

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentary Series
Parshas Korach

June 15, 2007

Mazal Tov
To
Rabbi and Mrs. Yosef Kalatsky on the Birth of a Grandson

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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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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Parshas Korach

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. The Key to Come Upon Truth

The Torah tells us that Korach attempted to usurp Moshe's authority claiming that it was nepotism for Moshe to choose his brother Aaron as the High Priest. He did not believe that this was G'd's choice. Korach claimed, **"the entire congregation is holy"** and would therefore qualify for that position.

Rambam, writes in the *Laws of Yisodei HaTorah (the Fundamentals of Torah)* that at Sinai every Jew witnessed G'd openly communicating with Moshe – thus designating him as His spokesman. Rambam cites the verse in Shemos that states after the Sinai event G'd said to Moshe - **"They (the Jews) will believe in you (Moshe) forever."** Meaning, the word of Moshe will be uncontested forever and accepted as the Word of G'd. Korach and his group of detractors (two hundred and fifty of the most advanced Torah sages from the tribe of Reuvain, who were qualified to be the head of the Sanhedrin - the High Court of Israel) were part of the generation that witnessed G'd openly communicating to Moshe, **"Go tell the Jews such and such."** After G'd had confirmed Moshe as His spokesman, how could have they suspected that the Torah was the word of Moshe?

The Torah tells us that after Korach and his assembly mutinied against Moshe, Moshe summoned Dasan and Aviram, of the tribe of Reuvain, who were the two compatriots 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, "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 shamed and change their position.'" Despite Moshe's meeting with them, Dasan and Aviram were intransigent. Moshe's initial consideration was that there was a possibility of change because their embarrassment would cause them to recognize the truth. Consequently they would repent (teshuvah).

The Gemara in Tractate Yevamos tells us that there are three characteristics that are unique to the Jewish people – "They are merciful, have shame/conscience, and do acts of kindness." Dason and Aviram did not repent because they had not shame. Thus, could not go beyond their own arrogance to perceive truth. Therefore, despite the Sinai experience, where Moshe was confirmed as G'd's spokesman, they remained belligerent.

Chazal tell us that the sons of Korach were not destroyed together with his community because they had repented at the last moment. How were they able to repent? The Midrash states that when Moshe had entered into the tent of Korach, each of his sons was sitting along side their father. They were faced with a dilemma. Should they stand up to acknowledge Moshe's presence as G'd's designated leader of the Jewish people? Or should they remain seated, and not disgrace their father Korach who was vehemently opposed to Moshe's leadership. Ultimately, they chose to stand in Moshe's presence. In the merit of acknowledging Moshe, they had stirrings of repentance in their heart. Their initial dilemma was rooted in their possessing the characteristic of shame. They thus were able to overcome the seeming insurmountable barrier to repent.

If one does not possess the characteristic of shame, he does not have the capacity to recognize and appreciate the wrong in his behavior and decisions. His arrogance will allow him to justify even the most unconscionable behavior. Therefore the Jew who through his pedigree naturally possesses the characteristic of shame has greater relevance to repentance than anyone else.

2. Appreciating the Evil of Dason and Aviram

After Moshe's leadership was contested by Korach and his compatriots, 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 denied the Jewish people all that is good only for the sake of his own glory to dominate them.

After hearing Dason and Aviram's response, the Torah tells us that, **"Moshe was anguished and pained."** Moshe then 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."**

In Egypt it was Dason and Aviram who had informed upon Moshe to Pharaoh that he had killed an Egyptian overseer, thus causing him to flee from Egypt for many years. They had brought serious hardship upon Moshe by disrupting his life – to live in exile.

Dason and Aviram were continuously the antagonists of Moshe. They openly defied him and did whatever they could to undermine his leadership and authority. Despite their reprehensible behavior, Moshe did not indicate any level of pain or anger towards them. He never wished upon them the Wrath of G'd. Moshe had believed that perhaps the basis for their defiant behavior was only as a result of their lack of understanding. Only now when they had attempted to usurp his authority and expressed an intense level of hate towards him, did Moshe wish that G'd's Judgment should come upon them. He had concluded that they were truly evil because there was no basis for them to see him as one who is driven by self-interest. To confirm this Moshe had said, **"I have not taken even a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them."** If this is so, their extreme hatred and disdain for Moshe must be rooted in their evil essence. Moshe therefore concluded that they do not deserve G'd's Mercy, but rather, G'd's Wrath.

Dason and Aviram had said, **"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 ..."** They had believed that Moshe had denied them of the ultimate blessing, which was their predicament in the land of Egypt. The Torah tells us that the bondage in Egypt was at an unbearable level. As the Torah states, **"They had embittered their lives with hard labor."** How is it possible that Dason and Aviram were able to perceive Egypt in a positive light when in fact it was the most extreme level of suffering?

The Gemara in Tractate Nedarim states a principle, **"An impoverished person is the equivalent of one who is dead."** From where is this principle learned? It is from Dason and Aviram. Initially they had the ear of the upper echelon of Egyptian society because they were wealthy. Therefore they had the ability to inform on Moshe- thus

jeopardizing his life. When Moshe was shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law, Yisro, in the desert, he witnessed a burning bush. G'd had communicated to him then, **"Those who pursue you are dead."** The Gemara explains that the verse is referring to Dason and Aviram. Although in actuality they were alive, because they had lost their wealth they had become ineffective and no longer posed a threat to Moshe. Because G'd refers to them as no longer being alive, we are able to draw from this that an impoverished person is the equivalent of a corpse. Since Dason and Aviram initially had great wealth, we are able to understand why they were upset with Moshe. In their own personal life, because of their financial status, they did not share the same lot as their Jewish brethren. They did not share the arduous experience of bondage. They had experienced Egypt as a land that flowed with milk and honey. Thus, Moshe taking the Jewish people out of Egypt and not bringing them into the promised Land which flowed with milk and honey brought upon them unlimited hardship. Through the statement of Dason and Aviram, we are able to appreciate their evil. If in fact they had empathized with the plight of their brethren in Egypt, regardless of their financial standing, they could not regard Egypt as a location of blessing. This is a confirmation that they lived only for themselves. They had no saving grace to be protected from G'd's Wrath.

3. The Seeming Insanity of Korach's Assembly

The Torah tells us that Korach and his entire congregation which was comprised of 250 of the most advanced Torah sages, each qualified to be the head of the Sanhedrin, attempted to usurp Moshe's authority. Their claim was that Moshe's appointment of Aaron to be the High Priest was his own choice rather than G'd's. In essence, they were contesting the authenticity of Torah.

Moshe told Korach that he and his group should each take a fire pan with incense and burn it. This would be a confirmation of who G'd had chosen to be the High Priest. Only one individual, who was qualified would live, all the others would die. They understood with certainty that those who were not qualified would die, just as Nadav and Avihu (the sons of Aaron) had died when they had brought the incense offering. Since the odds were overwhelmingly against each one of them to survive (250:1 that only one of them would survive), how could any rational person allow himself to be exposed to this level of danger? Despite the precariousness of the situation, Korach and his compatriots agreed to accept Moshe's challenge. How was Korach able to persuade people of such great accomplishment to join his mutiny?

Chazal tell us that “Korach was deceived by his eye.” He had seen through Divine Inspiration that Samuel the Prophet was to be his descendant. The Talmud tells us that Samuel the Prophet was the spiritual equivalent of Moshe and Aaron. Meriting being the forbearer of such a descendant, Korach believed that he would not perish. However, he was mistaken because he did not realize that his two sons at the last moment would repent and extricate themselves from his community.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Korach was the one of the wealthiest Jews who ever lived. When Yosef, the Viceroy of Egypt, distributed the grain during the seven years of famine to the entire civilized world, he had accumulated the wealth of the world on behalf of Egypt. Yosef had hidden away a significant portion of this wealth to be protected. It was not until the exodus that Korach came upon the treasure-trove. The Talmud tells us that Korach’s wealth was at such a dimension that he needed 40 pack animals to transport only the keys to unlock the locations of those treasures. Why did G’d endow Korach with such unprecedented wealth?

Korach was an awesome personality who was a member of the most prestigious family of Levy (the same family as Moshe). He was also recognized as a wise person. These qualities combined with his enormous wealth allowed him to be persuasive at an unusual level. He therefore succeeded to convince this assembly of exceptional Torah sages to appreciate his position against Moshe. Korach’s mutiny was the most serious affront to the existence of the Jewish people. He had contested the validity of Moshe’s word. Consequently he put the authenticity of Torah in jeopardy. The destruction of Korach and his community confirmed for all eternity the truthfulness of Moshe’s word- that it was in fact the Word of G’d. This conclusion could have not come about if Korach was not given an enormous amount of wealth.

The Torah tells us that as a result of the sin of the spies G’d decreed that the entire generation between the ages of 20 and 60 should die in the desert over a forty-year period. When G’d had expressed His decision, He had said, “They will come to an end and there they shall die.” Meaning, not only with they forfeit their physical lives but also they would not have a share in the world to come. If this was in fact the fate of the generation one could think that the performance of mitzvos no longer had relevance to their lives. Consequently, there would no longer be liability if they should violate the Torah. Chazal tell us that in order to dispel this belief, Tzelofchad, who was a tzaddik, openly transgressed the Shabbos. As a result, he was judged and stoned to death. Tzelofchad demonstrated to the Jewish

people that although the fate of the generation was sealed, they were still bound by Torah observance. Chazal tell us that the intent of Tzelofchad when he had violated the Shabbos (through reaping) was not for its own sake, which carries the death penalty, rather he wanted to teach a lesson to the Jewish people. The creative activity that had come about (reaping) was only a consequence of his intent. This was unlike the intent of the Jewish people when they had built the Mishkan, from which all laws of Shabbos are derived. Thus, according to Reb Shimon, he did not actually violate the Shabbos. However, this fact was only known to himself and G’d. Tzelofchad was willing to give his life for the sake of the Jewish people in order to demonstrate that the Torah law was still applicable to them.

Similarly, the compatriots of Korach, the 250 Torah sages, were in doubt whether Korach’s position was valid. If in fact Moshe’s word was not the word of G’d, they would all live. However, if Moshe was the true spokesman of G’d they would all die. Nevertheless their death would be meaningful because they would have confirmed the authenticity of the Torah – that it was the Word of G’d. Their failing was that they did not initially have sufficient faith, not to be swayed by Korach’s persuasiveness. They are classified by the verse as “fools” because they only entered into their predicament because they were foolish not to believe that Moshe was G’d’s true spokesman.

4. The Basis for the Distortion of Truth

The Torah tells us that Korach and his assembly had contested Moshe’s authority and leadership as the spokesman of G’d, saying, “**It is too much for you! For the entire assembly – all of them- are holy and Hashem is among them; why do you exalt yourselves (Moshe and Aaron) over the congregation.**” Korach and his assembly claimed that all the Jewish people are holy. Moshe was not uniquely qualified to be their leader. In fact, every Jew had as much relevance to this position as Moshe and Aaron. The Midrash explains, “We had all heard the commandment ‘I am Hashem your G’d’ at Sinai directly from Him. If you, were the only ones to hear the commandments from G’d then you would have been truly qualified. However, since we all heard the same words as you, it is an indication that we are all equally qualified. There is no basis for you to lord over us.”

Prophecy is a spiritual communication between G’d and man. When G’d communicates to the prophet it is always in a sleep state. The physicality of the person has no relevance to the communication. In fact the physicality of man denies the prophet the ultimate level of prophecy. However, Moshe was the only prophet to prophesize in a

wake-state. He merited the level of “face to face” communication with G’d because he had spiritualized his physicality to the point that it was not considered interference. The ability to spiritualize the physical to this level is incomprehensible to a physical being because here is always a degree of self-interest that does not allow it to take place. However, Moshe, the most humble human being to every walk the face of the earth had negated himself to the point of nonexistence. He was therefore an individual who had the capacity to receive G’d’s communication even in a wake state.

At Sinai, G’d had communicated the first two of the Ten Commandments directly to the entire Jewish people when they were a wake state. It was a communication of “face to face”, similar to that of Moshe. Sforno explains that although the Jewish people were not qualified to receive the communication of G’d when they were functioning with all of their faculties, G’d nevertheless allowed them to have the capacity to do so. G’d had to demonstrate to the entire Jewish people that the dimension of Moshe’s prophecy was possible and a reality. If He had not allowed them to come upon this truth, the Jewish people would have denied and rejected Moshe as the prophet with whom G’d communicates at a level of face to face. In essence, they only prophesized in this advanced state to establish Moshe as being the unique prophet.

Korach and his assembly miscalculated their own spiritual worth and had believed that G’d’s communication to them was because of their own worthiness. Thus, they believed that Moshe had no right to lord over the Jewish people. Korach’s distorted view of the Sinai event was the basis for his mutiny against Moshe. Had Korach experienced the communication at Sinai as G’d had intended (to appreciate the dimension of Moshe), Korach would have subordinated himself to his leadership. However, because of his conflict of interest he perverted the truth

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, “A man (adam) attempted to destroy us (the Jewish people). A man and not a king.” The term “man” is referring to Haman. Maharal of Prague explains that the interest of a king is to maintain and increase his subjects because without subjects the king is not a king. Although Achashverosh (the Persian Emperor) hated the Jewish people no less than Haman, he was initially opposed to their annihilation because it would diminish and minimize his kingdom. Haman, on the other hand, who was a “man (adam) who only existed for himself, would have been no less of who he was had the Jewish people been destroyed. Maharal explains that this is the meaning of the statement, “A person must say the entire

world was created for me.” This is the source of the self-centeredness of a human being.

The Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin states, “Why was Adam (man) initially created as a single being, while all of the other living species were created with a counterpart/mate? So that a person should say, ‘For my sake the world in its entirety was created.’” This statement can be understood and internalized in one of two ways: one that is correct and the other that is an outgrowth of one’s self-centeredness. The correct understanding is that G’d created this relatively unlimited universe for the sake of a single individual to indicate his awesome mission and potential. In order to bring this about, the entire universe was necessary for even the single person. One must realize that every moment must be invested properly in order to achieve G’d’s objective in creation. Because of this concept, the Mishna concludes, “One who saves (even) one Jewish life it is as if he saved the entire world.” The spiritual value and dimension of the Jew touches upon all existence.

The basis for the incorrect understanding of the statement is one’s personal conflict of interest emanating from his own physicality. Thus, this individual perceives all existence as a means to fulfill and advance his lusts and desires. Rather than being humbled by one’s awesome responsibility, one becomes arrogant and insolent. This perverted perception of reality is identical to Korach’s understanding of reality. He had seen himself as a spiritual person who was worthy of a communication with G’d in a wake state, rather than appreciating Moshe’s awesome level of spirituality and his own ineptness. Thus, because of his arrogant and self-centered perspective, Korach destroyed himself and his assembly.

5. Maximizing on the Innate Worthiness of the Individual (from Shelach)

The Torah tells us that Yehoshua Bin Nun and Calev were the only two of the twelve spies who did not slander the Land. Yehoshua Bin Nun was protected from the influences of the others because Moshe added the letter “yud” to his name (Hoshea). (The letter “yud” in the Hebrew Language represents the number ten). Prior to sending Yehoshua, his name had been Hoshea. The significance of the letter “yud” was a blessing that Moshe had given him that G’d should come to his aid and protect him from the other spies. On the other hand, Chazal tell us that Calev, the prince of the Tribe of Yehudah, went to Chevron and prostrated himself on the tombs of the Patriarchs to pray that he should not be ensnared by the evil plot of the spies. Why did Moshe only choose to pray on behalf of Yehoshua Bin Nun and not Calev?

The Midrash explains, “Moshe had added a ‘yud’ to the name of Yehoshua; however, Calev received his reward from the Land. The ‘yud’ that was added to Yehoshua’s name corresponds to the ten shares of the Land that were meant to be received by the ten spies who were destroyed by G’d.” If the significance of the “yud” that was added by Moshe was to provide Divine protection for Yehoshua, what is its relevance to the ten shares of the Land that he received?

Rabbeinu Yonah in his commentary on Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) cites Chazal who explain that if the tzaddik accomplishes what the evil person had the potential to bring about, he receives the evil person’s share in the world to come. In addition the portion of suffering the world to come that would have been meant for the tzaddik if he had failed in this existence is transferred to the evil person.

The ten spies, representing each of their tribes, were princes. A prince of a tribe personifies within himself the dimension of the entire tribe. If Yehoshua was worthy to receive their portion in the Land, it is an indication that his spiritual capacity and dimension was the equivalent of the ten princes. Calev, on the other hand, did not possess this dimension of spirituality. Moshe understood each of them in their own right. Thus, he acted accordingly by adding the letter “yud” to Yehoshua’s name to confirm and actualize the merit that Yehoshua had available to him. Calev did not have this dimension of merit. He thus had to take the initiative and pray on his own behalf at the tomb of the Patriarchs. If Moshe would have prayed for Calev, it would have not been effective because Calev did not possess the worthiness of Yehoshua. His worthiness only came to being when he prayed for himself.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Kama tells us that there was an individual Nechunia Chofer Boros, Nechunia the one who dug water holes. This person had dug water holes from Babylon to Jerusalem to provide water for the Jews who made the pilgrimage for the three Festivals. One day, Nechunia’s daughter had fallen into a well and it was not known whether she had drowned or not. When Reb Chanina Ben Dosa was told what had happened, he had said that she was alive and well. (Reb Chanina Ben Dosa was the Chassid of that generation). After a number of hours, Nechunia’s daughter immersed from the well unharmed. They asked Reb Chanina Ben Dosa, “How did you know that the girl did not drown? Are you a prophet?” He responded, “I am not a prophet... but I know that since Nechunia performed a mitzvah through water, G’d would not have allowed harm to come to his progeny through the same substance that he provided for a mitzvah.” The

Gemara tells us that subsequently Nechunia’s son died of thirst. If Nechunia’s progeny could not be harmed through water because of the unusual level of kindness that he had done through water, how was it possible that his son should die of thirst?

Shita Mikubetsis (a compilation of earlier commentators) explains that even if one has merit, it must be activated to have value. When Reb Chanina Ben Dosa was initially told about Nechunia’s daughter, he made a statement that one cannot be harmed by the same substance that was used for a mitzvah. The statement of this great tzaddik was in essence a request of G’d that the merit of Nechunia should stand in good stead to save his daughter’s life. However, regarding Nechunia’s son, no one drew upon the merit that he may have had. Thus he died of thirst.

When Moshe added the letter “yud” to Yehoshua’s name, it was a confirmation of his dimension of spirituality. Moshe in essence was saying that his spiritual dimension was the equivalent of ten princes. He was thus qualified to merit G’d’s protection not to be harmed or influenced by the other spies.

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 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Chulin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
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 **Daas Tevunos**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Duties of the Heart**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Taanis** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL)