

“The water came back and covered the chariots and the horsemen...there remained not a one of them.” (14:28)

The Daas Zekeinim derives from the words “ad echad”, “not a one”, that one person did survive, namely Pharaoh. Yalkut Shimoni says that Pharaoh repented at the last minute. His teshuvah was accepted, and he eventually became the king of Ninveh. The Alshich Ha’kadosh writes that Pharaoh was enveloped in a large wave, and as he was about to succumb, he uttered the words “Mi chamocha ba’eilim Hashem”, “Who is like You, among the Heavenly powers?” He was so weak that the sound was barely heard. Consequently, the “chaf” of “kamocho” is “weak”, written without the “dagesh,” dot in the consonant, and pronounced, chamocha, instead of kamocho.

We must endeavor to understand this. Pharaoh was the symbol of apostasy and defiance. He held himself to be a god. Nothing could affect him. Indeed, he repented at the very last minute, right before he was to follow his soldiers into oblivion. Yet, not only did Hashem accept his teshuvah but, He granted him another royal position as monarch of Ninveh. Is this the way teshuvah is performed and accepted? Is a teshuvah that is offered as a result of fear of death an acceptable form of teshuvah? Apparently, it is. Why?

In the ethical discourses of Yeshivas Bais Shalom Mordechai, it is explained that to concede guilt, to confess a wrong, takes extraordinary courage and strength, for which one is rewarded. Regardless of the timing or the reason, it takes a special person to perform teshuvah. Many have gone to their deaths knowing the error of their ways, refusing to acknowledge their sins. The Navi in Melachim I 16:34 details how Chiel of the House of Eili built Yericho in defiance of Hashem. He was punished by witnessing all of his sons die during a short period of time. When he made the foundation, he buried his eldest. When he hung the doors, his final act of obstinacy, he buried his youngest. There can be no greater message to convey the verity that Hashem is G-d, and we must listen to Him. Pharaoh was impressed with the truth; Chiel apparently was not.

The sons of Korach, as they were being swallowed into the ground, repented. Their teshuvah, albeit long overdue, was accepted. To concede that one has traveled through life on the wrong road is a difficult idea to accept. To change an entire life’s “weltanschauung,” to recast one’s beliefs, takes Herculean efforts on the part of a person. Many have failed the test. The ones that have triumphed are, according to Chazal, on a higher spiritual plane than tzaddikim gemurim, those who are wholly righteous.