

Parsha Ponders

Korach | June 30, 2022 | 1 Tammuz 5782

*Desperation salvation*¹

ויאמרו בני ישראל אל-משה לאמר הן גוענו אבדנו כלנו אבדנו: כל הקרב הקרב אל-משכן יקוק ימות האם
תמנו לגוע

The Children of Israel said to Moshe, saying: “Behold! We have perished, we’re lost; we’re all lost²!
Anyone who comes close³ to the *Mishkan* of Hashem will die! Will we stop perishing?”⁴

After a series of devastating blows, the morale of the Jewish people had reached a new low. Many had died at this point, due to unwarranted complaints or all out acts of rebellion. Those that remained were scared for their lives. They came to Moshe essentially expressing their complete despair. While this is a tragic point in the history of the Jews, we can perhaps glean an inspiring message.

One of the methods of biblical hermeneutics involves analyzing parallel phraseology. Our tradition⁵ has it that the word “האם”, which expresses a question, appears only twice in *Tanach*. Once here – “will we stop perishing?” – and once in the book of Job. There, Job asks: האם אין עזרתי בי, is there not anyone who can help me⁶? The fact that האם appears in only these two places signifies that there’s something we can learn by comparing these verses. What lesson is tucked away inside these seemingly unrelated expressions of surprise⁷?

Our Sages tell us⁸ that one should never despair from Divine Mercy. They say this even if one has a sword pressed against their neck. Furthermore, they teach us⁹ that even when Hashem is angry, so-to-speak, He “remembers” His trait of mercy.

Now, the phrase “will we stop perishing?” uses the word תמנו. Besides for “stop”, it can also connote “finalize”. Meaning, the Jews were asking if they were assured death. They felt as if they had a sword against their necks, as this was a time of Hashem’s anger. The verse in Job is teaching us that even so, “is there not anyone who can help me?” This is meant to be rhetorical. Of course there’s someone who can help me! Hashem’s mercy knows no bounds. Even at this desperate hour, there’s still hope. There’s always hope.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Derashos Eisan HaEzrachi *parshas Korach* s.v. במסורה האם, by Rav Avraham Rappaport (17th century), a student of the Sema

² See Targum Onkelos and Targum “Yonasan” *ad. loc.*

³ See HaEmek Davar *ad. loc.* who addresses the double expression here הקרב | הקרב, and the line that separates the two

⁴ Numbers 17:27,28

⁵ מסורה

⁶ Job 6:13. See Rashi and Metzudas Dovid *ad. loc.*

⁷ See Ba’al HaTurim *ad. loc.*, who gives his own explanation

⁸ Berachos 10a

⁹ Pesachim 87b, based on Hosea 1:6 with Rashi