

Parsha Ponders

Korach | July 4, 2024 | 29 Sivan 5784

Moshe's mechila measurement¹

...רב לכם בני לוי

...It's too much for you, sons of Levi!²

This week's *parsha* chronicles the tragic rebellion of Korach, the Levi, and his band of supporters. Korach claimed that the entire nation was Holy, and was against this whole caste system. Everyone is worthy to be the *Kohen Gadol*. He also challenged the leadership of Moshe, and the authenticity of his transmission of the word of G-d.

When Moshe initially responded to the rebellion, he told Korach and his followers: רב לכם, it's too much for you! We find a similar wording by Hashem later expressed towards Moshe. When Moshe wanted to enter the land of Israel, after being sentenced to die in the wilderness, Hashem told him to stop praying. He said לך רב!³ The sentence is final; he is to die in the wilderness. Our Sages note this parallel language. They teach⁴ that with the same stick that Moshe hit (Korach) with, he himself is struck. One wonders why Hashem using this expression is referred to as being "struck". What's the big deal?

Another teaching⁵ of our Sages clarifies Hashem's intent with רב לך. Hashem was telling Moshe that he had accrued six transgressions. As such, he can't enter the land of Israel. Moshe disagreed with the sin that he called the Jewish people a band of rebels⁶. This can't be a sin, as he learned this mode of conduct from Hashem Himself. Hashem called the Jewish people rebels⁷. If so, he should only have five sins under his belt⁸. However, why should that make a difference? Yes, five sins are less than six, but what did Moshe think that would accomplish?

¹ Based on [Chanukas HaTorah](#) to [Numbers](#) 16:7

² [Numbers](#) *loc. cit.*

³ [Deuteronomy](#) 3:26

⁴ The [Chanukas HaTorah](#) quotes this from a *Midrash*, although I couldn't find any say it the way he quotes it. It's basically [Bamidbar Rabbah](#) 18:18, although the way it's phrased is reversed. However, the way he quotes it appears in [Peirushim U'Pesakim L'Rabbeinu Avigdor HaTzarfasi ad. loc.](#), by one of the *Ba'alei Tosafos*, which is brought in [Kovetz Shitos Kamai](#) to [Sotah](#) 13b and [Sanhedrin](#) 110a. The *gemarra* [Sotah](#) notes the parallel language without the stick metaphor

⁵ The [Chanukas HaTorah](#) cites this from a *Midrash* and writes that this also appears in [Rikanati](#). I couldn't find this quoted in any early source. See note 7

⁶ [Numbers](#) 20:10. This could be going with the opinion of the [Rambam](#) in [Shemoneh Perakim](#) Chapter 4, that Moshe's sin at the waters of strife was that he got angry, as we see from this verse. [Bamidbar Rabbah](#) 19:9 says similarly. Another possibility is that the sin was that he disgraced the Jewish people, as brought by the [Ibn Ezra](#) to v. 8 in the name of an anonymous sage, and [Abarbanel](#) to v. 1 from [Chazal](#) (see [Otzar HaMidrashim Al Misas Aharon](#) § 3 and [Derashos HaRan](#) Chapter 9)

⁷ [Numbers](#) 17:25. This back and forth about Moshe's "rebels" sin does appear in many sources: [Devarim Rabbah](#) 2:8; [Devarim Rabbah](#) (Lieberman ed.) *parshas Va'eschanan*; [Tanchuma Yashan Va'eschanan](#), [Hosafah](#) § 1; [Midrash HaGadol](#) and [Midrash Tenaim](#) to [Deuteronomy](#) 3:24; [Yalkut Shimoni Va'eschanan](#) § 81

⁸ One wonders what the other five sins were

It must be that the back and forth was regarding a *gemarra* which teaches⁹ us that the verse “G-d overlooks two three times”¹⁰ means that Hashem forgives up to five sins, two and three. That’s one opinion. Another opinion is that the verse means up to three, but no more. That means that according to the first opinion, Moshe had only transgressed five sins, and was worthy of Hashem’s forgiveness.

Now, in the dispute with Korach, Moshe said רב לכם. Rashi tells¹¹ us that Moshe felt hopeless that he could request forgiveness from Hashem for their iniquity. This was already the fourth time the Jews had caused problems¹². But this is problematic. In the later event, when Moshe and Hashem were arguing about how many sins he had committed, Moshe was relying on the fact that Hashem forgives up to five times! Why then in the episode of Korach did he feel there was no hope for forgiveness? They had only sinned four times!

It must be that Moshe held like the other opinion, that Hashem forgives up to three sins. With the episode of Korach, they had already reached four, and he thus felt hopeless. We now see why Hashem responded to Moshe with the same expression of רב לך. Hashem was telling Moshe that very nice you have five sins, but since you earlier said רב לכם to Korach, you revealed that you really hold that Hashem forgives up to three sins, but not more. With the very stick that Moshe hit Korach, he struck himself.

We see from here an awe-inspiring concept. It sounds like from the above back and forth that Hashem would have been willing to forgive Moshe up to five sins. The problem is that Moshe was being inconsistent, as he previously showed he held that Hashem forgives up to three times. This had tremendous ramifications, as it led to Moshe not being able to enter the land. This is a clear demonstration of a teaching of our Sages, that Hashem measures us by the same measuring stick we use¹³. Had Moshe been more generous with his understanding of Hashem’s forgiveness, Hashem would have forgiven his indiscretions. Accordingly, this story should give us pause on how we judge others. We must remember that we will be judged according to our measuring stick.

Good Shabbos

⁹ Yoma 86b and Tosefta Yoma 4:12. Both only bring the second opinion. It’s not clear what the Chanukas HaTorah is referring to when he says this is a dispute. However, see Mera Dachya to Mishneh Torah Hilchos Teshuva 3:5 who has an approach to say that the initial reading of this verse by the *gemarra* was five sins, but the conclusion is three

¹⁰ Job 33:29

¹¹ Rashi to Numbers 16:4

¹² This is a unique reading of the intent of רב לכם. Rashi only makes his comment about feeling hopeless when it says that Moshe fell on his face. We don’t necessarily see any sense of despair in Moshe telling Korach that רב לכם. See Rashi ad. loc.

¹³ מידה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו (Sotah 1:7)