



Parshas Korach

For the week ending 30 Sivan 5757
4 & 5 July 1997

Overview

Korach, Dasan and Aviram, and 250 of the leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aaron. The rebellion results in their being swallowed up by the earth. Many people of the nation resent the death of Korach and his followers, holding Moshe responsible. Hashem's 'anger' is manifested by a plague which besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people, instructs Aaron to make atonement for them, and the plague is halted. Hashem then commands that a staff inscribed with the name of each Tribe be placed in the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle. In the morning, the staff of Levi, bearing Aaron's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that the Tribe of Levi is selected for the Priesthood, and also verifies Aaron's position as the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest. The specific duties of the *Levi'im* and *Kohanim* are stated. The *Kohanim* were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week's Parsha are laws concerning the first fruits, the redemption of the firstborn, and other offerings.

Insights

CLIFFHANGER 1

“For the entire assembly — all of them — are holy, and Hashem is among them.” (16:3)

On Simchas Torah there is a widely-observed custom to jump up and down while singing “Moshe is true and his Torah is true!”

What is the source of this custom?

In this week's *Parsha*, Korach and his cohorts were swallowed alive by the earth after Korach tried to supplant Moshe.

In the Talmud (*Bava Basra 73b*), an Arabian merchant takes Rabba bar Bar Chana to a place in the desert where there are fissures in the ground. Fierce heat pours from these cracks. They put wool that was soaked in water onto sticks, and hold them over the crevice. Immediately, the wool goes up in flames.

The Arabian merchant beckons Rabba bar Bar Chana closer. He motions to him to be silent and listen. From under the ground he hears voices saying “Moshe and his Torah are true and the others are liars!”

Korach and all his household went down into the abyss. However, his children were not consumed. At the last second, they repented and a small promontory jutting out of the rock was created for them. Onto this small ledge, they jumped.

When we jump up and down in *shul* on Simchas Torah, we are imitating Korach's children, who leaped onto the ledge and were saved from the abyss.

Korach's claim was that all Jews are equally holy. Therefore if we are all equally holy, no one can be greater than anyone else. But as we dance in that circle on Simchas Torah, there can be both young students and great rabbis dancing together. In some ways, we are not all equal.

And in other ways, we are.

In the future, Hashem will make a circle-dance for the righteous and the Divine presence will be at its center. No one will be jealous of his neighbor, for everyone will see that he is equidistant from the center — from Hashem. And those who saw themselves as diametrically opposed to each other will realize that they have always been equidistant from Hashem. “And Hashem is among them...”

CLIFFHANGER 2

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

Only someone who knows what it means to be alone can really talk about loneliness.

Only someone who has walked through the darkest night, can talk about what it means to long for the day.

Yaakov Avinu was the Patriarch who is the model of the Jew in exile. He was forced to leave the holy soil of *Eretz Yisrael* and dwell with Lavan. Before he went into exile — an exile which was to last 20 years — he instituted the evening prayer that we say to this day — *Maariv*.

Maariv is the prayer of longing. It is the prayer of the night — when we feel most alone. It is then that we turn to G-d out of our very loneliness and we find that He has been there with us all along.

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When the Torah delineates Korach's ancestry, it traces him back only to his great-grandfather Levi, but it stops short of linking his name one generation further back to Yaakov himself.

Interestingly though, in the book of Chronicles, Heman, a descendent of Korach, and the main singer in the *Beis Hamikdash* of King Shlomo, is traced all the way back to Yaakov Avinu.

Why should it be that Heman was linked back to Yaakov through Korach, but Korach himself was not?

Korach's sons had originally joined in their father's plot. They realized the enormity of the schism that they were helping to create and they repented. When Korach was miraculously swallowed up by the earth, they were miraculously given a refuge within the cavern. Here, on the brink of oblivion, they sang. They sang songs of exquisite yearning for Hashem. Their songs bespeak the closeness that is borne of distance, of the longing to be close to G-d, that only someone who is very far away can adequately express. In this, they were reflecting the very essence of their forefather Yaakov, who had himself stood on the edge of the precipice of exile and prayed to G-d the prayer of the evening. *Maariv*. The prayer of exile. The prayer of longing.

Haftorah: Shabbos-Rosh Chodesh: Yishayahu 66:1-24

When Rosh Chodesh fall on Shabbos, the regular Haftorah is replaced by a special Haftorah — the last chapter of the Book of Yishayahu (Isaiah).

This chapter was chosen because of its penultimate verse which links Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh: *"And it shall be that, from New Moon to New Moon, and from Shabbos to Shabbos, all flesh shall come and prostrate themselves before Me, said Hashem."* (66:23) This verse is also repeated after the end of the reading.

HAPPY BIRTH DAY

"Shall I bring (a woman) to the birth stool and not have her give birth?" (66:9)

When we look at the situation today, it's easy to despair. The strident metallic clang of materialism and selfishness seem to swamp out the message of the Torah and its People. The sensuous siren call of the media surrounds us all with a CD world of illusion. Virtual Reality masquerades as the real thing. The world seems to be deaf to morality, to modesty, to the values that are rooted in the Torah. The motto of the time is "Let it all hang out." In a world where there is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing

KOSHER STYLE

"And Korach took..." (16:1)

"\$500 for a pair of *tefillin*! You must be joking! \$500 for a couple of leather boxes with some Hebrew writing in them! Why, for a fraction of the price I could get something almost identical! If the whole point of *tefillin* is to be a reminder, what do I need all this crazy quasi-scientific precision for? What does it matter if there's a hairline crack in one letter? It's so small you can hardly see it! It's a typical example of the sort of nit-picking legalism that I hate in organized religion!"

"Open up your computer. What would happen if I took a very sharp *x-acto* blade and cut one of the wires here in the modem?"

"Well of course, it wouldn't work. The modem won't receive anything."

"It's exactly the same with *tefillin*. If there's the tiniest break in a letter, then the **spiritual modem** called *tefillin* won't receive anything."

Korach asked Moshe if a house full of Torah scrolls still needed a mezuzah on the door frame. Said Moshe "Yes." Korach started to mock him saying "If a single mezuzah affixed to the door frame of a house is enough to remind us of Hashem, surely a house full of Torah scrolls will do the job!" (Midrash)

In a way, Korach was the first non-halachic rabbi. The first proponent of 'Kosher-Style Glatt Treif.' "As long as it looks Jewish from the outside it's fine." In other words, according to Korach the *mitzvos* are only symbolic, devoid of absolute performance parameters. Moshe Rabbeinu's answer was that the *mitzvos* of the Torah function within strict operational criteria: One *mezuzah* on the door is what the Torah requires, no more and no less, even if a house full of Torah scrolls may look more Jewish.

brings shame, and thus anything is possible. And what is possible — happens.

Those who stand for the eternal values of our people are despised as fundamentalists and violent barbarians. Everything has been turned upside down.

The prophets speak in many places about the coming of *Mashiach* in terms of childbirth.

Someone ignorant of the process of childbirth who sees for the first time a woman in labor would be convinced that she is about to die. And the closer the actual moment of the birth, the stronger that impression would become.

Then, within a couple of minutes, seeming tragedy has turned into the greatest joy. A new life has entered the world.

This is exactly the way *Mashiach* will come. The worse things become, the more painful the birth-pangs, the nearer is his coming. Until, like a mother who had delivered, all the tears and pain will be forgotten in the great joy of a new life.

Sources:

Cliffhanger 1 - Rabbi C.J. Senter, Rabbi Zev Leff

Cliffhanger 2 - Rabbi Moshe Eismann, heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer

Kosher Style - Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perلمان

Fatherly Advice - Tidbits from the Ethics of the Fathers Traditionally Studied on Summer Sabbaths

The world stands on three things – justice, truth and peace

"Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel (Avos 1:18)

Even when no harm results from a distortion of the truth it must be avoided. There is a Talmudic tale (Yevamos 63a) of a problem which the Sage Rav had with his wife who consistently prepared a meal for him contrary to the order he conveyed to her. When Rav's son Chiya became old enough to realize what was happening he decided to solve the problem by conveying to his mother the opposite of what his father had asked him to order. When Rav surprisingly found the meal he actually wanted and asked Chiya what had happened to his mother's contrariness he learned of the "white lie" which his son had told. Rav praised his cleverness but condemned his action, citing the warning issued by the Prophet Yirmiyahu (9:4) that lying is habit forming and one who tells "white lies" develops a tongue so addicted to distortion that he will find it difficult to tell the truth even when it really matters.

Rabbeinu Yonah

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