

Parshat Korach: The Source of Korach's Rebellion

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The parsha starts with the words, "Korach took." The verse does not specify what he took. Rashi and Unkelos clarify that he took himself and went away. Korach separated himself from the Jewish people by rebelling against the laws of the Torah, which ultimately bind us as one. He created a terrible split within Klal Yisrael.

Korach's rebellion was really a rebellion against the Oral Torah as interpreted by Moshe. Korach attacked the analytical methodology of *Torah Sheb'al Peh* and tried to replace it with common sense thinking.

The Shem MiShmuel cites the Ari, who says that Korach had a spark of the soul of Kayin. Kayin killed his brother Hevel and is infamous in Tanach as the first murderer. In Hebrew, murder is called *shefichat damim*, spilling blood, because blood connects the body to the soul. Although it is a physical entity, blood contains the source of life. When a person dies, blood ceases to circulate in the body and the soul goes back to heaven. The bond between body and soul is torn apart. This explains why murder is described as spilling blood.

We live in a world of systems. Hashem created the universe as a combination of many different inter-related factors. There is no such thing as a separate entity that does not affect another entity. This world and the upper world are systematically integrated. Whatever

happens in one world affects both worlds.

When Kayin killed Hevel, he not only split Hevel's soul and body, but he created a split between heaven and earth. He caused Hashem anger, which led to His separation from this world.

Chassidut teaches that a name defines an individual. Hashem put man into this world to accomplish; if a person feels worthless he will not accomplish anything. This was the weakness of Hevel and the reason why he was murdered. The word *hevel* means nothingness. Hevel was overwhelmed with a sense of worthlessness and failed to complete his purpose on earth. Therefore, Hashem did not save him.

Korach possessed the soul of Kayin. He was egotistical, selfish, and ungrateful to Moshe, who took the Jews out of Egypt, brought the miracles at Yam Suf and led them through the desert for forty years. These evil *middot* led him to rebel against Hashem. Aharon embodied *shleimut*, and therefore was Korach's target. Aharon was completely selfless in a healthy way. He knew his talents and focused on others to create wholesome unity within Klal Yisrael. Hashem selected him to integrate heaven and earth and to bring peace between Hashem and the Jewish nation through the *avoda* in the Mishkan. Aharon signified what Korach resented.

When Korach and his people offered the mincha sacrifice, Moshe asked Hashem not to

accept it. The mincha is only an adjunct to the tamid sacrifice. Why did Moshe only mention the mincha? The Shem MiShmuel explains that the mincha is a communal, and not an individual sacrifice. It is made of flour, which comes from the ground. The earth creates a unity of diverse things because it is the basis of so many integrated systems. Therefore, it serves as an atonement for the *klal*. That is why Moshe prayed that Korach, who had caused such a terrible rift in Klal Yisrael, would not have any part in this sacrifice.

Ketoret also represents the idea of integration into the *klal* because it consists of eleven spices. The eleventh spice, *chelbana*, has a terrible smell, but when it is mixed with the other ten, it takes on a wonderful aroma. This teaches us the power of the *klal*, which can transform a *rasha* into a *tzaddik*. Chassidic communities are founded on the principle that the group gives strength to its weak members. This was the secret of the *ketoret* and this is why Moshe used *ketoret* as the test to see who the true Kohen Gadol would be.

The story of Korach teaches us many lessons. Appreciating the people around us, running away from *machloket*, focusing on the *klal* as opposed to one's own selfish ego, and living in an integrated world of systems rather than a world of separateness.

Taking It to Heart

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Gra wrote in his will that the first work his children should try to publish should be his commentary on Sefer Mishlei because it teaches fear of Hashem and how to work on ones *middot* and this is the highest form of wisdom.

In his introduction to the *Mesilas Yesharim*, the Ramchal tells us that the key question a person should ask himself is, "What is my

obligation in this world?" Every morning we recite the blessing, "*Shelo asani goy, shelo asani oved*," (You did not make me a non-Jew, a slave) whereby we recognize that we have a different purpose in this world. Every individual has a particular mission to fulfill with the specific family, friends, and circumstances he was given. Overcoming the *yetzer hara* is the greatest pleasure a person can experience.

We should feel indebted to Hashem for all that

He gives us. Each day He opens our eyes, straightens our limbs, and infuses us with renewed energy to face the challenges of the day. There are fifteen *birchat hanehin* that we recite every morning thanking Hashem for the gifts He bestows upon us. *Mitzvot* were not given for our enjoyment but rather as a way of expressing gratitude to Hashem for giving us the opportunity to live an observant Jewish life.



Awareness Amidst The Abyss: Parshat Korach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Parshat Korach recounts the rebellion of Korach and his followers and the terrible punishment Hashem meted out to them. Yet we know as stated in Parshat Pinchas, that the sons of Korach repented and did not die. Hashem elevated them above the flames of *gehinom* where they composed psalms. The *Hegyonah shel Torah* asks, when did the sons of Korach do *teshuvah*? Why were they swallowed up if they repented? Why is their repentance recounted in Parshat Pinchas rather than in Parshat Korach when it actually happened? Why not state “they lived” instead of “they did not die?” If they were in *gehinom*, how did they have descendants? When did they compose the psalms?

Rav Yonason ben Uziel explains that the sons of Korach did not join him in the rebellion and therefore all the other questions are moot, except for why their not dying is first mentioned in Parshat Pinchas. Rav Munk responds that the sons of Korach’s survival is mentioned there rather than here, because Parshat Pinchas discusses the division of the land and his sons inherited their portion not through Korach but through their maternal grandfather.

The ArtScroll Tehillim cites Rashi’s and the Yalkut Shimoni’s interpretation. While Korach’s sons originally joined their father’s rebellion, when they saw Moshe passing by, they decided it was more appropriate to rise in the presence of a *Torah* scholar than to continue to accord their father the honor. This created a spark of repentance within them. The caption for one of their psalms invokes an appropriate metaphor for their salvation: “*Lamnatzeach* ... For the Conductor on the Shoshanim, on the roses.” The rose, Korach’s sons, were surrounded by the thorns of Korach and his assembly. It was necessary to burn the thorns and pluck the roses from the inferno of *gehinom*. But the rose, in order for it to flourish must raise its head toward the sky, and man, to do proper repentance, must

train his heart toward heaven. As the Letitcha Elyon says, Hashem waits for the slightest stirrings of awakening, but it must then be followed with true *teshuvah*. While we can tap into a closeness with Hashem at any time, we must reach out to grasp Hashem’s extended hand, writes Rav Shach.

If the sons of Korach could do *teshuvah* at that last moment, why didn’t everyone else follow? The Ohr Doniel, citing Rav Schwadron, offers a tremendous insight into human behavior. It is hard to improve. Sometimes we tell ourselves that when we hit bottom, when we are at the gates of Hell, we will repent. But we see that if one has not already done some work and prepared himself for improvement, he will be unable to maintain his resolve and extricate himself from a dangerous spiritual, or even physical, situation. But thoughts themselves have transformative powers, even before being articulated, writes Rabbi Pliskin. Science validates how thoughts can immediately affect our emotions, even before being articulated in words. If thoughts of *teshuvah* are so powerful, how transformative is full *teshuvah*! Nevertheless, according to Rabbi B. Firer, because they did not articulate their *teshuva*, it was still of a limited nature.

Both the Ksav Sofer and the Taam Vodaath note that if you were the cause of other people sinning, you are accountable for their sins even if you yourself repent. The Bnei Korach didn’t try to influence others to repent and this lapse kept them in *gehinom*. We all have a responsibility at least to pray for others even if we cannot help in a substantive way. Rav Pincus notes that when Korach’s sons were in the abyss, Hashem created a bubble for them protecting them from the fire. Similarly, we too must shield ourselves and our children from negative influences. Men primarily create this protective bubble through the study of Torah, while women attain this through modesty.

According to Re’em, when Bnei Korach were in the abyss, they declared, “*Moshe emet v’Torato emet* ... Moshe is the true [leader] and his Torah is true, and we are liars.”. The commentators note that they were granted a short reprieve during which time they fathered children, and then they returned to the abyss. (There is an interesting custom on *Simchat Torah* that when the men sing *Moshe emet* ... they raise the children high to counteract the pull of the abyss that Korach and his group fell into.)

The Sifsei Chaim points out that the soul, as a reflection of The Holy One Whose seal is truth, recognizes truth. Falsehood derives from imagination and fantasy. Korach fantasized that he was the leader of Bnei Yisroel, and when he descended to the world of truth, his soul too recognized the truth. As the Maharal notes, *gehinom* is not a place, but the horror one experiences when one sees his potential and realizes how far short he came to realizing it.

This is what the Torah implies when, at the end of creation, Hashem sees that everything He had made was very good. According to *Chazal*, “good” refers to the Angel of Life, while “very” refers to the Angel of Death. Life clothes the soul in physical garments that obscure truth. Upon death, the soul sheds its physical garments and is clothed in spiritual garments. The righteous are fully clothed and not embarrassed. The totally evil are naked, for they have no spiritual merits in which to clothe themselves. Those who have some *mitzvot* are partially clothed with their merits, and repentance can add merits. The stirrings of *teshuvah* are glimpses of the truth. The sons of Korach merited a spot in *gehinom* from which they glimpsed enough of the truth that they were able to build on it and sing praises to Hashem. They saw that *teshuvah* was so powerful they could pull themselves up out of the abyss.