

Korach

THE WEISS EDITION

Light points

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

Lightpoints
לזיכרון ולעילוי נשמת
הרה"ח הרה"ת
הר"ר ישעי' זושא
ב"ר אברהם דוד ע"ה ווילהעלם
נלב"ע ביום ד' שבט ה'תשפ"ב
תנצב"ה



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קרח Korach

טז:א | 16:1

וַיִּקַּח קֶרַח

Korach set [himself] apart.

In Memoriam: Korach

“The mention of a righteous man shall be a blessing, but the name of the wicked shall rot.”¹ The Talmud² interprets the latter part of this verse as a directive to not name your child after an evil or corrupt person, so that the wicked person’s name will be put out of circulation.

But surprisingly, a portion in the Torah is named Korach, perpetuating the memory of a man who led a rebellion against Moshe—the greatest leader of all time! If we shouldn’t name our child Korach, why give a Torah portion his name?

1. Mishlei 10:7.

2. Yoma 38b.

Evidently, despite Korach's serious wrongdoing, at the root of his rebellion lay a kernel of truth— a virtue we must aspire to emulate.

Korach wanted to replace Aharon as the Kohen Gadol, the high priest. The attraction of this position was the extraordinary sanctity that came with it, which enabled the Kohen Gadol to stand in perfect union with G-d and to serve Him constantly. Therefore, at its essence, Korach's aspiration was commendable. In fact, the Midrash relates that when Korach and his associates told Moshe what they wished for, Moshe said, "I, too, desire the same!"³ We therefore title the Parshah using Korach's name, paying tribute to his admirable quest for holiness.

Nevertheless, the first word of the Parshah, vayikach, is not included in its title. Vayikach Korach means "Korach set himself apart," emphasizing the rebellion against Moshe, who at G-d's behest appointed only Aharon as Kohen Gadol. The word vayikach is therefore omitted from the title, because Korach's deplorable actions and the strife he caused are not what we seek to memorialize.

Korach's name, however, is enshrined in Jewish tradition, for his lofty dreams are an inspiration for all time.

—Likkutei Sichos, vol. 18, pp. 190–191;
Sefer Hasichos 5748, vol. 2, pp. 500–501

3. See Rashi, Bamidbar 16:6.

 16:3 | ט:ג

כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קְהֵל ה'

"The entire congregation are holy, every one of them, and G-d is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above the assembly of G-d?"

Protecting Your Information

Korach challenged Moshe, "If a house is full of Torah scrolls, what is the law? Does it need a mezuzah on its doorpost or not?"

Moshe replied, "It is obligated."

Said Korach: "The entire Torah, all 275 chapters, is not enough to absolve this house of its obligation, but the two chapters in the mezuzah do absolve it? G-d did not command you these laws; you have invented them yourself!"⁴

The house full of Torah scrolls in Korach's challenge also alludes to the Torah scholar who has lined his mind with the Torah's wisdom. And, as is evident from his response, Moshe informed Korach that even a scholar who is a virtual storehouse of Torah is in need of the mezuzah's protection.

The mezuzah represents our obligation to develop a conscious and personal relationship with G-d, including both love and trepidation before Him. These emotions are highlighted in the two chapters contained in the mezuzah. The first chapter, Shema, instructs: "You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your

4. Midrash Tanchuma, Korach 2.

might.” The second chapter, Vehayah im Shamoah, outlines the rewards for fulfilling G-d’s commandments, and warns of the consequences for neglecting them. Hence, the focus of this chapter is to instill in us fear and awe of G-d’s Omnipotence.

Moshe’s statement that even a house full of Torah scrolls requires a mezuzah teaches us that the study of Torah alone is insufficient. The Torah scholar needs the protection of a mezuzah i.e., to develop within himself genuine feelings of awe and love for G-d. For in the words of the Mishnah, “One whose fear of sin takes precedence over his wisdom, his wisdom endures. But one whose wisdom takes precedence over his fear of sin, his wisdom does not endure.”⁵

—Likkutei Sichos, vol. 2, p. 329

5. Mishnah, Avos 3:9.

 טז:ה | 16:5

בֶּקֶר וַיָּדַע ה' אֶת אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וְאֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְהַקָּרִיב אֵלָיו

In the morning, G-d will make known who is His,
and who is holy, and He will draw [them] near to Him.

Separate is Better than Equal

Korach fought for equality, which he believed to be the key to Jewish unity. “The entire congregation is all holy,”⁶ he argued. Why single out the Kohanim—and particularly the Kohen Gadol—as superior to everyone else?

But instead of going down in history as a great unifier, the Torah regards Korach as the quintessential instigator of conflict and divisiveness, whom we are cautioned not to emulate.⁷

What made Korach’s case for unity the textbook example of disunity? The answer is hinted at in Moshe’s warning to Korach and his followers, “In the morning, G-d will make known who is His.” According to the Midrash, Moshe compared the allocation of roles within the Jewish people to the division of day and night. Moshe said, “G-d assigned boundaries to His world. Are you capable of transforming morning into evening? Such is the possibility of undoing this.”⁸

In this way, Moshe illustrated that peace can be achieved only by respecting the boundaries inherent in creation, not by abolishing them. G-d created the world with diversity. Each day consists of both morning and evening, but individually, each of these periods serves a distinct purpose. The same

6. Bamidbar 16:3.

7. See Talmud, Sanhedrin 110a.

8. See Rashi, Bamidbar 16:5.

is true of all G-d's creations. He created every being with a unique identity and a specific role that it must fill. When its energies are devoted to the purpose it serves best, not wasted on a task intended for another part of creation, then the world functions in harmony, instead of chaos and discord.

In order to achieve Jewish unity, explained Moshe, the Divinely ordained distinctions of Kohen, Levi and Yisrael must not be annulled—they must be maintained and protected. Like the limbs and organs in the human body that function differently but cohesively, when a Jew thrives within his intended role in the service of G-d, his unique service complements his fellow Jews' unique roles as well, and theirs in turn enhance his.

—Likkutei Sichos, vol. 18, pp. 203–207

 טז:ה | 16:5

בִּקְרֹא וַיֵּדַע ה' אֶת אֲשֶׁר לוֹ

In the morning, G-d will make known who is His.

Same but Different

Korach and his followers took issue with Moshe's authority. They acknowledged that G-d communicated the Torah directly to Moshe, and that Moshe was therefore superior to the rest of the nation in his understanding of G-d's wisdom. In actual observance of the mitzvos, however, every Jew is equally capable. If so, argued Korach, considering that our primary purpose in this world is to observe the mitzvos in practice, what makes Moshe so much greater than "the entire congregation," which is "all holy"?⁹

The answer to Korach's question is hinted to in Moshe's response, "In the morning, G-d will make known who is His." With these words the Torah implies that even in the performance of a mitzvah there can be vast differences.

A mitzvah is comparable to a diamond. If a diamond is not clean, instead of dispersing light brilliantly, the filth on its surface obscures light. The same is true of mitzvos. When a wicked person observes mitzvos, he temporarily draws additional energy into the negative forces of kelipah that animate his life at that time.¹⁰ Likewise, if a person's observance of a mitzvah makes him conceited, his ego and self-regard prevent the light of G-d's infinite presence from being revealed. (When

9. Bamidbar 16:3.

10. See Shulchan Aruch Admor Hazaken, Hil. Talmud Torah 4:3.

this person later repents, the mitzvos he previously fulfilled are “reclaimed” by the forces of holiness.)

The mitzvos Moshe performed, however, were not clouded by ego or insincerity. He therefore responded to Korach, “In the morning, G-d will make known”: G-d’s will is fulfilled equally no matter who performs the mitzvah, but only mitzvos that shine like the morning reveal G-dliness in the world around them.

Granted, we are obligated to fulfill the mitzvos regardless of our spiritual state. Ultimately, however, the home that G-d desires in this world is not only a place where He will “be,” but also where He will be felt. This was the uniqueness of the mitzvos performed by Moshe, whose spiritual greatness made even his practical mitzvah observance superior to that of the rest of Bnei Yisrael. His mitzvos shone brightly, like the morning; they refined him and illuminated his life with G-dliness, bringing light to the world around him.

—Likkutei Sichos, vol. 4, pp. 1049–1055

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