding.