



Parshas Korach

For the week ending 5 Tammuz 5759 / 18 & 19 June 1999 (Outside Israel)
28 Sivan 5759 / 11 & 12 June 1999 (Inside Israel)

Overview

Korach, Datan and Aviram, and 250 leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed by the earth. Many resent their death, and blame Moshe. Hashem's "anger" is manifest by a plague which besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people: He instructs Aharon to atone for them and the plague stops. Then Hashem commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. In the morning the staff of Levi, bearing Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that the Levi's Tribe is chosen for Priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as 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 of the first fruits, redemption of the firstborn, and other offerings.

Insights

MEN AT WORK

"Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?" (16:3)

You're driving home after a long week's absence. A week before, you had had a long delay on the highway due to construction, and you sigh as you wonder how long it will take to get back through it. You turn the bend, and to your delight, the traffic is flowing like money at a casino. The road repair crew has already finished their work. Sailing over the new tarmac, you notice that it has already lost its pristine blackness. In a few short days, it will be indistinguishable from the thousands of other dusty gray miles of pavement.

Around the end of the 19th century, a saintly Jew in Russia authored a work which changed the course of Judaism. The book was called *Chafetz Chaim* — "The Desirer of Life."

Its subject matter, the laws of proper speech. In clear language, the Chafetz Chaim led his readers through the sometimes tortuous laws of permitted and forbidden speech. The Chafetz Chaim's author was famous for guarding his tongue with such care that his name became synonymous with that of his creation. He became known as the *Chafetz Chaim*.

One might have expected the Chafetz Chaim to be extremely taciturn, visibly guarding every syllable that left his lips. The opposite was, in fact, true.

The Chafetz Chaim's son-in-law was Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Levinson (*rosh yeshiva* of Radin). A visitor once noted the striking difference between the two men: Rabbi Levinson was a man of few words, who seemed to almost police their exit from his mouth. By comparison, the Chafetz Chaim was almost verbose, his conversation flowing with ease.

In this week's Parsha it's difficult to understand how Korach could have hoodwinked so many of the Jewish People into suspecting Moshe of "lording it up" over the congregation. Just a few chapters previously, the Torah testifies that Moshe was the "humblest of all men." How could there have existed even a suspicion that Moshe was pumped up with his own self-image?

When we master a certain character trait, it becomes an indivisible part of who we are. However, when we are still doing "road work" on part of our character, the signs of digging and construction are everywhere. It's clear to all that there are still "men at work."

To the untrained eye, Moshe might have seen lofty and removed. He was, after all, the king of the Jewish People. And he behaved in a the manner of a king. But in his heart, Moshe understood, as no one before or since, exactly how small he was compared to G-d. Moshe didn't need to trumpet his humility. It was already integrated into his personality as seamlessly as the tarmac of last year's road repair.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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“The man whom Hashem will choose — he is the holy one.” (16:7)

It's not *what* you say, it's *why* you say it. The *mishna* in *Pirkei Avot* says, “Any dispute which is for the sake of Heaven will have a constructive outcome.” However, says the *mishna*, any disagreement that is not for the sake of Heaven will not have a constructive outcome. It cites the argument of Korach and his cohorts with Moshe as an “argument not for the sake of Heaven.”

If you think about it, the *mishna* is problematic: The implication is that if Korach's intentions would have been correct, his dispute with Moshe would have had a positive outcome. In other words, what Korach said was, in essence, correct. It was *why* he said it, not *what* he said, that was at fault.

How could it be that both Moshe and Korach were right? Korach claimed “*all the people are holy;*” whereas Moshe said: “*He who Hashem chooses is holy.*”

Korach dressed his followers in garments which were entirely *techelet*, the blue color of the thread of *tzitzit*, and asked Moshe, “Does an all-*techelet* garment require *tzitzit*?” Moshe replied “Yes.” To which, Korach scoffed and said “If one thread of *techelet* is enough to exempt a garment made from a different color, isn't it logical that an all-*techelet* garment should be exempt?”

Behind Moshe's monosyllabic reply lies a fascinating concept. An entire garment *can* be of *techelet*. Korach was right: The entire people *can* be holy. But just as a garment which is entirely *techelet* requires *tzitzit*, so a holy people need a source for their holiness. Holiness doesn't just exist by itself, it comes from the Holy One and is channeled through His *tzaddikim*. Just as *tzitzit* are a life-line joining a holy people to their Source, so it takes a Moshe to connect the Jewish People to its Source.

It's not *what* you say, it's *why* you say it.

Sources:

Men at Work - Rabbi Mordechai Perlmán

The Right Thing for the Wrong Reason - *Sfat Emet* as heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perlmán

Haftarah: Shmuel I 11:14 - 12:22

This *haftara* contains Shmuel's chastisement, “Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken...”(12:3-4), echoing Moshe's words in this week's *parsha*, “Not one donkey have I taken from them.” (16:15)

Another connection between this *haftara* and the *parsha* is Shmuel's lineage: Shmuel was a scion from the house of Korach, and his prominence was compared to both that of Moses and Aharon (*Tractate Rosh Hashana 25b*). The *haftara* begins with the nation's gathering at Gilgal to anoint King Saul and proclaim him King. However, Shmuel who anointed the king chastises the people for requesting a king, as it might indicate deterioration of the unique spiritual level of the nation that needed no king to live in harmony. His rebuke ends with a miracle where Shmuel calls out to G-d for rain in a mid-summer day and a rainstorm begins.

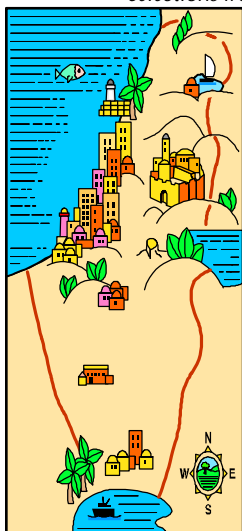
THUNDERSTORM

To demonstrate G-d's “displeasure” at their desire for a king, Shmuel performs a miracle, bringing a thunderstorm in the middle of the wheat harvest. Why this particular sign?

The people didn't see anything wrong in requesting a king, as the Torah itself commands the appointing of a monarch (*Deuteronomy 17:15*). Yet, the Torah commands appointing a king because a king has power to enforce law and order and to maintain observance of Jewish law. Samuel reproached them as they were then on a very high spiritual plane, and thus they didn't *need* a king. On the contrary, appointing a king now might bring the secular influence of neighboring nations, as it would change Israel's unique legislative and social structure to be like that of any regular nation in the land. Appointing a king should be put off until Torah observance is lax and needs enforcement; then it is acceptable despite its negative ramifications. This Shmuel demonstrated by the rainstorm, as rain is a blessing only when it falls in season; but not in the middle of the harvest.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



TSEFAT

For Jewish settlers and visitors during the last five hundred years Tsefat has been one of Eretz Yisrael's "sacred cities." A visit to its ancient synagogues and cemetery takes one back to the golden days of the city when Rabbi Yitzchak Luria ("Arizal") and his disciples established it as the center of Kabbalistic learning. Here too lived and died Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Shlomo Alkebetz, author of the "Lecha Dodi" sung on Shabbat eve, and Rabbi Yaakov Berrav, who made an abortive attempt to reestablish the Sanhedrin, and many other famous saints and scholars.

The cool air and beautiful surroundings of Tsefat attract many people from the entire country during the summer, but the year-long population remains small. A curious blend of art, music and mysticism endows this city with a unique personality during peak season. Among the Torah institutions functioning in Tsefat is "Shalom Rav," a yeshiva for students with limited backgrounds, headed by American-born Rabbi Rafael Weingot and a similar seminary for women, Sharei Bina, run by his wife.

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