

BUT KORACH WAS WISE!

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "Korach the son of Itzhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, took..." (Bamidbar 16:1).

We need to understand the underlying reason for Korach's rebellion against Moshe and the Shechinah. After all, Korach wasn't a simple man, having been among the tribe of Levi, which was chosen to carry the Ark of the Covenant. Now the Sages have said that the Ark carried those who carried it, and since Korach had an opportunity to carry the Ark, it signified that he was a great individual. That being the case, how did he come to have such a vile attitude?

Whom did he dare attack? Moshe, the "faithful servant" – the one who had completely devoted his entire life to the Jewish people! With a motion of his hand, Moshe had brought the terrible plagues upon Egypt. Indeed, he split the sea, raised his hands to defeat Amalek, and brought water out of a rock by striking it with his staff. Korach knew all this, and he also knew that he was nothing compared to Moshe. Therefore how could he have rushed into a war against Moshe and Aaron, the results of which were known beforehand?

Kabbalists cite the Arizal in stating that the last letters of the words tzaddik katamar yifrach ("a righteous man will flourish like a date palm" – Tehillim 92:13), form the name Korach. This tells us that in the future, Korach will arise and serve in the Temple as the Kohen Gadol. Now if he merits such a position, this proves that he was a very lofty individual at the outset. Yet how could he not have feared the dreadful results of such antagonism, and how did he manage to rally 250 men, leaders of the assembly, just by speaking Lashon Harah and slandering Moshe Rabbeinu, Hashem's servant, and Aaron the kohen? The verse states, "Moshe heard and fell upon his face" (Bamidbar 16:4), which the Gemara explains as meaning that they suspected him of adultery (Sanhedrin 110a). It is therefore appalling to see just how crude these people were, and it only reinforces the question of what pushed Korach to act in this way.

On the verse, "You have taken too much upon yourselves, O sons of Levi" (Bamidbar 16:7), Rashi writes: "What did Korach, who was wise, see [to commit] this folly? His vision deceived him. He saw [prophetically] a chain of great people descending from him: Samuel, who is equal to Moshe and Aaron. [Korach] said, 'For his sake I will be spared.' [He also saw] 24 watches [of Levites] emanating from his grandsons, all prophesying through Ruach Hakodesh.... He said, 'Is it possible that all this greatness is destined to emanate from me, and I should remain silent?' He therefore plotted in order to attain this privilege."

We need to think deeply about the lesson that Rashi is giving us by saying, "His vision deceived him." Someone who has become corrupt due to the pride that dwells within him, as well as the self-centered love implanted in his heart, may twist the things he sees,

transforming truth into falsehood and yet believing it to be the truth. How great is the power of such corruption, the strength of these detestable flaws, such that it can push a person to fight against the greatest of men, Hashem's chosen ones, and to even feel that such a fight is a mitzvah being waged for the sake of Heaven! And why? Because "his vision deceived him" – Korach saw the prophet Samuel emerging from him, and Samuel was equal to Moshe and Aaron combined.

If we think about this honestly and logically, it seems that, quite to the contrary, if a person values Samuel's honor, then the more he increases and glorifies the honor of Moshe and Aaron, the more that Samuel's honor and greatness will also increase. This is because Korach saw by Ruach Hakodesh that Samuel was equal to Moshe and Aaron combined. Alternatively, the more that a person harms their greatness by diminishing them, the more he diminishes the honor of Samuel. However "his vision deceived him," meaning that the pride and vanity that existed in Korach is what prevented him from seeing the truth about the honor of Samuel, who would emerge from him. Instead, Korach focused on his own honor, thinking that "if Samuel must emerge from me, then I should be gloried and honored."

Why Are You Exalting Yourself?

Bad character traits have the power to push the heart from positive to negative, and therein lay Korach's weakness. Jealousy and the pursuit of honor pushed him to seek glory for himself, and to fight against Moshe and Aaron.

The same applied to this entire dispute. Indeed, we see that "his vision deceived him," meaning that he did not have a clear view of things.

Korach told Moshe, "The entire assembly – all of them – are holy... why are you exalting yourselves?" (Bamidbar 16:3). Korach wanted everyone to be a leader, for everyone was worthy of leadership. Hence he asked, "Why have you, Aaron and Moshe, set yourselves up as leaders?"

This seems like a completely foolish question. Everyone fully realizes that in order for discipline and order to reign among the Jewish people, there must necessarily be some authority in charge. Otherwise, everyone would do whatever comes to mind. As the Sages tell us, when Eliyahu HaNavi and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi went into a synagogue frequented by the wealthy, and they were not treated with respect, Eliyahu gave them the blessing: "May it be G-d's will that you all be leaders," which is the worst curse that can be given to a community. That is precisely what Korach wanted to do among the Children of Israel. This happened solely because his vision deceived him, for jealousy and a love for honor blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.

Moreover, we see the firmness and courage of Moshe, concerning whom the Torah states: "Now the



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man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any man on the face of the earth” (Bamidbar 12:3). Although he was suspected of adultery, and although 250 men, leaders of the assembly, rose up against him, he still tried to calm the situation and usher in peace, as it is written: “Moshe sent forth to summon Dathan and Abiram” (ibid. 16:12). Here Rashi cites the Gemara (Sanhedrin 110), which learns from this passage that we must not maintain disputes, for it was Moshe who summoned them in order to placate them with conciliatory words. What’s more is that Aaron, Hashem holy one, was with Moshe in trying to make peace reign, and of Aaron it is said that “he loved peace and pursued peace.” Such was the immense difference between Moshe and Aaron on the one hand, and Korach and his followers on the other. Of Korach we read, “Korach...took” – he took himself to one side. Here the Targum states *vaitpaleg* Korach (“Korach separated himself”): He separated himself from the tribes of Israel and provoked a rift within Israel.

See the great punishment that Korach brought upon himself and his entire band of followers! The Holy One, blessed be He, created a mouth within the earth during the six days of Creation: “The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, along with all the people who were with Korach and all their goods” (Bamidbar 16:32). Our Sages state that even an object that originally belonged to Korach, and which happened to be in some other person’s pocket, was swallowed by the earth, even if that person was not a follower of Korach. The earth would open its mouth next

to that person, who did not understand what it wanted of him, since he was not among Korach’s followers. Tremendous fear then seized him, until he remembered that he had something in his pocket which he had received from Korach (for in order to assemble the community against Moshe and Aaron, Korach had distributed all kinds of objects in order to elect leaders). That person would immediately remove the object from his pocket, and the earth would swallow it up. Indeed, nothing remained of Korach or his possessions! Our Sages said, “See the power of disputes! The Celestial Court punishes only from the age of 20 years, but in this dispute even babies were swallowed by the earth, as it is written: ‘Their women, their children, and their babies.’ They were all swallowed up, such that absolutely nothing of theirs remained.”

We are familiar with the Sages’ statement that even today, Korach cries out and says: “Moshe is truth and his Torah is truth.” I thought I would explain that from his throat – which once raised a voice that sowed discord and raised doubts about Moshe, Aaron, and the community of Hashem – that very same voice is now repenting from the depths of Gehinnom, as the Sages have said: “Those who were swallowed up with Korach cry out from the depths of the earth: ‘Moshe is truth and his Torah is truth, but we are liars.’” Measure for measure, Moshe is truth and his Torah is truth. However with the exception of this voice, everything that emerged from his mouth was destroyed, thus teaching us the gravity of dissension.

Prayer

The book *Nefesh HaChaim* (2:11) describes a novel concept regarding the intentions that we should put into the prayers that we recite each day. It states that the entire difference between the prayers of Rosh Hashanah and those of the rest of the year is solely in the formulation of the words we recite. Nevertheless, our intentions are the same, being focused exclusively towards spiritual needs, in order for the world to be restored for the sake of His kingdom, not for us or our personal needs.

This requires an explanation, for if our intentions remain the same, why did the Sages change the formulation of our prayers so radically?

We may explain this with a parable: The situation can be compared to a minister who oversees a great country, a man whose entire fortune comes from the business that he does in selling all kinds of construction material. Every builder purchases his wood, stones, and every other material that he needs from him.

The minister was a kind man, and he greatly helped the inhabitants of the country. Among them was one of the most skilled builders in the land, a man whom the minister had taken under his wings from his youth and had brought to his home. In fact this man became the lead builder in the entire country. One day, he came to see the minister with a suggestion, for he had reflected upon all the kindnesses that the minister had shown him, and he wanted to do something in return: To build a magnificent palace for him. Naturally, the minister rejoiced upon hearing this, and told the builder to take all the material that he needed from his warehouse in order to build the palace according to his plans.

From that day on, the builder went to the minister’s warehouse each day with a list of the things he needed. All the minister’s servants hurried to help him: One brought wood, another stones, another windows, another doors, and so on. He would take these items and leave without paying.

Naturally, whenever this builder arrived, the other purchasers were stunned to see how the minister’s servants stopped what they were doing and went to serve him. He received all the material that he needed without saying a word – he just handed them a list of what he needed – and he didn’t even have to pay for anything! Such was not the case for them, since they had to pay for everything in cash, immediately and without delay. Finally, when they learned that this builder was constructing a luxurious dwelling

for the minister, they realized that everything they saw was as it should be.

The same applies to us: The Holy One, blessed be He, has instructed us to elevate our thoughts on Rosh Hashanah towards the goal of Creation, since He created us for His glory. We must take upon ourselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and submit ourselves entirely to serving Him. We must build Him a dwelling here below for His glory, and organize the world around the concept of His kingdom: “Recite the *malchuyot* before Me in order to make Me King over you.” When we truly do this with the intention for it to be for His great Name, He rejoices in us, as it is written: “May the glory of Hashem endure forever; may Hashem rejoice in His works” (Tehillim 104:31). The Holy One, blessed be He, tells us: “I am opening My warehouse to you, and it contains offspring, life, and sustenance, in order that you may serve Me in tranquility and health.”

At the end of the introduction of the Vilna Gaon’s siddur, it states that the teaching ‘I am my Beloved, and my Beloved is mine’ signifies that when all my demands and interests are directed towards my Beloved, then ‘my Beloved is mine’ – He answers my prayer and pours out His blessing without limit. Afterwards, we come each day with a list of all the things we need in order to carry out His will and serve Him with all our heart. He immediately gives us everything we need, for it goes without saying that what we ask for each day stems from the suggestion we made to Him on Rosh Hashanah: To devote everything to serving Him. – *Olat Tamid*

Our Prayers Will be Accepted

Our Sages have greatly stressed the importance of establishing a fixed place of prayer in synagogue, stating: “Whoever establishes a place of prayer, his enemies fall before him, the G-d of Abraham comes to his aid, and he is called a pious and humble man who is among the disciples of Abraham.”

The *poskim* write that we must always have a fixed place in synagogue, and that we must not change it for any reason. Our prayers will then be accepted.

Above all, we must not have a casual attitude in regards to something that is mentioned in the *Shulchan Aruch* as a duty, and it is forbidden to modify it without special need. – *Orchot Yosher*, Rabbi Chaim Kanievisky

The Suffering of Rich Men

It is written, “Is it not enough that you brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey, to cause us to die in the desert?” (Bamidbar 16:13).

Dathan and Aviram described the land of Egypt as “a land flowing with milk and honey,” for they had enriched themselves there. – Lekach Tov

Without Mercy

It is written, “If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me” (Bamidbar 16:29).

Children have a greater chance of saving their parents by their merit than vice-versa. The merit of children can save their parents from Gehinnom, but the contrary is not true. In that case, why was Korach not saved by the merit of his sons, who were righteous?

In reality, Moshe Rabbeinu had asked Hashem not to allow Korach to benefit from the mercy that He normally shows all men, but instead to judge him strictly, as it is written: “If these die like the death of all men.”

What does, “and the destiny of all men is visited upon them” mean? It means that although Korach had righteous sons, he should not be saved on their account. How do we know that he had righteous sons? From the fact that it is written, “But the sons of Korach did not die” (Bamidbar 26:11).

– Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer

The Wisdom of Women

It is written, “The earth opened its mouth” (Bamidbar 16:32).

When the earth was about to open and devour On, he was sitting on his bed. His wife then grabbed hold of the bed and exclaimed, “Sovereign of the universe, he already swore by Your great Name to never participate in a rebellion! Now Your Name is eternal and firm, and You can always punish him if he not does respect his oath!” She then told her husband, “Get up and leave!” He replied, “I’m ashamed before Moshe Rabbeinu!” She responded: “I will come with you.” She left [alone] and went to see Moshe. Upon reaching him, she began to cry out and weep. Moshe asked, “Who is this woman? Is she involved in a dispute?” He was then told, “This is the wife of On, and what happened is that...” Moshe went to the entrance of his tent and declared, “On, son of Pelet, come out!” Moshe then assured him, “G-d will forgive you.”

– Midrash Aggadah

Measure for Measure

It is written, “They and all that was theirs descended alive into the pit” (Bamidbar 16:33).

How did they descend?

The earth first split according to everyone’s girth, then according to the size of their feet, then according to the size of their legs, their thighs, their stomach, and finally their shoulders.

They descended little by little as the earth “strangled” them, and they cried out: “Moshe is truth and his Torah is truth!” – Lekach Tov

Guard Your Tongue

Blessing His Friend Loudly

We should commit ourselves to not praising someone if it will harm him, such as a guest who goes out into the street and shouts from the rooftops that his host demonstrated kindness to him by giving him food and drink, and by making a great effort for him. Upon hearing this, everyone who is destitute will turn to that generous man and drain him of all his wealth. It is therefore written, “If one blesses his friend loudly from early in the morning, it will be considered a curse” (Mishlei 27:14). – Chafetz Chaim

Whoever Scorns His Teacher Will Eventually Scorn G-d

The Torah attests that Moshe was “exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth” (Bamidbar 12:3). This teaches us that he did not blame the Children of Israel, even when they deserved it. That is why all the people learned Torah directly from Moshe’s mouth, and it is why he himself did not appoint dayanim (judges), as it is written: “Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood by Moshe from morning until evening” (Shemot 18:13). When Jethro saw this, he foresaw the consequences and immediately said to him: “You will surely become worn out – you as well as this people that is with you” (v.18). As we shall see, the Aggadah (Mechilta, Amalek 2) explains what Jethro meant by this: Rabbi Yehoshua said, “They shall discredit you and make you fall.” For his part, Rabbi Eleazar of Modiim affirmed: “They shall weaken you and make you like a fig tree whose leaves have fallen.” Because Moshe was not naturally inclined to reprimand the Children of Israel, they considered him to be on the same level as themselves, which is why they failed to demonstrate sufficient respect for him. It was for this reason that Korach was able to gather around him many from among the people to rebel against Moshe and discredit him. Furthermore, according to our holy books (Drashot Ketav Sofer for the month of Tevet), the punishment that Moshe received at the incident at the waters of Merivah (being prohibited from entering Eretz Israel) was completely a result of the expression he used in addressing the people: “Listen, please, O rebels!” (Bamidbar 20:10). The term na (“please”) always implies a request (Berachot 9a), meaning that Moshe was punished for not speaking firmly with them, and for not reprimanding them at the proper time. Aaron was also a man of great humility.

In the Gemara our Sages cite G-d as saying, “I bestowed greatness upon...Moshe and Aaron, and yet they said: ‘What are we?’ [Shemot 16:7]” (Chullin 89a). Our Sages also say that Aaron strived to make peace between men: When there was a dispute, he would go to one of the parties and say that the other had praised him. He would then go to the other party and say the same, until he was able to establish peace between them (Avoth D’Rabbi Nathan 12). The close ties that Moshe and Aaron had with the people caused Korach and his followers to be mistaken. These rebels did not respect their teachers as they respected Hashem, and therefore they did not follow the precept: “You shall fear your teacher as you fear G-d” – this being on account of Moshe and Aaron’s extreme humility. Hence in regards to the verse, “Korach... took” (Bamidbar 16:1), Rashi explains: “He took himself to one side in order to dissociate himself from the congregation, to contest the priesthood.” What does “to one side” mean? After all, were there two sides? In actuality, Korach wanted to confront Moshe and Aaron, as if they were on one side of a balance and he was on the other – both sides being equal in his mind and none being more important than the other. By thinking along these lines, Korach denied the Torah and G-d. In fact our Sages affirm that “Korach was a rebel who proclaimed that the Torah was not divine” (Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:1). How could he have reached such a point? It was because, quite simply, whoever denies his teacher will eventually deny Hashem, and whoever scorns his teacher will eventually scorn G-d.

It is written, "That he not be like Korach and his assembly" (Bamidbar 17:5).

The rebellion of Korach and his assembly, which constitutes the central theme of this week's parsha, has for generations served as the classic example of a "selfish dispute," a reference point for other disputes that have unfortunately not spared the vineyard of the House of Israel.

This is in contrast to the disputes between Hillel and Shammai, disputes that were, for their part, destined to endure because they were *leshem Shamayim* ("for the sake of Heaven"), meaning completely unselfish in nature.

Yet what exactly is a dispute that is *leshem Shamayim*? Can anyone claim that a certain dispute which took place generations ago was for the sake of Heaven?

In his book *Yaarot Devash*, the gaon Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz clarifies this subject by stating that a dispute *leshem Shamayim* cannot exist – period! As he writes, "To summarize, our Sages defined an 'unselfish dispute' by the example of Hillel and Shammai. No other such dispute exists. Do not listen to your evil inclination, for no dispute, regardless of the form, is *leshem Shamayim*. The gaon Rabbi Zeev Tchetchik, one of the great Torah scholars of Jerusalem, made the following remark to his son [as fully recounted in the book *Torat Zeev*]: If you want to live a happy existence and go through life in peace and tranquility, you must pay close attention to the following: Never bring up, even once, the subject of the dispute between the Chassidim and Lithuanians. I have met all kinds of people over the course of my life, and I realize just how delicate this subject is. I once knew a great chassid and a great Lithuanian, yet both of them fell into this trap. The Lithuanian also died a painful death, G-d help us.

"Although we are speaking only about wisdom here, let us at least acknowledge the importance of experience. Do not get mixed up with, and get as far away as possible from anything that pertains to this subject, and also from everything that resembles, even if just a little, certain 'mindsets.' You can then follow your path in all confidence, and goodness will be on your side, both now and later."

I Have My Own "Baggage"

The book *HaMeorot HaGedolim* recounts how the Chafetz Chaim once prevented a great dispute from breaking out in his town of Radin. After the Russian Revolution of 5678, commoners settled in Radin and established a new *Chevra Kadisha* next to the one that already existed, which could have provoked a great dispute.

On the Shabbat following this event, during the morning prayer service, the Chafetz Chaim addressed the assembled worshippers:

"My dear brothers, if someone had offered me 2,000 rubles to give this talk, I would not have agreed to it. I am old, and every hour is precious to me. Nevertheless, I see a need to address you. I have lived here for more than 50 years, and I remember everyone who frequented this synagogue at the time. Where are they now? All that remains of them are tombstones. Most of you weren't born at the time, and those who were children then are among the older ones today. May we all live long, but in the end we all go to the same place, and we will be forced to give an accounting for our behavior here below.

"Now know this, my dear brothers! A dispute is a very serious thing, and it can make a person lose the merits of all the mitzvot he fulfilled. I'm convinced that after 120 years on earth, when faced with the fear of judgment, everyone will try to grab hold of any lifeline in order to save themselves. Everyone will then declare, 'In our town there was a Jew by the name of Israel Meir. He was considered a scholar, and he saw everything but

remained silent.' That is why I am begging you not to mention my name. I already have my own 'baggage,' and I can't imagine how I will make it through the judgment. How can I also carry the responsibility of others?"

As he spoke, the Chafetz Chaim burst into tears and his entire body began to tremble out of fear. Those present, shaken by the spirit of these words, decided to immediately close the new *Chevra Kadisha*. At the same time, they committed themselves to unselfishly fulfilling this precious mitzvah of *chesed*, as they should.

Forbidden to Speak of It

Let us mention another painful subject connected to the episode of Korach and his followers:

The concept of a dispute, and all the words spoken in a dispute, end up destroying all the good areas of G-d's vineyard. In fact it becomes impossible not to be rattled when confronted by people who consider themselves orthodox, and yet dare to speak against great men of Torah who fear G-d.

During the eulogy that the gaon Rabbi Tzvi Greinowitz gave for his son, the eminent young Shemuel Yoel, he recounted how he went to see the gaon Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman to find out which subjects he should alert the community to.

Rav Steinman told him that he had to strengthen people on two essential subjects: Being diligent in the study of Torah, and distancing themselves from every dispute.

In his eulogy, Rabbi Greinowitz spoke at length about this subject. He said that the evil inclination entices us by advancing the argument that "discussing a dispute is not what creates it." It tells a person that a dispute already existed beforehand, and that it is acceptable to only be "interested" in a few details, namely who said what, and what he was told in return. What's the harm in that?

Rav Steinman therefore wanted to tell him that we are obligated to distance ourselves even from that. We must realize, Rav Greinowitz added, that polemics between great men of Torah do not concern us. It is forbidden to utter even a word about the topic, and whoever does so harms the soul of Orthodox Judaism, as well as his own.

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

A Complete Blessing

Mr. Samy Gabai of Casablanca made sure to attend the Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us, every year. In 5763, he stood by the grave of the tzaddik and poured out all his tears, for he had already been married a long time, but was still childless. Sensing his great pain, the faithful gave him a blessing to have a child, and to return on the following year as a father. The following year, he arrived at the Hilloula as he normally did, and when he emerged from the cemetery he turned to our teacher Shlita and asked him for his blessing, which he willingly gave: "Nu, thank G-d your wife conceived, and the blessing that you received from all the people by the grave to the tzaddik was accepted." Mr. Gabai agreed, but asked: "Why was the blessing not completely fulfilled? I was told that I would return here as a father, but that hasn't happened yet. The proof is that I'm here in Mogador, while my wife is in Casablanca, almost 500 kilometers away!"

"Do you know what the Hebrew date is today?" he asked Samy.

"Yes. Today is Shabbat, Elul 25," he replied.