

Moshe Rabbeinu – Great Teacher and Student

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In Parshat Ekev there is a brief encapsulated history of the major events that had begun forty years earlier. The reminiscence is addressed to those who in fact experienced it. Moshe Rabbeinu says that: "With your own eyes you have seen His greatness, His strong hand ... His deeds that He performed in the midst of Egypt ... What he did to the army of Egypt, to its horses and its riders ... and what he did for you in the wilderness until you came to this place."

Then Moshe says something that needs careful study: "And what He did to Datan and Aviram the sons of Eliav son of Reuven when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households and their tents ... in the midst of all of Israel."

Why does Moshe include this relatively lesser incident together with the wondrous events of the Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea? Furthermore, why is no mention made of Korach, who was the leader of the rebellion?

I believe that here we will see Moshe in his capacity as a great educator and a faithful disciple of Hashem.

The purpose of this brief history is to lay the foundation for the statement that follows: "...and so that you will have length of days on the Land that Hashem swore to your forefathers to give them and their offspring — a land flowing with milk and honey." Moshe's declaration continues after a pause in the reading of the Torah for the next aliyah: "For the land to which you come to possess it is not like the land of Egypt that you left, where you would plant your seed and water it on foot like a vegetable garden. But the land to which you cross over is ... a land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out... the eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it...."

Moshe is telling the Jewish people as they prepare to enter Eretz Yisroel that there is qualitative, existential and divine difference between Eretz Yisroel and Egypt. Moshe is teaching them something that he has patiently waited to impart for thirty-eight long years. He is still profoundly disturbed and in pain from the shocking statement made then by Datan and Aviram when he summoned them in an attempt to negotiate an end to the rebellion, "but they said: 'We shall not go up. Is it not enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey' to cause us to die in the Wilderness yet you seek to dominate us."

This statement is undoubtedly one of the ugliest in Torah. Egypt, the house of bondage, pain and suffering, where Jewish children were thrown into the Nile, is given the title that Hashem Himself coined to describe His Holy Land: "a land flowing with milk and honey." Their offensive remarks

continue after a pause for the next aliyah: "Moreover you did not bring us to a land flowing with milk and honey...." The Torah says: "this distressed Moshe greatly."

Moshe has waited for thirty-eight years till he could hopefully erase the negative impact of that terrible abuse of "a land flowing with milk and honey." He therefore now, here in Ekev, tells Am Yisroel to remember what Hashem did to Datan and Aviram, and make no mistake he continues — the land you are coming to is the "eretz zavat chalav u'dvash" —not like the land of Egypt etc. In both Parshat Korach and Ekev there is an interruption between Eretz Yisroel and Egypt in a sense to express the idea that they dare not be mentioned in the same breath. The pause of the end of an aliyah is akin to saying "L'havdil" between one and the other. Now we know why Moshe has singled out Datan And Aviram for special condemnation and all that follows.

There is also much to be learned from the absence of any mention of Korach.

Following the decision of the League of Nations in 1920 to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Reb Meir Simcha HaCohen of Dvinsk wrote a letter in praise of Eretz Yisroel. He wrote that Hashem was more zealous and protective of the honor of Eretz Yisroel than for his own honor. As proof he cites the fact that G-d forgave Israel the sin of the Golden Calf but did not forgive the sin of the spies. R. Meir Simcha says that the Golden Calf was an assault on G-d Himself while the spies were an attack on Eretz Yisroel that Hashem cannot countenance nor forgive. Moshe the great student follows the example of Hashem. He does not mention Korach because that was an attack on himself which he can forgive, but he cannot forgive Datan and Aviram whose wickedness was a blow against Eretz Yisroel.

Moshe is both Rabbeinu — our teacher— while he is also the great student of Hashem.