

— ♦ Parasha ♦ —

When the Ground Shakes

In Parashas Korach, Korach and his followers came with a claim and with a dispute. They said to Moshe and Aharon: "You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation is holy, and Hashem is among them; why do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?" They sinned through suspicion, through a crooked way of looking at the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen.

And yet the punishment came specifically through the earth. "The ground beneath them split open. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, their houses, all the people who were with Korach, and all their possessions." We must understand: why did the punishment come specifically through the earth? What connection is there between Korach's dispute and the ground splitting open beneath his feet?

The Torah is revealing the depth of the matter. Korach was not arguing only over one detail in the order of Kehunah and Levi'ah. He touched the ground upon which the entire congregation stood. That ground is trust. As long as there is trust, there is a place to stand. One may ask, one may clarify, one may not understand everything, but a person is still standing inside a faithful relationship. But when suspicion enters, the ground itself begins to shake.

A person is used to thinking that the ground is the simplest thing in the world. He stands on it, walks on it, builds a house on it, and does not think about it at all. As long as the earth stands firm beneath his feet, he is busy with what stands upon it. The ground itself does not take up space in his mind, because it is the thing he takes for granted.

But when there is an earthquake, suddenly it becomes clear that everything which seemed to stand on its own depends on one thing. If the ground does not stand, the house does not stand. The table does not stand. The person does not stand. Everything begins to move, not because each thing fell by itself, but because the place upon which everything stands began to shake.

So it is in every relationship. The inner ground of a relationship is trust. A home stands on trust. Friendship stands on trust. A student and a Rebbe stand on trust. A community and its leader stand on trust. As long as there is trust, there may be questions, difficulties, and things one does not understand, but there is still a place to stand. A person says in his heart: I do not understand everything, but I am standing inside a faithful relationship.

Trust does not cancel the mind. Trust does not mean that there are no questions and no need for clarification. On the contrary, when trust is healthy, one can ask with more calmness. The question is not coming to destroy the ground, but to understand the building. A person can say: I do not understand, but I do not

suspect. It is hard for me, but I am not turning the whole relationship into a place of exploitation. I am asking for clarity, but I am still standing inside the trust.

But when suspicion enters, everything changes. Suspicion is not only one thought. It is an earthquake inside the relationship. What was simple becomes doubtful. What was a mission begins to look like control. What was leadership begins to look like arrogance. What was giving begins to look like calculation. What was a relationship begins to look like a trap. Then a person is no longer

asking only about one detail. The very ground begins to move beneath him. He no longer knows whether he can stand here.

This is the depth of Parashas Korach. Korach brought suspicion into the relationship between Klal Yisrael and Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen. His language sounded like holiness, like concern for the honor of the congregation. "For the entire congregation is holy, and Hashem is among them." In truth, Klal Yisrael is holy. In truth, every Jew has a portion in holiness. But inside those words, one word was placed that shook everything: "Why do you raise yourselves."



As if there is no mission here, only arrogance. There is no leadership of Hashem, only the taking of a position. There is no higher order, only a man standing above others. Once the matter is said that way, the entire relationship becomes suspicious. If Moshe Rabbeinu is not a faithful messenger but one who raises himself, then everything that had been built until now begins to shake. Yetzias Mitzrayim, Matan Torah, the Mishkan, the order of the camp, Kehunah and Levi'ah, everything that passed through Moshe and Aharon receives a different shadow. Suspicion does not leave anything in its place. It enters beneath the ground and begins to split it.

Therefore the punishment of Korach and his followers came through the earth. It was not only a strange form of death. It was a revelation of the root of the sin. They split open the ground of trust within the congregation, and the physical ground split open beneath them. They opened a mouth of machlokes, and the earth opened its mouth. They wanted to uproot themselves from the order of the congregation, and therefore it says of them, "They were lost from within the congregation."

This is the meaning of "from within the congregation." Korach spoke in the name of the congregation. He claimed to be coming for the sake of the people. But his end was that he was lost from within the congregation. There is someone who speaks in the name of the people, while in truth he brings division into the very form of the people. Klal Yisrael is a congregation, and a congregation needs connection. It needs trust. It needs a point of joining. It needs leadership that is humbled before the word of Hashem. When a person uses the name of the congregation in order to break the relationship that holds the congregation together, he loses himself from within the congregation.

This is also the depth of what the Torah says afterward: "All Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, 'Lest the earth swallow us.'" When there is an earthquake of suspicion, the fear does not remain only with the people of the dispute. The entire surrounding area begins to run away. Everyone feels that if he stands too close to that place, he too may be swallowed. A dispute of suspicion is not only a claim between people. It changes the air. It makes everything unsafe. Every relationship becomes dangerous. Every ground begins to shake.

A person can stand near a question. A question does not swallow. Clarification does not swallow. Even a dispute for the sake of Heaven does not swallow, because it comes to build truth. But suspicion swallows. It swallows the person himself, and it also swallows the quiet of those around him. It makes a person unable to receive, unable to believe, unable to hold a relationship. He stands on earth that can open at any moment.

This is a lesson for a person's private life as well. There are homes that look strong from the outside, but their inner ground is shaking. Not because there is no outer order, but because

suspicion has entered. One does not believe the other. Every word is measured. Every act is suspected. Every delay becomes a sign. Every silence becomes proof. Then even if the house stands on the outside, inside there is an earthquake.

So it is with partnership. As long as there is trust, people can work together. Not everything is always equal, not everything is always perfectly arranged, but there is ground. When suspicion enters, every small account becomes a danger. Every decision becomes an injury. Every profit of the other appears as if it came at my expense. Then the partnership is no longer a place of building, but a place of self-defense. A person is not working; he is guarding himself. He is not creating; he is suspecting.

So it is in a community. A community stands on trust. Not blind trust, and not the cancellation of the mind, but trust that there are people here who want to hold together Torah, tefillah, chesed, yiras Shamayim, and order. When suspicion enters, that every leadership is only power and every regulation is only control, it becomes very hard to build. Everything breaks before it even begins. There is no ground.

Sometimes one must clarify. Sometimes one must repair a partnership. Sometimes one must set boundaries. Sometimes an old relationship no longer holds, and renewal is needed. But the difference is in the root. Does one want to build deeper trust, or does one want to turn the entire relationship into suspicion? Is one asking in order to understand, or asking in order to split open? Is one seeking order, or seeking swallowing?

Clarification says: There is a relationship here, and I want it to stand truthfully. Therefore we must speak, arrange, repair, and put things in their place. The machlokes of Korach says: There is no faithful relationship here at all. Everything is arrogance. Everything is calculation. Everything is power. Once it is said that way, there is no longer a place to build, because the ground itself has been denied.

This is one of the dangers in a generation of much information and much suspicion. A person hears about people who exploited each other, partnerships that broke apart, and institutions that lost trust, and it becomes easy to bring that same gaze into every place. He sees a trap in every relationship, a personal interest in every act of leadership, a calculation in every act of giving. He thinks he has become wise, but in truth he has become a person without ground.

Wisdom is not to be naive in a way that sees nothing. But neither is it to be suspicious in a way that can stand nowhere. Wisdom is daas. To know that there are relationships that need examination, and there are relationships that need strengthening. There is a place for a question, and there is a place for trust. There is fear that warns a person, and there is fear that destroys him. There is suspicion that saves a person from exploitation, and there is suspicion that swallows the person himself.

— ♦ Stories ♦ —

On the Thin Rope

R' Yaakov sat at home after Maariv, and the phone was lying on the table. He called the news line, as he was sometimes used to doing at night, to hear a little of what was happening in the world. He was not one of those people who run after every piece of news. Usually he would hear one or two headlines, put down the phone, and return to himself.

That evening he heard a piece of news that stayed with him. Another alliance between countries was weakening. Another country was looking for a new path. Another old relationship was about to change. The speakers described it in the language of great calculations: oil, trade, strong countries, rising countries, east and west. But R' Yaakov heard something simpler inside it all. He heard that the whole world is full of relationships, and every relationship that changes without care can shake much more than people think.

He hung up the phone, but the news did not leave him. He was not a statesman, and he did not know all the details. But he had a simple feeling. Countries cannot change relationships all at once. Even when an old relationship weakens, even when there is a need to find a new relationship, one cannot pull at once on a rope that is holding many things. If one pulls too quickly, the whole structure moves. If one cuts suddenly, there is an earthquake. Sometimes one must hold on here, open a little there, and build a new path slowly, until the world can move from one place to another without falling.

At that same time, R' Yaakov himself was inside such a question. For many years he had a business with one partner. At the beginning, everything was simple. Each one knew his part, and the trust stood quietly between them. There was no need to check everything. There was no need to write down every detail. A word held things together.

But over the years, things changed. The business grew, the responsibility grew, and the people themselves also changed somewhat. What had once been simple was no longer simple. Decisions were made alone. Accounts were not clear enough. There was no open evil there, and no clear betrayal, but there was a fine trembling. R' Yaakov began to feel that he was no longer standing on the same ground as before.

It pained him very much. He did not want to become a suspicious person. He did not want to say that all the years had been a mistake. He did not want to erase the good that had been there. But on the other hand, he did not want to close his eyes.

He knew that if he ignored it completely, the small trembling could grow. And if he became too frightened, he himself would bring the great shaking.

That night he sat with himself for a long time. He thought about how a wise relationship is not broken in one day. There are things that passed through that relationship: livelihood, responsibility, trust, habit, honor, years of work. If a change is needed, it must be done carefully. Slowly. One leaves a passageway. One holds a little here, builds a little there. Every relationship stands on a thin rope, and wisdom is neither to close one's eyes nor to tremble from fear. Wisdom is to place the foot carefully.

Suddenly he felt that this was exactly his own situation. He was standing on the thin rope of a relationship. If he told himself that everything was fine and nothing needed to be checked, he might fall. If he said that everything was false and everything was exploitation, he would also fall. He had to walk. Not freeze, not run. To see. To guard the trust, but give it boundaries. To change a little of the old form, but not break everything at once. To build a new order slowly, so that the relationship should not become an earthquake.

The next day he met his partner. He did not come shouting. He did not come with a letter of separation. He also did not come as a person who had already decided that the other one was guilty. He said to him quietly: We need to talk. Our business has grown, and what was simple once is no longer enough now. I do not want to lose the trust that was between us, and therefore we need to give it new tools. We need order. We need boundaries. We need to know what each one does, what each one decides, and what is written down in advance.

The partner was a little hurt. He said to him: After all these years, now you are asking for papers and boundaries?

R' Yaakov said to him: Specifically after all these years. If this relationship were not important, I would not be so careful. When something is precious, one guards it. Trust without tools can become damaged. Tools without trust become war. I am asking for both together.

Things were not solved in one day. At first it was hard. Every detail they wrote felt as if the old innocence was disappearing. R' Yaakov himself felt pain in every line. But afterward he understood something true: sometimes a boundary is not the



burial of trust, but the protection of trust. When something is small, it can stand on simplicity. When it grows, it needs order. That does not mean the simplicity was false. It means the relationship is asking for a wider vessel.

They began to change slowly. They did not close everything in one day. Some decisions remained together. Some were given to each one on his own. The accounts became more orderly. Things that had once been spoken by mouth began to be written down. Not because they wanted to suspect, but because they wanted not to need to suspect. Every new boundary lowered a little of the trembling.

R' Yaakov noticed that whenever they made a change all at once, the heart became frightened. And whenever they made a change slowly, through speaking, through respect, through remembering the good that had been there, a little new quiet was built. Not the old quiet of first innocence, but a more mature quiet. A quiet that knows the world changes, but is not frightened by every change.

A few weeks later, he again heard on the news line about countries changing relationships. This time, he heard it differently. Not only as distant news. He thought: the world also has to learn how to change relationships without splitting the ground. When an old relationship can no longer hold everything, something new must be built. But if one breaks too quickly, the world shakes. And if one remains by force in a place that no longer fits, then too the shaking gathers inside. One needs daas. One needs a passageway. One needs boundaries. One needs trust that is not blind, and calculation that is not suspicion.

That evening he said to his son: The whole world is like a person walking on a thin rope. One who is too afraid falls. One who takes it lightly also falls. One must feel every step. Not be afraid of movement, but be careful not to make a movement that causes a fall. So it is between countries, so it is between partners, and so it is also inside a person's own home.

His son asked him: If so, what is the main thing, to hold on or to change?

R' Yaakov said to him: The main thing is to hold on to the trust. Sometimes one holds on to it by staying. Sometimes one holds on to it by changing the form. Sometimes one holds on to it by setting a boundary. But the change must not come from panic, and the staying must not come from fear. If one stays from fear,

the relationship is choked. If one changes from fear, the relationship is torn. Everything must be done with daas.

Then he added: There are relationships that must be changed little by little, like moving a heavy load from one rope to another. If one cuts the first rope before the second is holding, the load falls. If one refuses to tie the second rope because he is holding on to the first, there will also come a time when the first will not hold. The wisdom is that there should never be a moment with no hold.

These things changed R' Yaakov. He became more careful, but not more suspicious. He became more orderly, but not colder. He learned to speak before the trembling becomes great. He learned to write things down so that he would not have to think thoughts. He learned that not every boundary is separation, and not every change is betrayal. Sometimes the boundary is the way the relationship can remain.

And sometimes, when he sat alone, he thought about the depth of the matter. The whole creation stands this way. Relationships are built, relationships weaken, relationships receive a new form. But everything needs order. In a person's soul as well, if an inner relationship weakens, the person does not need to panic. He must examine what became weak, what needs strengthening, what needs a boundary, and what needs a new form. If he panics, he opens the pit himself. If he ignores it, the pit opens beneath him.

On Erev Shabbos, when the house was already in order, he said to himself: There is one ground that must always remain. Trust in Hashem Yisbarach. All the relationships in the world move. Partnerships change. Countries change alliances. Markets move from place to place. A person himself changes over the years. But if he has an inner connection to the Creator, he has a place to stand. Then he can change without breaking, be careful without fearing, hold on without clinging stubbornly, and change without tearing.

He then understood that wisdom is not to run away. Relationships with people are, in a certain way, a thin rope. The wisdom is to walk on it with yishuv hadaas. Not to let fear become the leader, and not to let blind innocence hide the danger. To hold on to trust, to give it boundaries, to change slowly when needed, and to remember that where there is true trust, there is ground. And where there is ground, one can build.

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