

Korah and Torah Min Hashamayim

Rabbi Mois Navon

פרשת קרח - (א) ויקח קרח

We all know that the text leaves open the object that Korach took (Gem. San 109b, etc.). The Ibn Ezra says that Korah questioned Moshe's prophecy regarding the kahuna:

אבן עזרא במדבר פרשת קרח פרק טז פסוק א

(א) ויקח קרח זה הדבר היה במדבר סיני כאשר נתחלפו הבכורים ונבדלו הלויים, כי חשבו ישראל שמשה אדונינו עשה מדעתו לתת גדולה לאחיו,

So Korah claimed Moshe was giving out good jobs to his own family. But this is not why Moshe was so embittered by Korah's attack. What was at stake here was Korah's claim against the veracity of Moshe's prophecy. If he made up the business about appointing Aharon, what else did he make up?! If Korah is right, the whole veracity of the Torah is in questions. And this is why Moshe could not suffice with simply winning the argument, he could not even suffice that Korah would die, but rather that Korah had to die in a SUPERNATURAL way to show that God Himself supported Moshe and that no one should ever question Moshe's claim to truth.

Again, if it was not shown that Moshe was a prophet above all, and that all his words were divine, the Torah would be discredited and the whole of Judaism would come tumbling down.

And so Korah meets an immediate and supernatural death, and so ends the questioning of Moshe's Torah.

Unfortunately, this very attack of Korah is being wielded today by people in the modern orthodox community.

This week I attended a conference in JM entitled "What does "Torah From Heaven" Mean?" (מה פירוש : תורה מן השמיים)?

Now you might ask, what need is there for a WHOLE CONFERENCE to discuss this one question, I mean, every schoolchild knows that it means that God gave Moses the Torah at Sinai.

And if you were unclear, you could read the Rambam's commentary on the Mishna where he explains the notion in the first sentence of his 8th principle of faith:

רמב"ם על משנה מסכת סנהדרין פרק י משנה א

והיסוד השמיני הוא תורה מן השמים. והוא, שנאמין שכל התורה הזו הנמצאת בידינו היום הזה היא התורה שניתנה למשה, ושהיא כולה מפי הגבורה, כלומר שהגיעה עליו כולה מאת ה' ...

Appropriately, the Rambam explains that the verse that is the basis for this principle is from Moses' polemic with Korah:

והדבר המורה על היסוד הזה השמיני הוא אמרו בַּזֹּאת תִּדְעוּן כִּי יִקֹּץ שְׁלַחֲנִי ... כִּי לֹא מִלְבִּי.

So what need is there for a conference on this?

For those of you who are unaware, there are people today who do not believe in Torah Min Hashamayim. This is not earth-shattering news; we know that there are many

hilonim who don't believe. HOWEVER, what is a relatively new phenomenon concerns "religious" Jews, people who still want to be considered "religious" but cannot bring themselves to believe in Torah min hashamayim as it has been defined by the Rambam and understood for generations.

These people have been persuaded of the existence of textual issues in the Torah that have been promoted by Biblical criticism in its various forms.

So, in order to still be able to stay within the rubric of the Rambam's 8th principle, they want to change the meaning of "Heaven" to mean not specifically God to Moshe at Sinai, but God to anyone at anytime. And so if you find things that look like insertions by different authors they too were prophets, bringing God's word firm HEAVEN.

The problem with this approach is that now you are in violation of the Rambam's 7th principle of faith that Moses' prophecy was on a level unattainable by anyone else. And this is critical for he is the lawgiver – who saw God face to face without any intermediary imagery in need of human interpretation. The law must be received with ultimate clarity, not by any prophet.

As such, this redefinition of "heaven", of ongoing revelation, is beyond the pale.

But then there are others, some, honest people in the orthodox camp, who say, look there are textual issues, what are we to do? What about trying to put together a "critical edition" of the text? Why not go through all the vast material available to us today to piece together a "best version"?

The fact is that we – whom they call the "fundamentalist camp" - are well aware that there are textual issues in the text. We see this is the ADRNatan which talks about the words Ezra put dots over because he was unsure of them.

מסכתות קטנות מסכת אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א פרק לד
עשר [פעמים מופיעות] נקודות בתורה אלו הן : ... למה אלא כך אמר עזרא אם יבא אליהו ויאמר לי "מפני מה כתבת כך?" אומר אני לו "כבר נקדתי עליהן, " ואם אומר לי "יפה כתבת!" אעבור נקודה מעליהן [ז"א אסיר את הנקודה]:

I believe that the critical edition, the ideal text, will be made available to us by the Messiah. The thing is that we are living in Messianic times and so there is this messianic urge to build out the ideal text ourselves now.

The problem with the endeavor of building a critical edition is simply that one will become sidetracked (mesiach daato), one will ultimately fail to appreciate the text as we have it as divine because he will be so bogged down in what word, what verse, what text is the ultimately original text.

And thus he will have applied to him the Gemara's harsh pronouncement that such a person loses the WORLD TO COME:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף צ עמוד א
משנה. כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא, שנאמר ועמד כלם צדיקים לעולם יירשו ארץ נצר מטעי מעשה ידי להתפאר. ואלו שאין להם חלק לעולם הבא: האומר ... ואין תורה מן השמים, ... גמרא ... [צט.]. והאומר אין תורה מן השמים וכו'. תנו רבנן: "כי דבר ה' בזה ומצותו הפר הכרת תכרת - זה האומר אין תורה מן השמים... הכרת תכרת, הכרת - בעולם הזה, תכרת - לעולם הבא.

The Gemara explains that if one says ONE PASSUK:

... כי דבר ה' בזה - זה האומר אין תורה מן השמים. ואפילו אמר: כל התורה כולה מן השמים, חוץ מפסוק זה שלא אמרו הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא משה מפי עצמו - זהו כי דבר ה' בזה. ...

Strangely, the Rambam GOES beyond the GEMARA and says in his HALACHIC formation – even ONE WORD!

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג הלכה ח
... שלשה הן הכופרים בתורה: האומר שאין התורה מעם ה' אפילו פסוק אחד אפילו תיבה אחת
אם אמר משה אמרו מפי עצמו הרי זה כופר בתורה,

I believe that the the Rambam goes even further that the Gemara and says we must believe EVERY WORD (not only every pasuk as the Mishna demands) lest we lose our place in the world to come, he was EMPHASIZING that without relating to every WORD as divine we will fail to immerse ourselves in the text, in the primary conduit that we have to reach God. Without relating to the text IN TOTO as divine, we will fail to be moved to the action that is demanded of the Jew.

And this explains why one loses ones place in the world to come. That is, the punishment doesn't seem to fit the crime. I don't believe in a word, in a sentence, in a text and my whole life is erased!?!

Failure to believe in a text should not logically remove one from eternal reward – there is no seemingly mida-kenneged-mida meeting out of punishment, there is no – you stole something so you must repay it plus some penalty.

The answer is that it is not a punishment. It is a consequence!

What is the world to come? It is not a place of 72 virgins! It is the place where you enjoy the fruits of your labor of fulfilling God's will in this world. If you do not relate to the text as divine, you will ultimately fail to fulfill the divine will commanded therein and you will thus naturally have no place in the world that is built out of fulfillment of that divine will. Yes, you may do this mitzvah or that; you may even be conscientious about doing them. But when push comes to shove, when things get difficult, you will say, is that really in the text, is that really God's will?

Let us conclude with the words of the Rambam's 8th principle:

רמב"ם על משנה מסכת סנהדרין פרק י משנה א
... אין תורה מן השמים, אמרו שהוא האומר שכל התורה כולה מפי הקדוש ברוך הוא חוץ מפסוק אחד שלא אמרו הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא משה מפי עצמו וזה הוא כי דבר ה' בזה - יתעלה ה' ממה שאומרים הכופרים - אלא כל אות שבה יש בה חכמות ונפלאות למי שהבינו ה', ולא תושג תכלית חכמתה, ארוכה מארץ מדה ורחבה מני ים. ואין לאדם אלא להתפלל כמו דוד משיח אלהי יעקב שהתפלל: גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך [תהלים פרק קיט פסוק יח].