

When Cruel is Kind- Parshas Korach by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

After Korach, Dasan, and Avirom were swallowed by the earth and the two hundred and fifty followers were consumed by fire, the Torah tells us of the Bnai Yisroel complaining to Moshe and Aharon. They complained that Moshe and Aharon were responsible for the deaths of Korach and his followers, insisting that their deaths were too harsh of a punishment. They directly confronted Moshe and Aharon stating, “You have killed the people of Hashem”. My Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Feinstien, zt'l, explained that the people's complaint was that Moshe and Aharon should have had more compassion in dealing with Korach and his supporters and not let them die as they did.

We know Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest one who ever lived as the Torah testifies for us in Bamidbar 12:3. We also know Aharon was a lover and pursuer of peace. Hashem is surely the master of compassion. So given these facts, we see that if Korach was punished, it was the proper course for Hashem to take.

Rav Moshe stated often that there are times when compassion is out of order, as for example to those who are genuinely cruel and evil. Such misplaced compassion is really cruelty in disguise as it states in Mishlei 12:10, mercies of the evil ones is cruel. This is because showing compassion for evil shows that one's sympathies are really with evil. He also stated that we see so much misdirected sympathy in our times. We see how there is so much effort being made to give rights to criminals, which leads to more evil and destruction to our world.

Another example Rav Moshe gave for misdirection was the Communist system in the former Soviet Union which he himself had lived and was a rabbi under for some years before he came to America. In theory, Communism was supposed to create a completely new and better social order for the world. According to this system, there would no longer be the contrast of wealth and poverty and all people would have the same economic and social opportunities. Everyone would work together for the good of the community. On the surface, perhaps, this sounds very noble. However, in order to implement this system, the Communist party and its following turned into most cruel and evil social order the world had ever seen. Countless people were imprisoned, tortured cruelly and put to death for not following the Communist system and ideology. And it was all done in the name of making a new and better world for the 'greater community.'

All of this took place because they acted without the guidance of the Torah to understand what is good and what is evil. Another example Rav Moshe gave was the case of animal rights activists and others who protest our shechita in the name of being humane. We often see these activists commit acts of great violence in order to achieve their goals. Even the non-Jews see this when they see the biggest activists for animal rights, many of them Jewish, show virtually no sensitivity when many people are killed. Rav Moshe stated that we see from such behavior it really is not the animal rights that they are fighting for but rather they are really fighting against our entire Torah life. Truthfully, the root of all of this is the lack of the guidance from the Torah. For the Torah is the only way we can understand what is truly cruel and what is kind as well as where and when to apply the appropriate measures of compassion.