

חמודי שׁי על התורה והמועדים

Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

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Parashas Korach

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Parashas Korach

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I

It is stated in our parashah:

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן־יִצְחָר בֶּן־קְהָת בְּרֵי לֵוִי

“And Korach, son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, took...” (Bamidbar 16:1).

Rashi explains: “Why does the Torah not mention ‘son of Yaakov’? Because Yaakov prayed concerning himself that his name should not be mentioned in connection with their dispute, as it says: ‘in their assembly may my honor not be mentioned.’” That is, when Yaakov Avinu blessed his sons, he requested mercy that his name not be associated with future disputes. This was a prophetic allusion to the rebellion of Korach. Therefore, Korach’s lineage is traced only as far as Levi and not to Yaakov.

What did Korach take?

The verse begins with the words וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח “And Korach took,” but it does not tell us what he took. The commentators offer many explanations. Here we will explore one approach to this question in order to better understand Korach’s motivations and where he erred.

II

- ▶ **The words of Korach and the power of the congregation**
- ▶ **The power of ten Jews for both good and evil**
- ▶ **From the spies to Korach: The power of the group**

The omission of Yaakov from Korach's lineage

Why was Yaakov Avinu so concerned that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach, to the point of davening to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that his name not appear in the Torah as the forefather of Korach? After all, Yitzchak is mentioned as the father of Esav, and Avraham as the father of Yishmael!? It is impossible to erase the fact that Korach was among Yaakov's descendants. What, then, was Yaakov seeking to accomplish through this request?

The Sfas Emes on Korach's error

The *Sfas Emes* (5632/1872) opens with the Mishnah: "A dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will ultimately endure," the classic example being the disputes of Hillel and Shammai. He explains that Aharon HaKohen embodied the attribute of *chesed* (kindness), whereas the Leviim were distinguished by the attribute of *din* (justice, discipline). The world cannot endure through *din* alone; its existence requires a partnership

between *din* and *rachamim* (mercy). Korach erred in thinking that, as a quintessential Levi, he could introduce *din* into the *kehunah* without *chesed*. But the *kehunah* is built upon *chesed*. This was Korach's critical mistake.

The source of Korach's identity

Let us examine Korach's lineage and why the Torah traces him only to Levi and not to Yaakov. In my humble opinion, "And Korach took" means that he "took" his lineage. He took his identity from Levi rather than from Yaakov. Korach saw himself as the direct heir to the legacy of Levi. Levi was his role model and the source of his pride in lineage. It is similar to someone today who takes pride in being a descendant of a Rebbe or a great Torah leader. Korach magnified his connection to Levi and not to Yaakov.

Yaakov: symbol of integration

Yaakov Avinu embodied the attribute of *tiferes* (beauty, harmony), the harmonious balance between *din* and *chesed*. This balance is precisely what the *kehunah* requires. Aharon HaKohen

possessed this balance; Korach did not. Korach drew from the attributes of Levi before Levi achieved complete *teshuvah* and transformed his character.

Levi's teshuvah

In our sefer *Chamudei Shai* on Sefer Shemos, we cited an article by my revered father, zt"l (of saintly memory), published in *HaPardes*, explaining why the tribe of Levi was exempt from labor in Egypt. Early in his life, Levi acted with *din*, strict judgment. He avenged Dinah's honor and joined Shimon in killing the inhabitants of Shechem. Levi did not consult Yaakov, and together with Shimon he displayed jealousy toward Yosef. Yaakov's rebuke was severe: "For in their anger they slew a man, and in their willfulness they uprooted an ox."

Levi repented. He internalized Yaakov's rebuke and transformed his character, becoming a complete tzaddik, in the spirit of the Sages teaching: "In the place where *baalei teshuvah* (penitents) stand, even completely righteous individuals cannot stand."

Korach's error in identifying himself as a son of Levi

Korach identified with Levi as Levi was before his teshuvah: a zealot without compromise. וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח... בֶּן-לֵוִי "And Korach... son of Levi took", he took his identity as a Levi and gloried in it. Even Moshe addresses him with, "Hear now, sons of Levi." As a descendant of Kehas, Korach held prestigious responsibilities. He carried the holiest vessels, including the *Aron Bris Hashem* (the Ark of the Covenant) containing the *Luchos* (Tablets).

The secret of the connection between Yaakov and Korach

My revered father, zt"l, cited a Midrash: "Before his passing, Yaakov instructed that Levi should not carry his coffin. Why? Because "He and his descendants will carry the Aron Bris Hashem." The tribe of Levi was destined for this sacred role. Even before the descent to Egypt, Levi had been set apart for Divine service. One may wonder why Yaakov emphasized *this* Levitic role rather than the *kehunah* (priesthood),

which requires an even greater level of sanctity and avoidance of ritual impurity. The exalted status that Yaakov attached to carrying the Aron Bris Hashem may have inflated Korach's sense of entitlement. As a member of the Kehas family responsible for carrying the Aron, Korach may have felt destined for leadership, for Yaakov himself had highlighted the supremacy of that role.

The message Yaakov conveyed to Korach

Yet Yaakov requested that his name not be mentioned as Korach's ancestor. What message did Yaakov intend to convey? The answer is that Yaakov foresaw through *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration) that despite his sharp rebuke of Levi some of Levi's descendants, such as Korach, would still go astray. He wanted the omission of his name to serve as a message for all generations: "Do not think that this is my path. Korach, why did you not follow my example? Why did you cling to Levi's earlier traits, the very traits I criticized, instead of following his example after his complete

teshuvah?" Yaakov continues to remind his descendants of the correct path of service to Hashem.

The legacy of the sons of Korach

The story does not end in tragedy, but in the hope of rectification. The sons of Korach repented. Eleven psalms of Tehillim are attributed to them, among them Tehillim 47, which is customarily recited seven times before the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, since it contains the verse: "Elokim has ascended with a blast; Hashem, with the sound of the shofar." How beautiful this custom is! The purpose of the sounding of the shofar is to awaken us to teshuvah, as the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:4:

"Although the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a Scriptural decree, it contains an allusion, as if to say: 'Awake, sleepers, from your sleep! Arise, slumberers, from your slumber! Examine your deeds, return in teshuvah, and

remember your Creator.' These are the people who forget the truth amidst the vanities of time and spend all their years pursuing emptiness and futility, things that cannot help or save. Look to your souls, improve your ways and your deeds, and let each of you abandon his evil path and his improper thoughts..."

The sons of Korach symbolize precisely this awakening and transformation that the sounding of the shofar is meant to inspire within us.

The psalm that follows (Tehillim 48), "A song, a psalm of the sons of Korach...", is a fixed part of our prayers. It is the *Shir shel Yom* for Monday that the Leviim sang in the Beis HaMikdash. These songs composed by the sons of Korach praise and affirm faith in Hashem. Shmuel HaNavi (the prophet Samuel) was among Korach's descendants. Rashi notes that in *Divrei HaYamim* (Chronicles), Korach's lineage is traced all the way back to Yisrael

(Yaakov): "...son of Aviasaf, son of Korach... son of Levi, son of Yisrael."

Reflections on lineage and legacy

"Yisrael" is the name that reflects the perfected essence of Yaakov. We are "Bnei Yisrael." This is our identity, bound to the lineage of our father Yisrael. Our faith is built upon, "Hear, O Yisrael," as the Gemara relates: "His sons said to him: 'Hear O Yisrael (our father), Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One.'" They responded: "Just as there is only One in your heart, so too there is only One in our hearts" (*Pesachim* 56a). Yaakov built and united us into a nation. He harmonized all the diverse attributes necessary for life. Korach, on the other hand, despite his sincerity, failed. But his sons repented and restored honor to Levi. They brought satisfaction to their father by identifying themselves as "the sons of Korach." Every Monday, we say in our davening, "Today is second day of the week, the day on which the Leviim would say (sing) in the Beis HaMikdash: "A song, a psalm of the sons of Korach: Great is

Hashem and exceedingly praised in the city of our G-d, His holy mountain..."

On the second day of Creation, the phrase "*ki tov*" ("that it was good") was not stated, because that day witnessed the emergence of division through the separation of the upper and lower waters. Korach embraced the discord associated with the second day. But his sons, through their repentance, rectified their father's dispute. The entire psalm they composed revolves around the Beis HaMikdash. Through their song, they expressed the theme of unity and connection revealed in the Beis HaMikdash, the place of connection and Ahavas Yisrael (love for a fellow Jew).



II

וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב־לָכֶם כִּי כָל-
הָעֵדָה כָּלֵם קְדָשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם הִ'
וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל-קְהָל הִ'

"They assembled against Moshe and against Aharon and said to them: 'You have taken too much for yourselves, for the entire congregation, all of them, are holy, and

Hashem is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?'" (Bamidbar 16:3)

Korach begins his protest with words that sound positive and unifying. He declares that all Bnei Yisrael are holy because the Shechinah dwells among them. His opposition to Moshe and Aharon is couched in egalitarian and democratic language: Why should they elevate themselves above others when all are equally close to Hashem?

Rashi explains "all of them are holy" to mean that all heard the Aseres HaDibros (the Ten Commandments) directly from the mouth of the Almighty at Sinai. At first glance, Korach's approach champions social equality: everyone is equal, everyone has the same right and access to holiness. Yet from this lofty opening, his argument rapidly deteriorates into outright rebellion against Moshe's leadership. To compare the collective experience of the entire nation hearing Hashem at Sinai with Moshe's unique role as the one who ascended the summit of Har Sinai

and spoke with Hashem face to face is insolent and unfounded. Very quickly Korach's true goal emerges: to seize the leadership. At that point, the pretense of equality comes to an end.

The words of Korach and the power of the congregation

Yet despite all this, it is possible that a deeper positive message is hidden within his opening words. The expression: "For the entire congregation, all of them, are holy, and Hashem is among them" calls to mind another verse in Vayikra: "And I shall be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael." The source of the concept of a *minyan* (quorum), which is that only in the presence of ten Jews can one recite certain prayers and words of sanctity, is found in the Gemara in *Megillah* (23b). The Gemara investigates the source of the requirement for a minyan:

From where do we derive these matters? Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "For the verse states, 'And I shall be sanctified among Bnei

Yisrael.' [This tells us that] any matter of sanctity may not be recited with fewer than ten. How is this implied [in the verse]? As Rabbi Chiya taught: 'We derive תוך תוך "among" ("toch") from "among." Here it is written, "And I shall be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael," and there (in the episode of Korach) it is written, "Separate yourselves from among the congregation." We then derive עדה "congregation" ("eidah") from "congregation," for there (in the episode of the spies) it is written, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation?' Just as there it refers to ten, so too here it refers to ten.'"

The above Gemara is explaining that the requirement of ten for matters of sanctity is derived through a *derasha* (exposition). The *derasha* begins with the verse, "And I shall be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael," which teaches that the sanctification of Hashem's

Name, such as in the saying of Kaddish or Kedushah, must take place "among Bnei Yisrael," that is, within a group. But how many people constitute such a group? The Gemara employs a *gezeirah shavah* (a textual bridge) based on the word "among," which appears both here and in the account of Korach's rebellion: "Separate yourselves from among the congregation." The word *eidah* "congregation" is used there, and we already know from the ten spies, who were called "this evil congregation," that a congregation is a (minimum of) ten people. How remarkable is that!? That we derive the power of a minyan for every matter of sanctity from a textual link built upon Korach and the spies! What is the message behind this?

The power of ten Jews for both good and evil

A group of ten Jews gathered for prayer brings the Shechinah down to earth. Such is the power of ten Jews. One could say that Korach's statement, "For the entire congregation, all of them, are holy," expresses precisely this idea: that every congregation

possesses holiness and the ability to connect to Hashem.

Where do we find this concept, that every Jew, regardless of status, has equal access to holiness? Right here: כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' "For the entire congregation, all of them, are holy, and Hashem is among them..." Every *eidah* (a group of ten, a minyan) is holy, and Hashem dwells within it. My heart tells me that Korach was alluding to the concept of a minyan. The power of a group of ten is immense, both for good and for evil. The ten spies brought about a national catastrophe. The 250 men who joined Korach were swallowed into the earth. Yet the measure of good is greater than the measure of punishment, and that very same group structure can bring the Shechinah down to earth.

There is an element of equality within a minyan, for whether it consists of ten Torah scholars, ten tzaddikim, or ten simple Jews, every minyan draws the same holiness and brings a revelation of the Shechinah into the world. The Shechinah does not rest upon nine tzaddikim

alone; there must be a tenth, even if he is a simple Jew. If there are nine tzaddikim in one place and ten ordinary Jews in another, the Shechinah rests with the ten. Such is the halachic and spiritual power of ten Jews.

“Let a person arise early to come to the synagogue so that he may be counted among the first ten” (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 90:14). It is ruled that the first ten receive the reward corresponding to the entire congregation: “For the reward of the entire congregation depends upon the first ten.” We may suggest that this is because they are the ones who affect the descent of the Shechinah, while those who join the minyan afterward enter a place that has already become holy through the first ten.

From the spies to Korach: The power of the group

As we wrote in Parashas Shelach, the ten spies taught us this lesson. Although their actions were negative, they demonstrated the collective power of ten. Groups can influence a nation with far greater force than individuals. That small group altered the destiny of the entire nation. The fall of the ten spies from righteous and upright men to sinners revealed to us the power that lies in a group, both for destruction and for holiness. As we concluded in Parashas Shelach, since we learn the concept of a minyan from the ten spies, every time we establish a minyan, it serves as a merit for them.

Korach's legacy,
rooted in an

uncompromising approach of *din*, proposed something that cannot truly exist in our world. Yet even within his rebellion, his opening words contained an eternal truth: “For the entire congregation, all of them, are holy, and Hashem is among them.” Every Jew is precious. Every Jew has equal access to holiness and to the Shechinah. Although Korach fell, his sons repented. The sons of Korach gave us some of the most beautiful chapters of Tehillim. Even Korach himself, through his opening remarks, managed to leave behind a legacy, not merely of rebellion, but of hope, reminding us of the holiness embedded within every Jew and of the power we possess when we unite as a group, *ke'ish echad b'lev echad*, as one man with one heart.

Maharal Tzintz ב-י-ל-א ואמן

PEARLS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE GAON FROM PLOTZK

Korach challenges Moshe Rabbeinu, and Moshe responds. וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל-קָרַח וְאֶל-כָּל-עֵדוּתוֹ. לְאֹמֶר “And he spoke to Korach and to all his congregation, saying: In the morning...” (*Bamidbar* 16:5). We must understand why Moshe insisted on waiting until morning, and also why the word “saying” (לֵאמֹר) appears in the verse.

Our teacher, the Maharal, explains that Moshe Rabbeinu, in his great humility and righteousness, did not want Korach to be punished for his sin, but rather, to merit to retract his claims and return in complete teshuvah. For this reason, Moshe wanted

to wait until morning, because, as will be explained below, Moshe anticipated that the morning would deliver a moral message of *mussar* to the world that would inspire Korach to achieve complete teshuvah. This is the meaning of the phrase, לאמר בוקר "saying, the morning", that "the morning would speak" and reveal the truth to Korach, leading him to repent and thereby avoid punishment. But how was the morning supposed to bring Korach to teshuvah? Listen to the remarkable words of our teacher.

Let us begin with the words of Chazal in *Sanhedrin* (110a):

Rava said: What is the meaning of the verse, "The sun and moon stood in their habitation; at the light of Your arrows they went forth" (*Chavakuk* 3:11)? This teaches that the sun and moon ascended to *zevul* (a lofty heavenly firmament) and said before Him: "Master of the Universe! If You execute judgment on behalf of the son of Amram, we will go forth; but if not, we will not go forth." He cast arrows at them and said to them: "For My honor you did not protest, yet for the honor of flesh and blood you protest!"

Rashi explains that every day the kings of the East and West would place their crowns upon their heads and bow to the sun. Thus, we learn that the sun and moon wished to refrain from shining in order to protest the desecration of Moshe's honor, while Hakadosh Baruch Hu rebuked them for not similarly protesting the desecration of His own honor at the hands of idol worshippers.

This requires explanation. Why did the sun and moon consider protesting on behalf of Moshe Rabbeinu more than on behalf of Hakadosh Baruch Hu?

Rabbeinu explains: Hakadosh Baruch Hu created the world in such a way that sinners possess free choice. This is the very foundation of the concepts of reward and punishment. We can now understand why the sun and moon did not withhold their light in protest against idolatry: had they ceased to shine, the nations would immediately have stopped worshipping them, and free choice would have been removed. The entire system of reward and punishment would thereby have been undermined. Therefore, they continued to shine despite the fact that people worshipped them.

With regard to the righteous, however, there exists a concept that Hakadosh Baruch Hu protects them from sin, as it says, "He guards the feet of His faithful ones, while the wicked are silenced in darkness" (*Shmuel I* 2:9). This means that while Hakadosh Baruch Hu does not remove their free choice, He does prevent them from stumbling and falling into certain tests. We likewise find in the Gemara in *Kiddushin* (81a) that Heaven proclaimed concerning Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir: "Beware of them and their Torah," and permission was not granted to the Satan to test them and cause them to sin.

Therefore, when it came to the congregation of Korach, which consisted of a large and distinguished group within the Bnei Yisrael, the sun and moon wished to cease

shining so that, by virtue of the merit of that great community, everyone would be aroused when they saw that the heavenly lights were not shining. They would then return in complete teshuvah, and the punishment of such a large segment of Bnei Yisrael would be averted. Hakadosh Baruch Hu, however, did not agree with them, because Korach stemmed from a "kelipah" (an impure force) of wickedness. He was not deserving of that special protection against stumbling. Such protection is granted only to completely righteous individuals, such as Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir, whose merit shields them from sin. Korach, by contrast, was in the category of a thoroughly wicked person, without a merit that would protect him. Therefore, he had to remain within the normal framework of free choice, without any extraordinary warning from the sun and moon. For this reason, Hakadosh Baruch Hu shot arrows at the sun and the moon so that they would continue to shine.

This is why Moshe Rabbeinu, in his great humility, said, לאמר בוקר. Moshe himself hoped for what the sun and moon had proposed. He expected that they would refrain from shining in protest over the affront to his honor. In this way, "the morning would speak" and reveal the truth to Korach and his followers. When they saw the world plunged into darkness, they would understand that they had sinned. As a result, the entire great congregation of Korach would return in complete teshuvah and seek reconciliation with Moshe. Naturally, Moshe would immediately forgive them, and there would be no need for punishment on account of the insult to his honor. Thus, a calamity affecting a large segment of Bnei Yisrael would be avoided. For this reason, Moshe requested that they wait until morning.

Thus appears a true leader of the Jewish people.



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