

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Korach
 June 26, 2008

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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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
June 26, 2008

B"H

Korach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Moshe's Sensitivity to G'd's Being

The Torah states when the spies had returned with their slanderous reports about the Land, **“Moshe and Aaron fell on their faces before the entire congregation of the assembly of the Children of Israel.”** What is the significance of covering one's face in prostration?

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the Canaanite slave that belonged to Yani the king of Israel, had committed murder. Yani, who had become a heretic and killed most of the rabbis of his generation, was required to appear before the Sanhedrin (High Court of Israel). The law states that when a defendant appears before the court he must stand before the judges. Yani was considered the defendant because it was his chattel, the Canaanite slave that had committed murder. Yani, however, because of his arrogance refused to stand. Shimon Ben Shetach, who was the chief justice of the Sanhedrin said to Yani, “Stand up on your legs!” Yani defiantly gazed upon each of the seventy members of the Sanhedrin. He had intimidated them with his gaze and “turned their faces to the ground.” Yani's gaze struck fear into their hearts to such a degree that they became incapacitated. When Shimon Ben Shetach saw what had transpired, that the members of the Sanhedrin were frightened by a mere mortal rather than understanding that their fear of G'd must take precedence, he reproached them severely. Consequently, they were struck down by G'd.

When one puts his face to the ground, it is an indication that he believes that there is nowhere else to turn. There is no approach that will rectify or justify the wrong that was done. Sforno explains that when Moshe and Aaron had heard the slanderous reports of the spies, the level of disgrace to G'd was so great that Moshe could no longer justify their behavior. He could no longer see them in a vein where they could be vindicated. He therefore, put his face to the ground to express the hopelessness of the situation.

The Torah tells us that when Korach and his assembly approached Moshe to contest his leadership as G'd's spokesman and thus refute the authenticity of Torah, **“Moshe heard and fell on his face.”** The Midrash states, “Immediately, Moshe began to tremble as a result of this dispute. This had been the fourth failing of the Jewish people since receiving the Torah at Sinai. This is analogous to the son of the king who had failed his father and disgraced him. The prince had asked an intimate friend of the king to appease his father. He did so the first, second, and third time. However, by the fourth failing the intimate friend of the king had felt at a loss. He believed that because he had expended all of his good standing with the king, by persuading him to forgive his son, it would be a disrespect to approach the king again. The friend of the king said to the prince, ‘How many times could I burden the king?’ Similarly, Moshe supplicated G'd after the Jewish people had sinned with the Golden Calf, complained that they wanted to have meat only with the intent to find fault with G'd, and the spies. However after the dispute of Korach, Moshe said, ‘How can I burden G'd?’” Moshe put his face to the ground after hearing Korach's claim, not because it was an affront against him or to G'd, but rather it was because he could no longer ask G'd to forgive them. As the intimate friend of the king had felt, Moshe believed that he could no longer broach this subject with G'd.

Because Moshe was the most humble person to ever live, he had a unique capacity to revere G'd. His sensitivity to G'd's Honor was such that regardless of the need, he would not want to burden Him any longer. In addition to burdening G'd, the Midrash mentions that the issue at hand involved a “dispute.” Korach wanted to disrupt the unity of the Jewish people for the sake of his own glory, thus drawing the Jewish people into the fray. Because a state of “dispute” is something that is detestable to G'd, it only made the request for forgiveness more difficult.

The Torah tells us that on the second day of Creation, G'd separated the upper waters from the lower waters. After this transpired, the Torah does not state, "And G'd saw that it was good," at it is stated regarding the other days of Creation. It was only on the third day of Creation that the Torah states "It was good" two times. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the creation that had relevance to water was not completed until the third day, when G'd said "**Let the waters gather...**" Therefore the Torah does not mention "It was good" on the second day because the creation of water was not complete until the third day. However, the Midrash explains the omission of "It was good" differently. The Midrash tells us that since the act of Creation that had taken place on the second day was G'd "separating" between the upper waters and lower waters, the term "It was good" is not mentioned because the concept of separation has relevance to "dispute." Taking something that is whole and dividing it, is something that, in another context, would not be good. G'd will not associate the term "It was good" with something, which in another context is not good. Since G'd is Whole, Complete, and One, for Him to say that something that has relevance to dispute "is good" would be contrary to His essence. Although in this context the result was positive, the innate characteristic of dispute is negative. Korach's mutiny caused dispute and separation among the Jewish people, attempting to usurp Moshe's authority. Because this was the nature of the sin, Moshe trembled and felt that it was a disrespect to approach G'd for a fourth time for something so detestable as "dispute."

2. *Converting the Abstract into Reality*

The Torah tells us that Korach and his assembly attempted to usurp Moshe's authority, claiming that the laws that he had presented to them were his words and not the Word of G'd. Korach believed that after the first two appointments of king and High Priest, had gone to Moshe and his brother Aaron, he was the next in line to receive the third appointment, which was to be the Prince of the family of Kahas. Moshe passed over Korach and appointed Eliztafon, the son of Uziel for that position. Korach believed, that the appointment was not justified because his father Yitzhar was an elder brother of Uziel, who was the father of Eliztafon. The invalid appointment of his younger cousin was a confirmation to Korach that the word of Moshe was not the Word of G'd.

Rambam, writes in the Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah (*Yisodei HaTorah*) that if one's belief is based on witnessing miracles, that belief does not have any permanence because it is subject to contention. One could

claim that the miracles that were performed by Moshe were actually a result of witchcraft and not the Hand of G'd. In order to establish Moshe as His spokesman/prophet, G'd openly communicated to him in the presence of the entire Jewish people. Every Jew heard G'd say to Moshe "**Go tell them such and such.**" As a result of this public revelation, G'd said to Moshe, "**They (the Jewish people) will believe in you forever.**" Meaning, the word of Moshe will be uncontested forever and will be accepted as the Word of G'd. Korach and his community were part of the generation that had witnessed G'd openly communicating to Moshe. If that experience is an event that is irrefutable and uncontested, how could Korach and his assembly claim that Moshe's word is not the Word of G'd?

The Torah tells us that Miriam, Moshe's sister had spoken critically of him. As a result, G'd said to Miriam, "**Hear now My words. If there shall be prophets among you, in a vision shall I, Hashem make Myself known to him...Not so is My servant Moshe; in My house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him...**" Miriam had only spoken critically of Moshe because she did not appreciate his unique level of prophecy and his dimension of person. Although he had ascended to heaven for forty days and forty nights during which time he existed at the level of an angel to bring the Torah to the Jewish people, Miriam nevertheless was critical of his behavior. Despite the fact that Moshe possessed a radiance that people were not able to gaze upon, Miriam did not understand the difference between herself and Moshe. How is this possible? If one sees something in another individual that causes him to feel that he is of a lesser dimension, it will cause him to see that individual in a negative light. Moshe had only separated himself from his wife because of his relationship with G'd as His prophet. When Miriam became aware of this fact, she had felt that her level of prophecy was at a lesser level because she did not separate herself from her spouse. This was something that she could not accept. Therefore, despite the obvious differences, she was not willing to see the difference between herself and Moshe.

When G'd said to Moshe, "**They will believe in you forever,**" He established Moshe as His uncontested spokesman. The objective of G'd's open communication with Moshe in the presence of the Jewish people was to establish this undeniable truth. It is not to say that the Jewish people did not have the ability to deny fact and truth as a result of their arrogance/ego. For example, when one chooses to reject its reality because of his own conflict of interest, it is as though that reality does not exist. It is as if one had placed his hand over his eyes to block the rays

of the sun and claim that it is not shining. Korach, because of his own sense of self could not accept the fact that G'd had chosen someone other than himself to be the Prince of the family of Kahas. Acknowledging this fact would have been an admission that he is truly not worthy. Korach's ego had blinded him to make the conclusion that Moshe's appointment of Eliztafon could not be the Word of G'd. Because of his conflict of interest, he was blinded to truth. He could no longer function within the context of rationality.

The Torah tells us that Moshe said to the Jewish people, **“You are to know this day and take to your heart that Hashem is the only G'd – in heaven above and the earth below- there is none other.”** It is not enough to intellectually “know” that something is true. One must continuously reflect upon it and engage in it, which is the internalization process, for one to establish the truth as part of his being. One must “take it to heart.” Because Korach was preoccupied with his own lack of glory, his focus did not allow him to see truth or to accept it. Unless one continuously reflects upon truth, truth will be almost irrelevant to that individual's life and decision process. The Gemara tells us, based on a verse in Proverbs, that the only absolute truth in the existence is the Torah itself. The Gemara states in a number of locations, “I (G'd) have created the evil inclination and the Torah as its antidote.” The evil inclination seeks to distract the one from appreciating what is truly correct- thus causing the individual to sin. The only mechanism through which one can defeat and incapacitate the evil inclination is Torah study, which allows one to focus on and experience truth.

3. Korach's Perspective

The Torah states, **“Moshe said to Korach, You and your assembly, be before Hashem – you, they and Aaron – tomorrow. Let each man take his fire-pan and you shall place incense on them...two hundred and fifty fire-pans; and you (Korach) and Aaron...”** In order to resolve Korach's dispute, Moshe presented him and the 250 members of his assembly, with a test that would establish the one who is truly qualified to be the High Priest. Only the one who was chosen by G'd to be the High Priest would survive the test of the burning of the incense. Although, Korach and his assembly understood the odds against their own survival, they nevertheless subjected themselves to it. Ultimately, Korach and his assembly were destroyed. Only Aaron, who was G'd's choice to be High Priest, survived.

Rashi cites Chazal who state, “Korach was an exceptionally wise person. How did he allow himself to enter into such foolishness? It was because his eye had misled him. He had seen a great chain of generations descending from him. He saw that Shmuel the Prophet, who was the equivalent of Moshe and Aaron was to descend from him...He also saw that twenty- four families of Levites will descend from his children that will have prophetic abilities. Korach had said, ‘Is it possible that all of this greatness will emanate from me and I should be destroyed?’ However, Korach did not see correctly. In fact, Shmuel and all of the great families that descended from him were only a result of Korach's sons who had repented at the very last moment.” If Korach had seen the generations that would descend from him as a clear indication that he would survive test of the burning of the incense, why is it necessary for the Midrash to discuss the spiritual dimension of his descendants? What is the significance of understanding that Shmuel the prophet, who was the equivalent of Moshe and Aaron, and twenty-four families with prophetic abilities will emanate from Korach?

Rashi explains the words of the Midrash, “Korach had said, ‘Because these great people will descend from me, therefore I will be worthy to be saved.’ Meaning, in the merit of his exceptional descendants he will survive the test of the incense. If Korach had seen his descendants in the future, why is it necessary to introduce the issue of merit? If Korach had seen his future generations it is obvious that he will survive because if he should die there would be no future to see. If so, then the greatness of his descendants and his own personal merit are not relevant his survival.

The Torah tells us that after Yishmael and his mother Hagar were sent away by Avraham, Yishmael was dying of thirst in the desert. Hagar and Yishmael had both prayed for G'd's assistance. The Torah states, **“G'd has heeded the cry of the lad in his present state.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “At that moment the angels in heaven were presenting prosecution against Yishmael. They had said to G'd, ‘In the future when the Jewish people will go into the Babylonian exile, his descendants will cause Your children to die. How could you allow him to live?’ G'd responded to the angels by saying, ‘At this moment is he righteous or evil?’ They said, ‘He is righteous.’” As a result of G'd's response, Yishmael survived. There seems to be a difficulty with the dialogue between the angels and G'd. If in fact the angels believed that Yishmael was not worthy of a miracle to allow him to live, how were they able to see his descendants who would cause the Jewish people to die? If Yishmael were to die,

there would be no descendants. How do we understand the words of Chazal?

When the angel sees the future, it does not mean that the event will actually take place, but rather, the angel, because of its unlimited ability, is able to extrapolate the future from the present. Meaning, based on Yishmael's essence, which is evil, if he were allowed to live and procreate, ultimately the evolution of the generations would produce descendants that would kill the Jewish people. Because of this understanding, the angels requested that Yishmael should not merit a miracle. G'd's response was, "Although that may be correct, since his present status is 'righteous' he will merit a miracle." When Korach saw in his prophetic vision that he would have descendants, it was not sufficient for him to believe that he would survive. They needed to be special and unique to give him merit so that he should survive. Meaning, meriting a descendant such as Shmuel the Prophet, who was the equivalent of Moshe and Aaron, was an indication of his own purity.

If such unique and special descendants were going to emanate from him, how could he not survive? It was a confirmation to him that he would definitely not die. However, his "eye misled him." The special dimension of his descendants did not emanate from him but rather from his sons who had repented before Korach and his community were destroyed.

We see from the incident of Korach a novel concept. Although Korach was misled as a result of his arrogance, his perspective was nevertheless correct. If a special person was meant to descend from an individual, although that person does not yet exist, the antecedent is considered meritorious. The patriarch of that special line will merit Divine Assistance, based on the future generations that will descend from him.

4. *The Vulnerability of Man*

The Torah states, "**Vayikach Korach Ben Yitzahar- Korach son of Yitzahar took...**"...Rashi cites Chazal who explain "**Vayikach Korach** (Korach took)" to mean that Korach "took" two hundred and fifty men who were qualified to be the head of the Sanhedrin (the High Court of Israel) with his words. Meaning, he persuaded them to join his mutiny against Moshe.

We also find the Torah states regarding Adam, "**And Hashem G'd formed the man of dust...He took (vayikach) man and placed him into the Garden of**

Eden." Rashi cites Chazal who explain the term "vayikach" to mean, G'd persuaded Adam to enter into the Garden of Eden. Similarly the Torah states, "G'd said to Moshe, "**Kach es Aaron achichah - Take Aaron your brother...**" G'd told Moshe to persuade Aaron his brother with his words to assume the position of the High priest.

The word "**vayikach**" which means, "to take," is typically used regarding the taking of an inanimate object or an unintelligible creature, which does not have choice to come or not to, and therefore it is "taken." However, as it applies to a human being, who has a mind of his own, the term "**vayikach**" means to "persuade" or "convince."

A human being with the power of choice typically makes decisions based on his intellect. He evaluates the situation and then chooses to advance or refrain. An evaluation is based on seeing both sides of the issue. However, when one is persuaded by another, he no longer appreciates the alternatives and therefore follows the directive of that person. In effect, he has given up his free choice and he is no different than an inanimate object that has been taken.

Although the congregation of Korach was a unique and exceptional group of individuals who were qualified to be the head of the Sanhedrin, Korach nevertheless, through his power of persuasion, rendered them helpless. He had convinced them that Moshe had deceived them and denied them an honor that was rightfully theirs.

Ramban at the beginning of the Portion of Korach explains why the mutiny of Korach occurred at this particular time. Prior to this moment, because of Moshe's accomplishments and dedication to the Jewish people, he was beloved and revered by them. If anyone were even to attempt question or usurp his authority, that individual would have been stoned. However, after G'd decreed that the Jewish people should perish over a forty-year period because of the sin of the spies, the Jewish people were demoralized. They began to reflect upon all that Moshe had promised them when they had left Egypt. Korach came with his claim at a moment when the Jewish people were most vulnerable. It was at a time when they were sensing a hopelessness in their lives.

The fact of the matter is, the Jewish people, although it was decreed that they should perish, should have not diminished their esteem and reverence for Moshe. The only reason they were meant not to enter into the Promised Land was as a result of their own lack of faith. They believed the slanderous reports of the spies when

they had returned from Canaan. Nevertheless, because of their mindset, they saw Moshe in a negative light. It is the nature of a person to become vulnerable and more receptive to persuasion when he is depressed or disillusioned. Just as Korach took advantage of the Jewish people when they were in a vulnerable state, so too does the evil inclination take advantage of man when he becomes disillusioned and depressed.

The Gemara cites an argument between Hillel and Shamay regarding whether it would have been better for man to have been created or not. After two and a half years of dialogue their was a consensus between them that it would have been better for man to not have been created. This is because man is prone to spiritual failure. When one reflects on his situation, very often within the spiritual realm, he sees himself lagging behind and not sufficiently accomplished. This brings about a sense of hopelessness which results in the evil inclination convincing one that it is not so grave to transgress because ultimately it will not make a difference.

The scenario of Korach is a replay of most individual's personal interaction with their evil inclination. One needs to feel that he is advancing and succeeding as a Jew. One must have a sense of his spirituality. The only way to accomplish this is to engage in Torah study with the intent of performing mitzvos. When one engages in this spiritual mode, one will be encouraged and motivated to succeed despite the pitfalls of life.

5. *The Spies, A Mirror Image of Their Generation* (From *Shelach*)

The Torah states, “**And Moshe called Hoshea Bin Nun ‘Yehoshua.’**” The Midrash explains that Moshe added the letter “yud” to Hoshea’s name because this letter signifies the Name of G’d. Moshe had prayed on behalf of Yehoshua that “G’d should come and save you.” Rashi explains that Moshe prayed that Yehoshua should be protected from evil plotting of the spies. However, the Midrash Tanchuma explains the supplication of Moshe slightly differently. Moshe prayed, “G’d should save you from this evil generation.” It is understood why Moshe would supplicate G’d to protect Yehoshua from the other spies, that they should not bring upon him physical and spiritual harm. However, why should Moshe pray to protect Yehoshua from the evil generation? What relevance does the generation have to Yehoshua’s mission as a spy? In addition, why did Moshe not supplicate G’d on behalf of Calev? Seemingly, Calev also needed protection. Chazal tell us that he had taken the initiative to

prostrate himself on the graves of the Patriarchs to beseech G’d for protection from the negative influence of his fellow spies.

The Torah identifies each of the spies that were chosen to be sent from each tribe. Regarding the representative of the tribe of Ephraim the Torah states, “**From the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea Bin Nun...**” However, when the Torah identifies the spy from the tribe of Manasseh it states, “**For the tribe of Yosef for the tribe of Manasseh...**” If in fact both Ephraim and Manasseh both descend from Yosef, why does the Torah identify the tribe of Manasseh with Yosef and not the tribe of Ephraim? Daas Zikanim Baali Tosfos explain that although Manasseh and Ephraim both descend from Yosef, nevertheless Manasseh identifies more closely with Yosef because “Yosef had spoken negatively about his brothers (lashon harah) to his father.” Since the spy who represented the tribe of Manasseh had slandered the Land together with the other spies, he is associated with Yosef because he had a similar failing. However, Yehoshua, who had spoken positively about the Land, is not associated with Yosef’s failing.

Eitz Yosef, a commentator on the Midrash Tanchuma explains the reason Moshe prayed to G’d on behalf of Yehoshua and not Calev. It is because Yehoshua was a descendant of Yosef, who was culpable of tale bearing to his father about his brothers, therefore Yehoshua was vulnerable to misinterpret the events that he would witness. Therefore Moshe needed to pray on his behalf. This was not the case with Calev who had descended from the tribe of Yehudah. This is based on the principle of “*aveira goreres aveira*- one spiritual infraction (even of a minor nature) draws one to another (of an even more severe nature).”

How do we understand the words of the Midrash which explain that Moshe was concerned that Yehoshua needed to be protected from the “evil generation?”

There is a Torah principle “*Shaliach shel adam k'moso* – an agent stands in the stead of the one who appointed him (to be the agent).” For example, if one appoints an agent to marry a woman on his behalf. When the agent performs the marriage ritual on behalf of the one who had sent him, it is the equivalent of the one who sent the agent is performing the marriage. The agent is linked to the one who had appointed him in the context in which he was appointed.

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Shelach, regarding the spies, “**Send forth for yourself**

men..." Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "The men that were chosen by G'd to spy out the Land initially were devoutly righteous (tzaddikim) and men of special status." At the time Moshe had sent spies, they were righteous; however, after they had embarked on their mission they became evil. They had misinterpreted what they had witnessed and consequently slandered the Land.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, "If the spies were all initially righteous when they were chosen by Moshe, what caused them to become corrupted?" He explains with a profound understanding of the concept of agency. When one is chosen as an agent to represent another individual or group of people, he is affected by the mindset of the one who he represents. Within a halachic (Jewish law) context the agent is in the stead of and the equivalent of the one who he represents. Since the reason for the Jewish people to send spies emanated from their lack of faith/trust in G'd, their representatives (the spies) were impacted negatively by the shortcomings of those who they represented. Although the spies had free choice, their mission became more tenuous because they were tainted by the lack of faith of the people, who had sent them.

With the understanding of Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh, we are able to appreciate the words of the Midrash. Moshe prayed on behalf of Yehoshua so that G'd should protect him from the evil of generation because it was their evil that had impacted his fellow spies negatively. The intensity of the evil of the spies was the equivalent evil of the entire generation who they represented. Thus, Moshe needed to pray for Yehoshua's protection because of the overwhelming negative influence that they could have on him.

One could apply the principle of Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh in a positive vein. If one represents the Jewish people in a context where their intent is pure, the effect of that individual can overcome and supersede all obstacles to bring about a positive result.

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—Tractate 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

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

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
 Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

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

1:00—2:00 pm **Daas Tevunos**

Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm **Duties of The Heart**

Location: Yad Avraham

12:30 – 1:30 pm **Talmud: Megilah** Sunrise Capital 641

Lexington (25th FL)