

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
Parshas Korach
June 30, 2006

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. Is Seeing Really Believing?</i>	2
<i>2. Conscience, the Pivotal Characteristic of the Jew</i>	3
<i>3. Korach's Misunderstanding Of Spirituality</i>	4
<i>4. Appreciating the Silver Lining in the Ominous Cloud</i>	5
<i>5. Moshe's Quantification of Dason and Aviram</i>	6

Previous Topics

Protecting Oneself from the Pitfalls of Life
Recognizing the True Sense of Self
G'd's Wrath Reflects One's Behavior
Sacrifices- The Mechanism For Spiritual Rehabilitation
The Far Reaching Consequence of Moshe's Question

About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
June 30, 2006

B"H

Parshas Korach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. Is Seeing Really Believing?

The Torah tells us that when the spies returned from scouting out the Land they had reported that they had seen **“fortified cities.”** They believed, because of their lack of trust/faith in G'd, that the Land of Canaan was not conquerable.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe was about to pass away he recounted all of the failings of the Jewish people. One of the incidents that he cited was the slander of the spies. He had said that when the spies returned from scouting out the Land they reported seeing, **“fortified cities in heaven.”** Seemingly, Moshe did not quote what the spies had said accurately. They had reported seeing **“fortified cities.”** What is the basis for Moshe's statement that the spies reported seeing **“fortified cities in heaven?”** What is the meaning of this statement?

Kli Yakar explains that initially the spies had reported that the Land was not attainable. However, when they saw that the Jewish people were not convinced, they further stated that the nations of Canaan are even more powerful than G'd Himself.

Every nation has a spiritual counterpart that is the basis for its existence. The spies had the ability to perceive that the spiritual powers representing the nations of Canaan were not to be defeated. Of course, this is because G'd had Willed it so. Thus, the fortified cities “in heaven” that Moshe had recounted was based on this particular fact.

King David writes in Psalms (Psalm 136), after each of his statements, “Give thanks to Hashem, forever is His goodness.” Regarding two of the twenty-six statements, he singles out the destruction of the two giants-Sichon the King of Amori and Og the King of Bashan. Why does King David choose these particular events to mention as the ultimate kindness of G'd? It is true that Og and Sichon were powerful giants, but why did King David

single out their destruction and include it with miracles such as the exodus from Egypt and splitting of the Sea?

The Midrash tells us that the spiritual counterpart behind the giants Og and Sichon was even more formidable than that of Egypt. Although the Egyptian people were perceived by the world as the most powerful and advanced civilization, it was actually more difficult to destroy the kingdoms of Og and Sichon than all of Egypt. King David therefore when expressing the ultimate kindness of G'd, acknowledges the destruction of Og and Sichon. What is perceived in the physical spectrum does not reflect the corresponding spiritual forces and powers that exist.

The spies, because of their dimension, were expert astrologers. They were able to understand through the reading of the Zodiac the future that is meant to come upon existence. As we find regarding our Patriarch Avraham, who was an expert astrologer, he had seen in the stars that he and his wife were not destined to have children. G'd needed to explain to him that he transcends what is written in the stars. As the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that although the Zodiac exists and accurately depicts the destiny of man, the Jewish people do not have a determined future based on the stars (mazel). Tosfos explains that although each person is born under a certain star with specific implication for his future, through tefillah (prayer) and merit of the community, the Jew is able to change and transcend the destiny indicated by the mazal.

Because the spies had understood through the Zodiac that the kingdoms of Canaan were not to be conquered, they perceived the entry into the Land as a death trap. They did not fully appreciate that the Zodiac was going to be overridden. The Zodiac only transmits information that is limited to the natural order. Anything that touches upon the supernatural has no relevance to the Zodiac. The Jewish people, because their essence is spiritual, can transcend the limitations of the finite because of their relationship with G'd Who is Infinite.

The Jew must appreciate that although he is physical in nature, his essence is of unlimited capacity.

2. Conscience, the Pivotal Characteristic of the Jew

The Torah tells us that after Korach and his assembly mutinied against Moshe and attempted to usurp his authority, Moshe summoned Dasan and Aviram, of the tribe of Reuvain, who the two cohorts of Korach. The Torah states, **“Moshe sent forth to summon Dasan and Aviram...but they had said, ‘We shall not go up!’”**

The Midrash states, “Dasan and Aviram did not say that they would not come to meet Moshe, rather they said that they ‘shall not go up.’ King Solomon states, ‘The mouth of the fool is the dread upon him.’ They actually forecasted their own destruction when they had said that they ‘shall not go up.’...Moshe said, ‘If they are not willing to come to meet with me, I will go to them to avoid their destruction. Perhaps if I meet with them personally, they will be embarrassed and change their position.’” Despite Moshe’s meeting with them, Dasan and Aviram were entrenched in their position. Moshe’s initial consideration was that there was a possibility that because of their embarrassment they would repent (do teshuvah).

The Gemara in Tractate Yevamos tells us that there are three characteristics that are unique to the Jewish people that were inherited from the Holy Patriarchs – “They are being merciful, having shame/conscience, and doing acts of kindness.” Avraham, our Patriarch demonstrated through his actions the characteristics of mercy and kindness. However, where do we see that he was one who possessed shame/conscience?

Avraham was the only person in existence to recognize G’d as the Master. It is not because Avraham’s dimension of genius transcended all of the members of his generation. Rather, it could only be attributed to his unique level of humility. The reason one chooses to ignore truth is that it conflicts with one’s own agenda. However, because of his humility, Avraham did not possess a conflict of interest – thus he was able to recognize G’d as the Omnipotent Being. If one is truly humble and has a sense of being undeserving, one will have a sense of conscience and shame. Avraham could not rationalize and justify acting in a manner that was not in conformance with the Will of G’d because of his humility. If he were to transgress, it would be his sense of conscience that gave

Avraham relevance to teshuvah. Without the characteristic of shame, one does not have a sense of wrong and thus has no relevance to repentance.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis states, “The insolent person is destined to go to gehenom.” Arrogance/insolence is the antithesis of shame. The Gemara explains that a prostitute could not continue doing what she does, if she were to appreciate the wrong of her behavior. It is only the one who is insolent that can ignore shameful behavior and continue to transgress.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos states, “Hillel says, ‘A boor is not afraid of sin...’” A “boor” is one who is uncultured and unrefined. He has no structure in his life to be able to appreciate what is ethical or moral. The basis for this person to be oblivious to sin is because he has no sense of shame or conscience.

Within the final days of Moshe’s life, he had rebuked the Jewish people for their failings during the past forty-year period. One of the incidents that Moshe recounted was how the Jewish people had embraced the suggestion of Yisro when he had introduced the concept of creating a hierarchy of judges. Yisro had set prerequisite qualifications for these judges. One of them was that they should be “Chachamim (wise).” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that “chachamim (wise)” is one who possesses shame. One only comes upon wisdom when one recognizes truth, which is contingent on conscience/shame.

The Midrash tells us that every nation that G’d began punishing throughout history was ultimately destroyed. Because of G’d’s punishment, they became more defiant, rather than recognizing their own failing. Because of their lack of humility and lack of a sense of conscience, they did not have the capacity to make the necessary corrections/ teshuvah. The Jewish people, on the other hand, did do teshuvah when they were punished by G’d. It is only because the Jewish people have an innate sense of shame/conscience that they were able to realize that the punishment was not in vain - but rather because of their shortcomings.

Moshe believed that Dasan and Aviram, despite their continuous defiance and efforts to usurp his authority, had the ability to repent because of the innate characteristic of shame that every Jew possesses. However, after Moshe had approached them, they did not respond properly. Consequently, they were destroyed.

3. *Korach's Misunderstanding Of Spirituality*

The Torah states, **“Korach...separated himself...”** This verse is juxtaposed to the previous Portion, which discusses the mitzvah of tzitzis (fringes on a four-cornered garment). The Torah states, **“Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them that they shall make themselves tzitzis on the corners of their garments...And they shall place upon the tzitzis of each corner a thread of blue wool (*techeilis*)...that you may see it and remember all the commandments of G'd...and not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray.”**

The Midrash tells us that the reason the Torah juxtaposes the Portion of Korach to the Portion of tzitzis is to communicate to us that Korach had attempted to make a mockery of Moshe by ridiculing him through the laws of tzitzis, which he had presented to them. Korach had taken a garment that was completely colored with the techeilis dye but its tzitzis/fringes were not. He asked Moshe, “When an entire garment is dyed with techeilis, is it exempt from the obligation of placing techeilis on the fringes?” Moshe responded that one was still obligated to place techeilis on the fringes. Korach and his assembly laughed at him saying, that if the obligation of techeilis is sufficiently fulfilled by having a few strings dyed with blue, is it not logical that if the entire garment was dyed blue that it should be sufficient.

Korach then presented another question to Moshe “If one filled a house with Torah scrolls would one be obliged to place a mezuzah on its doorposts?” Moshe responded that one would surely be obligated. Korach and his assembly again laughed at Moshe saying, “If one fulfills his obligation of mezuzah by placing two portions of the Torah on the doorpost (the mezuzah is comprised of the first two paragraphs of the Shema), is it not logical to say that the house that is filled with Torah scrolls is exempt from the mitzvah of mezuzah?” What were Korach and his assembly trying to communicate to Moshe with these particular halachic questions?

The Gemara in Tractate Menachos tells us that the value of having techeilis on the tzitzis of one's garment is so that when one gazes upon the tzitzis he will see the blue which is the color of the sea, which in turn, reflects the heavens which reflect the throne of G'd (Kisei HaKavod). Thus, by gazing upon the techeilis upon the tzitzis, one is reminded of G'd's Omnipotence. Similarly, the mezuzah

on the doorpost is intended to be a reminder of G'd's Presence.

Kli Yakar explains that Korach was communicating that if one had an entire garment that was the color of techeilis he would be reminded of G'd's Presence and not need to have techeilis on the tzitzis. Similarly, if one's home were filled with Torah scrolls, he would also be reminded of G'd's Presence and therefore not need to place a mezuzah on his doorpost. Korach was telling Moshe that since all the Jewish people were equally holy – **“Kulanu kedoshim – we are all holy...”** Thus, they did not require Moshe to be the intermediary between them and G'd. Every individual has a similar relevance to G'd as Moshe, because “we are all holy.” Korach's questions were in essence allegorical, meant to communicate his position to Moshe. Presenting it in a deprecating manner was meant to usurp Moshe's authority.

Korach's understanding was flawed because it was based on the idea that all one needed to have a sense of G'd's Presence was to gaze upon something colored in techeilis/blue (which reflects the Holy Throne) or the Torah scrolls themselves which are an embodiment of the totality of G'd's Word. The Torah specifically communicates that one is only reminded of G'd's Presence if it is within the context where it is enmeshed with the performance of mitzvos. As it states, **“And you will see them and you will remember all the mitzvos of G'd...”** The color of techeilis outside of the context of mitzvos has no value. Ramban in his commentary on the Portion of Bo writes that when one puts a mezuzah on one's doorpost, although it may be of little monetary value, one accepts upon himself the yoke of heaven. Similarly, the Torah scrolls in the house do not express one's submission to G'd. It is only the mezuzah, which contains the first two portions of the Shema that reminds one of His Presence and one's obligation to do His mitzvos.

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that fringes are called “tzitzis” because the numerical equivalent (gematria) of the word “tzitzis” is 600. In addition, there are eight strings on each fringe that are tied with five knots. Together the total number is 613, which corresponds to all of the mitzvos. Rashi explains that the word “tzitzis” means “to gaze upon.” When one gazes upon his tzitzis, he is reminded of all of the mitzvos because they represent the entire spectrum of mitzvos (613). In fact, the Shulchan Aruch states regarding the special value of the mitzvah of tzitzis, that it is the equivalent of all the mitzvos of the Torah.

Korach mistakenly believed that Moshe, who was the intermediary between G'd and the Jewish people, was not needed. Since every Jew is innately holy, he is able to have a direct relationship with G'd. The basis for the authenticity of Torah/mitzvos to be the Word of G'd is G'd's open communication with Moshe in the presence of the entire Jewish people at Sinai. Thus, Korach's rejection of Moshe's legitimacy was in essence a rejection of the legitimacy of Torah itself.

It is interesting to note that Korach did not understand or appreciate the innate value of the particular mitzvos of tzitzis and mezuzah. Both of these mitzvos involve using one's eyes to gaze upon the mitzvah item. It is through one's sense of sight that he is impacted to appreciate the Omnipotence of G'd. However, since Korach's eyes were focused elsewhere he was not able to appreciate the mitzvos of tzitzis or mezuzah. The Midrash tells us that Korach believed that he would not fail in his mutiny against Moshe because he saw through his holy spirit that Samuel the Prophet, (who was the equivalent of Moshe and Aaron), was to be his descendent. The words of the Midrash are, "His eye misled him." Thus, he failed.

4. Appreciating the Silver Lining in the Ominous Cloud

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin cites a verse from Ecclesiastes, "Wealth is kept for its owner to his detriment." Raish Lakish explains, "This is referring to the wealth of Korach." The reason Korach chose to take the stance of usurping the authority of Moshe was due to his unlimited wealth. It was his wealth, which ultimately brought about his and his community's destruction. The Gemara tells us that the wealthiest Jewish commoner to ever live was Korach and the wealthiest gentile commoner, was Haman, the evil one.

The Gemara explains, "Wealth is the element which gives a person stability in life. Yosef as the Viceroy of Egypt hid away three treasures (which had come to Egypt from the nations of the world who came to purchase grain during the famine). One of them was revealed to Korach. One was revealed to Antoninus (the Roman Emperor). One was set aside for the devoutly righteous (tzaddikim) at the end of time." If it was not for his wealth, Korach would not have had the sense of superiority to lead a mutiny against Moshe. This affront not only led to Korach's destruction it nearly resulted in the destruction of the Jewish people. In addition, it was an attempt to contest the validity of Torah and thus bring

about the destruction of existence. Why would G'd provide Korach with such enormous wealth if it had the potential to bring about such catastrophic consequences?

The positive outcome of Korach's failing was that it was proven "Moshe is true and his Torah is true." It was only through this confrontation and subsequent destruction of Korach and his assembly that the truthfulness of Moshe and the Torah was proven for all eternity. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that there is a certain location in the desert where one could hear the voices of Korach and his assembly in gehenom declaring- "Moshe is true and his Torah is true, and we are liars." Although Korach's wealth was to his detriment, it ultimately led to the confirmation of the truth of Torah and of Moshe as G'd's prophet. Thus, Korach's wealth contributed to the permanency of Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate Temurah tells us that because of the Roman decrees and persecutions, which came upon the Jewish people, they began to forget the Torah. Judah the Prince therefore concluded that unless the Oral Law was committed to writing, the Torah would ultimately be forgotten. Although it is a Torah Prohibition to commit the Oral Law to writing, Judah the Prince ruled that it is permitted because of a verse in Psalms. King David in Psalms states, "There is a time when one must do for G'd when the Torah is being nullified." Antoninus, the Roman Emperor, who had been one of the beneficiaries of the treasures that were hidden away by Yosef, had a special relationship with Judah the Prince. It was because of this relationship that the Roman decrees against the study of Torah were rescinded. He was a righteous gentile who secretly studied Torah with Judah the Prince and eventually converted to become a Jew. Antoninus indirectly is responsible for the perpetuation of Torah in its entirety. Thus, the wealth that was hidden away by Yosef was granted to an individual who is linked to the survival of Torah.

The Gemara tells us that the world stands in the merit of tzaddikim (devoutly righteous). These tzaddikim are going to be the beneficiaries of the third treasure that was hidden away by Yosef. We find that all of the wealth that Yosef had hidden away ultimately would be given to those who contributed to the perpetuation of existence through Torah.

5. Moshe's Quantification of Dason and Aviram

After the sin of the spies, which was caused by a lack of trust in G'd, He decreed that the Jewish people should wander the desert for an additional 39 years and over that period of time all the men between the ages of 20 and 60 would die, never to enter the Land. After Moshe's leadership was being contested by Korach and his cohorts, the Torah tells us that Moshe had summoned Dason and Aviram, who responded with, **"We shall not go up! Is it not enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the desert, yet you seek to dominate us... Even if you would gouge out our eyes, we shall not go up!"** Dason and Aviram believed that Moshe had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt only so that he could lord over them and ultimately bring about their destruction in the desert.

Rashi cites the Midrash, which states that what Dason and Aviram had actually said to Moshe was, "You did not bring us to a land flowing with milk and honey, rather you had decreed upon us that we should die." It was only because the Jewish people failed with the sin of the spies that they deserved to die. Moshe was not the cause of their predicament or their fate, rather it was G'd Himself. Regardless of these facts, Dason and Aviram believed that it was because of Moshe's decree that the generation that had left Egypt was destined to perish. After this extreme response from Dason and Aviram, the Torah states, "Moshe was enraged." Rashi cites Chazal who explain that although the word "vayechar" normally means "enraged/angered" here it means that Moshe was "pained" by their accusation. Moshe said to G'd, **"Do not turn to their meal offering! I have not taken even a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them."** Moshe's statement seems to be a refutation of their accusation. How does Moshe's statement indicate that in fact his ulterior motive was not to dominate them, as he was accused?

The Torah tells us that in Egypt it was Dason and Aviram who informed upon Moshe to Pharaoh that he had killed an Egyptian officer – causing him to flee from Egypt for many years. They had brought serious hardship upon Moshe by disrupting his life – to live in exile. The day after Moshe had killed the Egyptian, he witnessed Dason and Aviram quarrelling with one another. He had said to the evil one, "Why are striking your fellow?" They responded, **"Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us?"**

Dason and Aviram were the antagonists of Moshe. They openly rejected and continuously tried to undermine his leadership and authority. It seems from their first encounter with Moshe and the last one prior to their destruction, that they had believed that his only objective was to dominate over the Jewish people for his own glory. They did not appreciate or perceive Moshe as a true leader. However, regarding all of their other incidents of dissent in the desert, the Torah does not clearly reveal to us their motive. It was not until their final accusation against Moshe that he responded/reacted to their brazenness. However initially, regardless of their degree of antagonism towards him, Moshe did not indicate any level of pain or anger. It was only after they claimed, **"...you seek to dominate us... Even if you would gouge out our eyes, we shall not go up!"** did Moshe react. Why was this so?

Moshe, because of his dimension of person, was able and willing to see Dason and Aviram in a non-accusatory light. He had felt that maybe the basis for their belligerence was that they actually believed that his objective in leading the Jewish people was only out of self-interest. Moshe had not yet functioned sufficiently as a leader to demonstrate that they were mistaken. It was only after a substantial period of selfless dedication and leadership that Moshe understood and realized that they were truly evil. To confirm his evaluation, he had said, **"I have not taken even a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them"** to prove that their perception was warped.

The Mishna in Tractate Eruvin states, "Poverty/destitution leads one to lose his own sense of stability and deny his Maker..." The Mishna is telling us that if one's tenuous predicament causes him to reject G'd, He puts that person's situation in perspective in order to judge him fairly. Similarly, Moshe was able to put Dason and Aviram's unacceptable behavior in perspective and not judge them severely. However after it was repeatedly demonstrated and proven that their position against Moshe was baseless and flawed, he reacted and supplicated G'd by saying, **Do not turn to their meal offering! I have not taken even a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them."** At that point, Moshe realized that they were beyond spiritual rehabilitation. They wanted to contest Moshe's authority as the spokesman of G'd, thus, contesting the authenticity of Torah. Since this was the case, their heresy could not be tolerated because if it should be allowed to linger it could jeopardize the existence of the Jewish people. Therefore he

prayed to G'd that Dasan and Aviram should go into oblivion.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Taanis**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Taanis**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

1:00—2:00 pm **Derech Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Taanis** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington