

## Parshat Matot: Putrid Politics (תש"פ)

R' Chananya Berzon

In משה gives directives to put together an army; generals, commanders, soldiers to defeat מדיין. The army goes out and quickly defeats מדיין, but fails to follow the complete orders and they take the women as captives. משה is upset, and here (31:14) ספרי quotes the "מִמְּנִים עַל הַחֵיל," *with those appointed over the army*. To whom did משה point his anger? Not toward the simple soldier! משה pointed his critique toward the generals, the commanders, and the officers; namely, toward the leaders. Why? Says the ספרי, it comes to teach us, "לְלַמְּדֶךָ שֶׁכָּל סִרְחוֹן הַדוֹר," *that all of a generation's 'sirchon' is ascribed to their leaders, as they have the power in their hands to object*.

סִרְחוֹן (*sirchon*) is a strong terminology used to describe something that is putrid, rotten, obscene, and corrupt. Everything that went wrong with this generation depended upon the leadership; these generals and commanders had the power to direct the soldiers in accordance with the instructions of משה, and it was their choice not to, that upset משה.

Today, the Israeli population is sceptical of our government; from our prime minister(s), to ministers, to nearly all the political public figures. It's obvious that we're still in the chaotic midst of this coronavirus, and at first onset we were trusting. Our government directed, and we followed the orders. We did a great job! But suddenly, it seemed that the politics, ego, and corruption blindsided our leadership. We remained with a few, very good rules, but much to our chagrin we noticed hypocrisy.

Almost every newscast showed our leadership violating the rules - they were just paying lip service; the newscasts showed beaches, bars, and nightclubs thronged, with no distancing, no masks, no police. This מוצאי שבת (of פרשת פנחס) there is a demonstration at Rabin Square, of which the authorities have said they have no way of enforcing the rules put in place to stop the spread of this contagious coronavirus! When there is a political advantage at hand, it seems health risks are overlooked.

I received a "cute" joke this week - a sick person visits his doctor and asks, "Doctor, when do you think this pandemic will end?" The doctor responds, "I have no idea; I don't understand politics." The truth underlying this one liner is quite serious and even disconcerting. If the government and the politicians would have left the remedy to those dedicated to פיקוח נפש, perhaps there would have been less danger posed to the lives of the sick and to those who have passed on; instead, the decisions seem to be left up to those concerned with political or financial maneuvering. This סִרְחוֹן, this putrid, smelly, almost obscene approach is disenchanting. And that's what משה said to the מנהיגים, "you're off the path, get back in line."

הלוואי, *if only*, our politicians will really make a חשבון הנפש, think it over clearly. In their positions they have an unbelievable opportunity to consider the welfare, the health, and the effect on the economy for the people dwelling in Israel. Once again, we will become the guiding light for the rest of the world to follow suit. We will be able to really see the end and never have to encounter another wave of this pandemic.

אמן!