

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KORACH · 23 SIVAN 5771 · JUNE 25, 2011 · VOL. 18 NO. 38

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE OBJECT OF DESIRE

“And Korach...took” (16:1)

“**A**nd G-d said ‘Let Us make man in Our image.’” (Bereshet 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 and others 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 a costume.

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 since 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, 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 object of the first sentence of the weekly portion.

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.

• Sources: 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

CONTRAST OF CONFLICTS

After the rebellion of Korach against the authority of Moshe, which is related in this week's Torah portion, there is a statement that seems to summarize the lesson to be learned from the bitter fate of the rebels:

"So that there will not be like Korach and his assembly."
(*Bamidbar* 17:5)

There is an interesting takeoff on this which was reportedly suggested by the Chafetz Chaim.

There may be many disputes in the future, but they will

never be like the one initiated by Korach. In every other dispute there is the possibility of each side having some measure of justice to their claim. In regard to the dispute between Korach and Moshe, the truth was unequivocally on the side of Moshe representing G-d.

This perhaps explains why Korach and his assembly were swallowed by the earth. There was no place above the ground where there was justification for such a rebellion.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

THE WISER SAGES

The special quality of learning Torah in Eretz Yisrael finds expression in a number of places in Talmud and Midrash.

"The gold of that land is good" writes the Torah about Eretz Yisrael in its description of the area surrounding one of the rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden. This gold refers to the words of Torah, which are more precious than gold, and this



description teaches us that there is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisrael, and no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisrael.

After arriving in Eretz Yisrael after many years in Babylon, Rabbi Zeira reconsidered a position he had in a legal dispute with a colleague. "This is conclusive proof," he exclaimed, "that the very air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wiser."

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

Israel Forever, Love of the Land, TalmuDigest, What's the right thing to do?, The Human Side of the Story written by Rav Mendel Weinbach

Parsha Insights written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair • General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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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.

- Who is eligible to do *shechita*
- The status of a *Kuttite* or sinner regarding *shechita*
- The *shechita* of an idol worshipper
- How the righteous King Yeshshofat ate from the meat of sinful King Achav
- The Prophet Eliyahu and the ravens
- Accepting sacrifices from sinners
- The condemnation of the *Kuttites*
- Rabbi Meir's eating of a vegetable and its consequences
- Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair and the River Ganai
- The dialogues between him and Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi
- The blessing Prophet Elisha received from Prophet Eliyahu
- *Shechita* done with a heated knife

HALF-HEARTED HOSPITALITY

When Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi invited Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair for a meal, he was happily surprised when this great Sage accepted, for it was his custom to always refuse hospitality. Noticing the excited look on the face of his host, Rabbi Pinchas declared:

“Do you think that I have taken a vow not to benefit from any Jew? Jews are a holy people and my refusal is based on my understanding that there are among them who genuinely wish to give to me but lack the means to do so, while others have the means but lack the will. Regarding the latter, King Shlomo wrote: ‘Do not eat the bread of one who has an evil eye... for he invites you to eat and drink, but his heart is not with you.’ (Mishlei 23:6-7)”

“You,” concluded Rabbi Pinchas, “have the means and the will to grant hospitality but I must nevertheless turn down your invitation because I am in a hurry to fulfill the mitzvah of ransoming captives.”

Rabbi Pinchas seemed to be critical of half-hearted hosts and yet includes them in his praise of all Jews being holy people. Tosefot explains that the very fact that a miserly Jew extends an invitation to a guest, even though he is motivated by shame rather than generosity, qualifies him to be considered holy.

It was the extreme righteousness of Rabbi Pinchas that compelled him to refuse an invitation from a host who did not extend it wholeheartedly.

• Chullin 7b

What the SAGES Say

“No one suffers a blow to his finger unless it is decreed from Above.”

• Rabbi Chanina - Chullin 7b

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STILL WATERS RUN DEEP

From: Allison

Dear Rabbi,
This is kind of a personal question, but I hope you can help. I am a quiet person by nature. I would say that I'm basically friendly. That is, I like people and I think people like me, but the truth is that I don't talk very much. So maybe it seems that I don't have friends. I have a family member who is constantly telling me to be more talkative. I know she means well, but when she says things like, "If you don't say anything people will think you're stupid. If you have something to say about things people will think you're smart" – that just doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't seem to me to be the approach of the Torah either. Could you please clarify this for me?

Dear Allison,

From a Torah point of view, there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with being quiet. In fact, it would seem that the Torah would sooner suggest silence than being overly talkative.

Our Sages taught that an aide or preserver of wisdom is silence (*sayag l'chochma – shtika*). This is true on a most basic level in that a person who is always talking is only spewing forth what he already knows (or pretends to know). But since he's so busy talking, he'll never hear or understand what he's talking about from other perspectives. A person who listens more than he speaks will always be learning something new. In this way, silence aides the acquisition of knowledge.

But silence also helps preserve wisdom as well. A person who's constantly talking will inevitably come to speak nonsense. This is because a person simply can't know everything about everything, so if he talks about everything, at least some of what he says must be nothing. But to sound knowledgeable, he'll have to speak more and more nonsense to demonstrate how much he "knows", when it would have been wiser to say less. Another manifestation of this is that not every topic can be important, so if he's always talking, even if he is saying something, inevitably he'll come to saying much about nothing.

We all know how odious it is to be around such people whose domineering discourse drives you crazy until you

either physically or mentally head for the exit door.

Another interesting source on the topic is the teaching of one the Sages who said, "All my life I was in the presence of wise men, and I didn't find anything better for the body than silence." Given the above explanation, the idea that silence benefits the body is peculiar. We would expect the teaching to express that silence is good for one's soul, or mind, or psyche, or emotional state. But that it should be good for the body needs clarification.

One explanation is that when one is constantly talking, the body is never relaxed. Running in high gear all the time is a great strain on the brain and body. Overly talkative people are never at rest. Silence, on the other hand, enables a person to maintain peace and tranquility. This has a direct effect on one's state of health. Another explanation is that listening, particularly to positive, spiritual and Torah ideas, is in fact good for one's soul, mind, psyche and emotional state. And since all planes of our existence are interconnected, the body actually benefits from spiritual health. A third, very interesting idea is one I heard/learned from one of my students. Since the resurrection of the body in the Word-to-Come depends on one's spiritual perfection in this world, all the spiritual benefits of maintaining silence when appropriate will ultimately bestow upon the body everlasting good.

That being said, there are certainly times and circumstances that one should be talkative and expressive. For one, when you are certain that what you know is right, and others would benefit from this knowledge, share it. Similarly, when your speech can help uplift, encourage, or benefit others in any way, speak up. And, perhaps most importantly, regarding spiritual matters or sharing ideas of Torah, it's a mitzvah to talk not only to others, but to yourself as well. King David thus said, "*He'emanti ki adaber* – I believed because I spoke." Rabbi Nachman of Breslev noted that usually one speaks what he believes. What's the meaning of believing what one speaks? He explained that King David was instructing us that speaking out matters of spirituality actually has the power to effect and realize belief.

So I beg to differ with your relative. Still waters run deep, and being quiet, if you're listening in order to learn, engenders wisdom, while people who are overly talkative often reveal how little they really know.

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THE RIGHT THING TO SAY

Question: When speaking or writing I often rely on an idea or a statement I heard or read. How important is it for me to cite the source?

Answer: Plagiarism is vigorously condemned by our Talmudic Sages. “Do not rob the poor because he is poor” (*Mishlei* 22:22), they say, is a warning against robbing credit from the originator, who may not be deprived of the money he anyhow lacks, but is the victim of plagiarism. In his commentary on *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 156*, the great halachic authority Magen Avraham rules on this basis that one who fails to give credit to a source is guilty of a transgression.

There is a positive angle as well in mentioning your source. “One who says something in the name of another,” say our Sages,” brings miraculous redemption to the world”.

The historic example is Queen Esther informing her husband, the Persian King Achashveirosh, of the assassination plot against him, and mentioning that Mordechai was the source of her information. This resulted in the miraculous redemption of the Jewish People from the genocidal plot of Haman.

To practice what I preach I will now quote what I once heard in the name of the great ethicist of the previous generation, Rabbi Eliyahu Lapian of blessed memory, as an explanation of why citing a source is a catalyst for miraculous redemption. G-d deals with us in the manner in which we deal with others. It is human nature to take credit for some important information and deny it to the source. One who is capable of breaking his own nature by citing the source becomes worthy of the Creator breaking the rules of nature that He has created and making a miracle.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE TOMBSTONE'S TALE

Among the thousands of tombstones in the graveyard in the Israeli city of Holon, there is one that stands out in its beauty. It was placed there by a monument maker who did it not for profit but for a special reason. Following is the story behind this stone.

A monument maker who was running a successful business was approached by some drug dealers. They offered him a lot of money if he would consent to have a substantial quantity of the illegal substance smuggled into the country in a shipment of his marble material. Unable to resist the temptation to make some easy money he succumbed. Before the shipment arrived, however, there was a feud among the gangsters and one of them reported the smuggling plan to the police. A sentence of 10 years in prison was the result of his foolish mistake.

During his prison term his mother passed away and he appeared one day in a local synagogue on leave from jail to say *kaddish* for her. Although he had hardly been observant before entering prison, his fall into such tragic circumstances moved him to become more serious about his faith. His lack of familiarity with observance was, however, still evident to

the worshippers who saw him clumsily turning pages in his prayer book. One Jew, the unofficial spiritual leader of the congregation, came over to him and patiently guided him in what he had to say and do. He even told him that he would arrange, at his own expense, a memorial gathering in the synagogue when the thirty-day mourning period ended and he wanted him to join it and say *kaddish*.

The convict's happy surprise at such consideration was surpassed only by the good news he received a few weeks later from the prison warden that, in deference to the request of a very respected Jew, he was being granted a leave to attend that memorial gathering. Upon his arrival there he profusely thanked his benefactor and promised to become his devoted disciple when he would be released.

Not only did he keep his promise but went on to become a lecturer on the subject of returning to religion and gained fame as the “drug dealer who repented”. When the man who got him started on this new path in life passed away he showed his appreciation in a manner recalling his old trade. He arranged that the grave of his benefactor and mentor be honored with a most beautiful tombstone.