



מוקדש לחיזוק ההתקשרות
לכ"ק אדמו"ר

נדפס ע"י ולזכות
הרה"ת ר' אלחנן משה
וזוגתו מרת חנה זלאטא
ומשפחתם שיחיו
טענענבוים

להצלחה רבה ומופלגה
בשליחותם הק'
בנאפה וואלי, קאליפורניא

Who's the Culprit?

IN HONOR OF 60 YEARS SINCE THE REBBE INTRODUCING HIS REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING RASHI, 5725—5785, THIS MONTHLY COLUMN FEATURES AN ADAPTATION OF ONE OF THE REBBE'S "RASHI SICHOS."

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וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל-פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵל-אֱ-לֹהֵי
הַרְוּחַת לְכָל-בָּשָׂר הָאִישׁ אֶחָד יַחֲטֵא
וְעַל כָּל-הָעֵדָה תִּקְצָף: (טו, כב)

They fell on their faces and said,
“Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all
flesh, if one man sins, shall You be
angry with the whole congregation?”

”אֵל-אֱ-לֹהֵי הַרְוּחַת: יוֹדֵעַ מַחֲשָׁבוֹת; אִין מַדְתָּהּ כְּמֹדֵת
בְּשָׂר וְדָם, מְלֹךְ בְּשָׂר וְדָם שְׁסָרְחָה עָלָיו מִקְצַת מְדִינָה, אִינוּ
יוֹדֵעַ מִי הַחוֹטֵא, לְפִיכָה בְּשֵׂהוּא כּוֹעֵם נִפְרַע מִכָּלָם, אֲבָל
אַתָּה, לְפָנֶיךָ גְלוּיּוֹת כָּל הַמַּחֲשָׁבוֹת וַיּוֹדֵעַ אַתָּה מִי הַחוֹטֵא.

הָאִישׁ אֶחָד: הוּא הַחוֹטֵא וְאַתָּה עַל כָּל הָעֵדָה
תִּקְצָף; אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, יָפָה אֲמַרְתֶּם,
אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ וּמוֹדִיעַ מִי חָטָא וּמִי לֹא חָטָא.”

“*Hashem, the G-d of the spirits:* [means:] You know [their] thoughts. Your nature is not like that of flesh and blood: A human king against whom part of [his] country has offended does not know who the sinner is; therefore, when he gets angry, he punishes everyone. But to You, all thoughts are revealed, and You know who the sinner is.

One man: is the sinner, yet You would be angry with the whole congregation?! The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “You have spoken correctly. I know and will make known who sinned and who did not sin.” (Rashi)

At first glance it seems that Rashi’s intention is to say that a human king also punishes those in the country who did not offend, since he is unable to know who did and who did not; Moshe’s argument was that Hashem ought not act like this, but rather distinguish between those who sinned and those who did not, and not punish everyone.

According to this interpretation, however, Rashi’s words require clarification:

The comparison to a “king of flesh and blood” is unneces-



sary in order to establish the demand that Hashem not punish the innocent—this is a logical and obvious truth!

Furthermore, even a human king, if he is honest and fair, would certainly not punish innocent people solely due to his inability to identify the true culprit.

Rashi's true meaning lies in his precise language, מֶלֶךְ בָּשָׂר "אִדָּם שֶׁסָּרְחָה עֲלָיו מִקְצַת מְדִינָה אֵינוּ יוֹדֵעַ מִי הַחוֹטֵא":

The expressions of "סרחה" and "חוטא" are not equal in meaning: A "חוטא" is a person who committed a real sin against the king and rebelled against him, whereas "סרחה" "מקצת מדינה" means that some of the country's residents behaved in a way that was not to the liking of the king. Still, there was no real rebellion against him.

We are dealing here, therefore, with a case of a single individual (the "חוטא") who incited some of the residents of the state and caused them to misbehave ("סרחה עליו"). And since the king does not know who the sinner responsible for instigating the rebellion is, he punishes even those who were merely swept along—but not the rest of the country's citizens, who are innocent.

The same thing happened here:

In *possuk* 19, on the words "וַיִּקְהַל עֲלֵיהֶם קֹרַח" ("Korach assembled [all the congregation] against them") Rashi comments: "...he circulated among the tribes and enticed them [to join him]... until **they were all persuaded [to join him].**" Korach was, therefore, the main "חוטא"—the instigator—and he dragged "the whole congregation" along with him into the rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu.

Even with regard to the other leaders of the rebellion—Dasan and Aviram and the other 250 men—Rashi on *possuk* 1 says: "Because *shevet* Reuven was encamped south [of the Mishkan, being] a neighbor of Kehos and his descendants who were [also] encamped to the south, **they joined with Korach in his dispute.**" In other words, they were all dragged into the *machlokes* by Korach.

This, then, was Moshe's argument: A "king of flesh and

blood" might, in such a case, punish all those who followed the instigator, since he does not have the ability to know who is the instigator and who a follower. But you, Hashem, since all thoughts are revealed before you, and you know that Korach alone is the "חוטא," it is appropriate that you punish only him, and not those who followed him.

To this Hashem replied, "You have spoken correctly. I know and will make known who sinned and who did not sin": You are right that only the sinner should be punished and not those who follow him. However, your statement that Korach alone is the sinner ("האיש אחד יחטא") is not correct, for I know that Dasan and Aviram are also sinners in their own right (and not only under the influence of Korach). Therefore, they too will be punished (but not the rest of the Yidden).



A profound lesson emerges from this exchange between Moshe Rabbeinu and Hashem:

The preceding *pessukim* recount the audacious and brazen words of Dasan and Aviram directed at Moshe Rabbeinu (see *possuk* 12 and on), causing him immense anguish and distress.

And yet, despite this, Moshe sought to exonerate them and attribute the blame entirely to Korach.

This teaches us the extent to which one must strive to inculcate in oneself the instruction to always be "*dan l'kaf zechus*"—to judge every person favorably—even when, judging by their exterior appearance, it does not seem possible.

Takeaway:

Don't get distracted by external appearances; every single person deserves to be judged favorably.

(Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 13, p. 51; vol. 18, p. 196)