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PARSHAT KORACH IS READ ON 28 SIVAN (JUNE 24) IN ISRAEL AND ON 5 TAMMUZ (JULY 1) OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL

PARSHA INSIGHTS

NO OBJECT OF DESIRE

“And Korach...took” (16:1)

“**A**nd G-d said ‘Let Us make man in Our image.’ (Bereishet 1:26) Artists throughout the ages have taken this verse and stood it on its head: Man has ‘created’ G-d in *his* image. The G-d of Michelangelo, Donatello *et al*, appears as no more than a venerable grandfather, complete with a long white beard and robes. Save for a few thunderbolts, their G-d looks like an Italian *zeide* in fancy dress.

What does the Torah mean when it says that G-d created man “in His image?”

When G-d created man, He gave him two powers: the power of giving and the power of taking. The power to give is the elevated quality that imitates G-d, for G-d is the Ultimate Giver — there is nothing you can give Him in return. He already owns everything. Man is created specifically to imitate G-d by being a giver.

The desire to take is the antithesis of G-d’s purpose in creating man. Furthermore, taking is not about amassing a vast fortune, or a fleet of Porsches; it’s not a matter of “*He who dies with the most toys, wins.*” In truth, the desire to take has nothing to do with toys, or trophies, or physical objects at all.

The desire to take is the dark side of the power to give. It is the anti-world of giving, its negative doppelganger. The desire to take is never satisfied by the object of its desire. It’s amazing how quickly the sheen wears off

a pristine new computer, or a new car, or a new wife (if that’s your view of marriage). For once the object becomes our possession it ceases to interest us, the desire is gone, and we focus on something else. Why?

The desire to take is never satisfied by the object of our desire because the desire to take is really the desire to enlarge ourselves, to make ourselves more, to take up more real estate in reality — to exist more.

And that desire is insatiable.

All physical desires have their limits — there’s just so much *pate de foie gras* you can consume, but the desire to be more, the dark side of giving, is insatiable.

This week’s Torah reading starts with the following sentence, “*And Korach (the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kohat, the son of Levi) together with Datan and Aviram (the sons of Eliav) and On ben Pelet (sons of Reuven) took.*” There is no object in this sentence. It just says that “Korach ...took...” without revealing what, or whom, he took. What then, is the object of the sentence?

What did Korach take?

Korach “took” the entire sad episode that followed. His rebellion and demise are the objects of the first sentence of the parsha.

Korach was the quintessential taker. What he wanted was more, more and more.

Korach wanted to devour the world.

And thus it was apt that the earth opened its mouth and devoured him.

• Based on Rabbi E. E. Dessler’s *Kuntras HaChessed* and Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch

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PARSHA 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. G-d'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 G-d commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the Mishkan. In the morning the staff of Levi,

bearing Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that Levi's tribe is chosen for priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as Kohen Gadol, 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.

ISRAEL Forever

THE MISSING WORD

What does it mean when an Israeli says *lefargen*? Literally translated into English this means to not begrudge the success or well-being of someone else. This is an adaptation of the Yiddish word *fargin*, which is a positive way of expressing the satisfaction one can feel with another's happiness.

The tragedy of Korach and his company sinking alive into the earth, which we will be reading in this week's Torah portion, all began when this extremely wealthy and important individual could not *fargin* the position given to someone else that he felt was coming to him. This envy led him

to challenge the authority of Moshe and brought about his disaster.

Not only is there really no word in modern Hebrew to approximate the *fargin* of Yiddish, there is also a lack of this attitude in much of our society. In politics and business there is too much of a "dog eat dog" approach to dealing with others, especially competitors. This is a very unhealthy condition for any society, especially a Jewish one.

Perhaps the lesson of Korach will alert our people to the importance of *fargin* others and bring peace and harmony to Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE SAGES

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

"THE WORLD WAS CREATED WITH TEN STATEMENTS. WHAT LESSON DOES THE TORAH COMMUNICATE BY TELLING US THAT IT TOOK TEN STATEMENTS BY G-D WHEN ONE WOULD HAVE SUFFICED? THE WICKED WILL BE PUNISHED FOR DESTROYING A WORLD CREATED WITH TEN STATEMENTS, WHILE THE RIGHTEOUS WILL BE REWARDED FOR PRESERVING A WORLD CREATED WITH TEN STATEMENTS." — (AVOT 5:1)

The message of the Torah's account of the creation of the world with ten statements is that the world and everything in it are most precious to their Creator. When a man's sin brings about the Heavenly retribution of destruction of his property he is guilty of spoiling something beloved by G-d. He therefore deserves to be punished for this as well.

When, on the other hand, one's righteousness not



only sustains the world but also serves as a catalyst for a blessing of greater prosperity, he is fulfilling the Will of his Creator and will receive another reward for receiving a reward.

This is what an earlier Mishna (Avot 4:2) means by the statement: "The reward for a mitzvah is in itself also a mitzvah: the retribution suffered for a sin is in itself sinful".

• Tiferet Yisrael

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Datan and Aviram join Korach?
2. Why is Yaakov's name not mentioned in Korach's genealogy?
3. What motivated Korach to rebel?
4. What did Korach and company do when Moshe said that a *techelet* garment needs *tzizit*?
5. What warning did Moshe give the rebels regarding the offering of the incense?
6. Did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol*?
7. What event did Korach not foresee?
8. What does the phrase *rav lachem* mean in this week's Parsha? (Give two answers.)
9. What lands are described in this week's Parsha as "flowing with milk and honey"?
10. When did Moshe have the right to take a donkey from the Jewish community?
11. What did Korach do the night before the final confrontation?
12. What sin did Datan and Aviram have in common specifically with Goliath?
13. Before what age is a person not punished by the Heavenly Court for his sins?
14. What happens to one who rebels against the institution of *kehuna*? Who suffered such a fate?
15. Why *specifically* was incense used to stop the plague?
16. Why was Aharon's staff placed in the middle of the other 11 staffs?
17. Aharon's staff was kept as a sign. What did it signify?
18. Why are the 24 gifts for the *kohanim* taught in this week's Parsha?
19. Who may eat the *kodshei kodashim* (most holy sacrifices) and where must they be eaten?
20. Why is G-d's covenant with the *kohanim* called "a covenant of salt"?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 16:1 - Because they were his neighbors.
2. 16:1 - Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion (*Bereishet* 49:6).
3. 16:1 - Korach was jealous that Elizafan ben Uziel was appointed as leader of the family of Kehat instead of himself.
4. 16:1 - They laughed.
5. 16:6 - Only one person would survive.
6. 16:6 - Yes.
7. 16:7 - That his sons would repent.
8. 16:7,3 - *Rav lachem* appears twice in this week's Parsha. It means "much more than enough greatness have you taken for yourself (16:3)" and "It is a great thing I have said to you (16:17)."
9. 16:12 - Egypt and Canaan.
10. 16:15 - When he traveled from Midian to Egypt.
11. 16:19 - Korach went from tribe to tribe in order to rally support for himself.
12. 16:27 - They all blasphemed.
13. 16:27 - Twenty years old.
14. 17:5 - He is stricken with *tzara'at*, as was King Uziyahu (*Divrei HaYamim* II 26:16-19).
15. 17:13 - Because the people were deprecating the incense offering, saying that it caused the death of two of Aharon's sons and also the death of 250 of Korach's followers. Therefore G-d demonstrated that the incense offering was able to avert death, and it is sin, not incense, which causes death.
16. 17:21 - So people would not say that Aharon's staff bloomed because Moshe placed it closer to the *Shechina*.
17. 17:25 - That only Aharon and his children were selected for the *kehuna*.
18. 18:8 - Since Korach claimed the *kehuna*, the Torah emphasizes Aharon's and his descendants' rights to *kehuna* by recording the gifts given to them.
19. 18:10 - Male *kohanim* may eat them and only in the *azara* (forecourt of the *Beit Hamikdash*).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

- Where in the *Beit Hamikdash* was the office of the lambs
- How the *kohen* burning the Red Heifer on Har Hazeitim (Mount of Olives) saw the entrance to Sanctuary
- Length and width of the *Beit Hamikdash* courtyard and where the altar stood
- Privileges of the *kohen gadol* and the division of the *lechem hapanim* (showbreads)
- Preparation of the *kohen gadol* for Yom Kippur through study and diet
- Talmudic Sages and their sometimes unusual marriages
- The oath imposed on the *kohen gadol* and why
- The two offices of the *kohen gadol* and the functions of the other offices
- Are the *kohanim* our agents or agents of Heaven
- The fate of the *kohanim gedolim* who deviated from the proper service
- What was read for the *kohen gadol* who could not study himself
- How the *kohen gadol* was kept awake and the tragedy of later imitation
- Timing of the tithing of the altar ashes
- The cry of the *kohen* and the crowing of the rooster
- The mysterious interpreter who refused to quit
- The miracles of the *Beit Hamikdash*
- Noises, fires and smoke
- The race up the altar ramp and why it was abandoned
- The lottery for choosing *kohanim* for the sacred service
- Counting Jews and the sins of the kings Shaul and David

MIRACLE OF THE EXPANDING FLOOR

One of the miracles that took place in the *Beit Hamikdash* was the expansion of space. When Jews came there on the festivals they were so crowded in the Temple courtyard that many of them did not even have room to put their feet on the floor, so that they gave the appearance of floating in the air. But when the time came to prostrate themselves the floor space miraculously expanded, so that there was a separation of four cubits between each of them. Thus no one would hear the confessions of sin made by his neighbor and cause him embarrassment.

Two challenges are raised by Maharsha to this *gemara*. In a later *mishna* (*Yoma* 35b) we learn that when the *kohen gadol* made his confession on Yom Kippur, he did so standing and not prostrated. The reason given by Rashi for the separation seems to be unnecessary since a

human prostrated takes up four cubits, and this alone would have necessitated a miracle without the reason for confessional confidentiality.

In response to the first challenge we may suggest that the *kohen gadol* made his confession with his hands on the animal that he would sacrifice for his atonement, and this required standing. For the Jews confessing their sins during their festival visits it was more proper to do so in the humble posture of prostration.

As to the need for mentioning the separation of four cubits as being based on confessional confidentiality, it must be noted that even if a person's outstretched body anyway took up four cubits, this would only remove his mouth from the earshot of the fellow ahead or behind him. In order for the fellow alongside him to be unable to hear his confession there had to be another separation of four cubits, which made the miracle even greater.

• *Yoma* 21a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"Every turn you take in performing the sacred service in the *Beit Hamikdash* should be to the right."

• *Rabbi Yehuda, quoted in Yoma 17b*

"When Jews act in accordance with the Will of G-d they will be so great in number that it will be beyond the ability of man to count them."

• *Rabbi Yonatan and the Sage Abba Yossi ben Dostai - Yoma 22b*

FORGOING THE FIERY LION

From: Scott in Portland, OR

Dear Rabbi,

I was told that Jews in biblical times were steeped in idol worship and that this was one of the reasons that the Temple was destroyed. I don't understand how Jews who had the guidance of the Torah and rabbis were involved in such nonsense. Would you please explain?

Dear Scott,

Rav Ashi of the Talmud (Sanhedrin 102b) once spoke disparagingly of the wicked king Menasha of Biblical times in a public lecture. That night, Menasha appeared to him in a dream and remonstrated him for criticizing him when he didn't even know Torah ideas that were basic in Menasha's times. The holy rabbi asked him that if his generation was so learned, why did they practice idolatry? Menasha replied that if the rabbi were living in his times, he'd lift his robe over his knees and run to worship idols. If this is so regarding the holy rabbi and his learned generation, all the more so should this apply to us. If so, why don't we have a drive for idolatry? What changed?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 64a) relates how the Sages in the times of the Prophet Zechariah beseeched G-d to nullify the inclination for forbidden worship. They cried, "The Temple has been destroyed, the righteous have been murdered, the Jews have been expelled and Satan still dances among us. The only reason You created the evil inclination was for us to overcome it and receive reward. We no longer want the inclination nor its reward." At that point, a fiery lion leaped out of the place of the Holy of Holies. Seeing that their request had been granted, the Sages then

prayed to nullify the inclination for immorality. However, afterward not even chickens would lay eggs and they had to have the urge restored.

This teaching illustrates two very important ideas:

First, what does the nullification of the drive for forbidden worship have to do with a fiery lion leaping out of the Holy of Holies, the center of pure spirituality? The answer is that in its most basic form, spirituality is one drive that can be expressed either through holiness or impurity. Dissipating the desire for forbidden worship necessarily dissipates the drive for spirituality in general. We may no longer feel the desire for idolatry that they felt, but we have no idea of what intense spirituality they experienced either. For this reason, from the time the fiery lion was sent from the Holy of Holies, prophecy terminated from Israel.

Second, what does the nullification of the desire for idolatry have to do with the nullification of the drive for immorality? The answer is that idolatry and adultery [the prototype of immorality] go hand in hand. Idolatry is infidelity vis-a-vis the Divine; adultery is unfaithfulness to one's spouse. For this reason, these prohibitions parallel each other on each side of the tablets (Commandments 2 and 6). Similarly, in order to snare the Israelites with idolatry, the Midianites enticed the Jewish men with immorality. In their excitement, the Jews were told, "If you want this, bow down to that!" The fact that these two drives are juxtaposed might also offer us a glimpse into just how consuming the lust for forbidden worship really was. Although it is hard for us living "post-fiery lion" to imagine the drive for idolatry, we can certainly relate to a person being overcome by its counterpart in immorality, despite the recognition that it is wrong. Perhaps "pre-fiery lion", the drive for spirituality was so great that people often succumbed to their desire for immediate, but inappropriate, spiritual gratification despite their knowing it was wrong.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

LOST AND FOUND

"Where is Chaim?" was the anguished cry of the Jerusalem mother whose three-year old son was nowhere to be seen.

Neighbors were soon organized into search parties and there was talk of alerting the police and the ZAKA volunteers who specialize in locating lost people.

Then someone reminded the searchers, who had already spent a futile hour, that Jerusalem, with its large population of infants, had a "Gemach for Lost Children" in

virtually every religious neighborhood. An Orthodox Telephone Directory was consulted and a call was made to the nearest home that offered this unique service.

"Does your little boy answer to the name Chaim?" was the question coming from the end of the line. "Someone found him crying in the street and brought him here." Thus there was a happy ending to yet another story of a lost child thanks to a very special Gemach.

BELTING THE PASSENGER

Question: I enjoy doing the kindness of giving someone a ride in my car and the passenger usually sits in the back seat. As one who is very careful to always wear a seat belt while driving, I insist on my passengers doing the same even if they are sitting in the back, as is required by law where I live. Since too many people in my community view this as an unnecessary caution, my passengers are often put off by my request. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: You have every right to insist on your passenger's wearing his seat belt even if it makes him a bit

uncomfortable. If he expresses dissatisfaction you should explain to him that as his driver you have a responsibility to guarantee his safety as much as possible. Short stops and collisions can happen to anyone, and the seat belt offers a better chance for survival. The law requiring the wearing of seat belts is based on serious research proving that it helps the victims of accidents and deserves to be respected.

In an area where police actually enforce this law, you have a much easier time in convincing your reluctant passenger to save both him and yourself from paying the penalty for his lack of caution.

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