

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Korach

June 10, 2010

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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Korach

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. G'd's Orchestration of Survival

The Torah tells us that after the spies had returned with slanderous reports about the Land, the Jewish people were distraught because they had believed that G'd's intent was to bring them into the Land only to destroy them. The Torah states, **"G'd said to Moshe, 'How long will this people provoke Me...I will smite them...and make from you a greater and more powerful nation than they.'"** However, Moshe supplicated G'd not to do so saying, **"They (the nations of the world) have heard that You, Hashem, are in the midst of this people – that You, Hashem, appeared eye to eye and Your clouds stand over them, and in a pillar of cloud You go before them by day and in a pillar of fire by night – yet You killed this people like a single man! Then the nations that heard of Your fame will say, 'Because Hashem lacked the ability to bring this people to the Land that He had sworn to give them, He slaughtered them in the Wilderness...'"**

Moshe beseeched G'd not to destroy the Jewish people because it would be a desecration of His Name. He had argued that since the nations of the world had witnessed G'd's special relationship with the Jewish people, from the time that He had taken them out of Egypt through the Sinai experience, it would be an enigma if He would subsequently annihilate them. The nations would say that although G'd destroyed the Egyptians for the sake of the Jewish people; however, He is unable to bring them into Canaan as He promised, because He does not have the ability to destroy the thirty-one nations of Canaan. This perception would be a desecration of G'd's Name. Thus, Moshe supplicated G'd not to destroy the Jewish people. Moshe in essence was telling G'd that He could not destroy them because He openly bound Himself to them from the time He had taken them out of Egypt with revealed miracles.

The Midrash tells us that the reason the Jewish people were vulnerable to the sin of the Golden Calf after receiving the Torah at Sinai was due to the evil eye that they had received from the nations of the world. Since the Sinai event had taken place in a public setting, in which all

the nations of the world had witnessed G'd's revelation, their envy had caused the Jewish people to be affected by their evil eye. It was after the tragic event of the Golden Calf that G'd commanded the Jewish people to build the Mishkan to be the medium through which He would dwell in their midst. Initially, His relationship with the Jewish people was in a revealed context; however, after the sin of the Golden Calf, G'd's Presence in their midst was concealed in the Mishkan.

Since the Omnipotent One knows all, He knew that the Jewish people would be subject to the envy of the nations of the world, thus causing them to be affected by the evil eye. Consequently, they would be tempted to engage in the idolatry of the Golden Calf. Their relationship with G'd would be negatively transformed forever. If this were so, then why did G'd not give them the Torah in a concealed setting so that the nations of the world would not be aware of the intimacy between G'd and His people – thus protecting them from the evil eye? Why did He give the Torah in full view, understanding the catastrophic chain of events that would follow? G'd gave the Torah in a manner so that all the nations of the world should see His revelation so that they should appreciate and understand His love for His people. His relationship with them was exclusive. He chose not to give them the Torah, His most precious commodity in private, but rather in the most public setting. He had openly revealed His special love for the Jewish people to indicate that He would do for them what He had not done for any nation since the beginning of existence, thus binding Himself inextricably to them. Because of the manner in which He had structured His relationship with the Jewish people, He could not destroy them without it being a desecration of His Name. This was to guarantee the eternity of the Jewish people, despite the degree of their spiritual failing.

The Torah tells us that on the third day of creation G'd stated, **"Let the earth give forth fruit trees producing fruit."** Meaning, that not only should the Tree produce edible fruit, but also the tree itself should be edible. However, the earth had only given forth trees that bore fruit, but the bark was not edible. Because the earth had not followed G'd's Command as it was instructed, the

earth itself became spiritually flawed and limited. G'd should have destroyed the earth and brought about a new Creation that was not flawed, yet He chose to leave it in its defective state. After Adam had sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, he became a finite being that was subject to death. Prior to his sin, Adam was an eternal and spiritual being. When he had failed by transgressing G'd's Command he putrefied himself and all existence. Seemingly, G'd should have destroyed Adam, but He chose to limit his life to a 930 years. He allowed him to repent and atone for his transgression. Since Adam was the handiwork of G'd and existed in His Presence, his failing should have resulted in his death. His clarity of truth was unique and nearly absolute. If so, the consequence of his failing should have been more severe than merely becoming a finite being. It was because the physicality of Adam was constructed and formed from the earth that was defective (because of its failing on the third day of Creation) Adam was not fully culpable for his sin. G'd had deliberately not destroyed the earth so that Adam should merit some degree of Mercy so that existence could continue without being destroyed.

We see that G'd brings about circumstances in a specific context so that His objective of existence should be met. This could only come about through His Attribute of Mercy. He chose to take the Jewish people out of Egypt in the most glorious and public setting and had given them the Torah in a context which was known to the world so that He could not destroy His people in the desert. It would have been a desecration of His Name

2. Moshe, The Man of G'd

The Torah tells us that after the earth had swallowed up Korach and his assembly, which was a revealed miracle, all the Jewish people complained to Moshe and Aaron saying, **“You have killed the people of Hashem!”** Ramban explains that the basis for their claim against Moshe and Aaron was that the test of the incense to determine who was qualified to be the High Priest was chosen by Moshe. It was not the directive of G'd. Consequently, Korach and his assembly of 250 men who were qualified to be the head of the Sanhedrin (High Court) were consumed by fire and swallowed-up by the earth.

As a result of this complaint, G'd's Attribute of Justice came upon the Jewish people, causing a plague that could have consume all of them. Moshe said to Aaron, **“Take the fire-pan and put on it fire from upon the Altar and place incense– and go quickly to midst of the**

assembly and provide atonement for them, for the fury has gone out from the presence of Hashem; the plague has begun!” Aaron, following Moshe's instruction caused the plague to cease. The Jewish people had complained in the past against Moshe and were not under threat of immediate destruction as a result. Why, at this time, were the Jewish people culpable to the point that they were not deserving of Mercy? Why was the Attribute of Justice unleashed with such immediacy?

Korach's attempt to contest Moshe's authority was the most serious attack on Judaism in its history. He claimed that the Torah that was communicated by Moshe to the Jewish people was not the word of G'd, but rather it was the word of Moshe. After Korach and his assembly were swallowed-up by the earth, it was meant to be a confirmation that Moshe's word was the word of G'd and not his own. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that there is a certain location in the desert, which emits smoke from *geheinom*. If one were to put his ear to the ground in that location one would hear a chorus of individuals, Korach and his assembly, calling out, “Moshe is true and his Torah is true, and we are liars.” By claiming that Moshe presented them with a test that was too harsh was in essence contesting the fact that Moshe is G'd's spokesman. Moshe's mind and decision is the equivalent of the Dictate of G'd. The Jewish people did not fully grasp the lesson that was meant to be drawn from the destruction of Korach and his assembly. They echoed the same heretical position that Korach had. Therefore, in order to establish Moshe as the one who speaks the Word of G'd, the Wrath of G'd needed to be unleashed again.

The Gemara tells us that the wellspring that accompanied the Jewish people for forty years in the desert was in the merit of Miriam, the sister of Moshe. After she had passed away, the wellspring ceased. The Jewish people complained vociferously against Moshe that he had taken them into the desert to die. G'd said to Moshe, “Take you staff and speak to the rock.” Moshe, being disappointed with the Jewish people because of their lack of faith said to them, “Listen, you rebellious people” and struck the rock rather than speaking to it as G'd had commanded him. The consequence of striking the rock and not heeding the Word of G'd was that Moshe would die and not merit to enter into the Land of Israel. Regardless of how much Moshe supplicated G'd, He would not annul the Decree. G'd being the Father of Mercy, why did He not accept Moshe's supplications? If Moshe would have been permitted into the Land, it would put the authenticity of G'd's Word into question. The Jewish people would have seen that Moshe was able to Act differently than G'd had commanded him. This would

have given support and credence to the position of Korach and his assembly. Therefore, in order to guarantee the purity and authenticity of Torah, Moshe needed to pass away and not enter into the Land. This established and confirmed that his behavior in this instance was not the Word of G'd but rather his own.

3. Conscience, the Stabilizing Characteristic of the Jewish People

The Torah tells us that Korach together with Dasan and Aviram led a mutiny against Moshe and attempted to usurp his authority as the leader of the Jewish people. They claimed that the Torah was not the Word of G'd but rather the word of Moshe, thus undermining the authenticity of Torah. In order to quell the uprising, Moshe sent an agent of the court to Dasan and Aviram in order to summon them to meet with him. Although Dasan and Aviram refused to come to Moshe saying, "...Even if you would gouge out our eyes, we shall not go up" Moshe was agreeable to go to them despite the fact that he was the leader and king of the Jewish people. He was willing to forgo his status for the sake of defusing the opposition. Seemingly, Moshe's offer to meet with Dasan and Aviram was because of his unique level of humility. Moshe is referred by the Torah as, "**the most humble man who ever walked the face of the earth.**" However, the Midrash explains this differently.

The Midrash states, "Moshe said, 'If they are not willing to come, I will go to them. Perhaps if I go myself they will become embarrassed and repent.'" Moshe believed that if Dasan and Aviram would see that the leader of the Jewish people was willing to compromise his status on their behalf, they would be ashamed. By feeling a sense of shame, Moshe believed that they would recognize that they had done wrong and withdraw from their position, thus terminating the mutiny. However, this was not so. The Midrash continues, "When Dasan and Aviram had seen Moshe coming towards them, they began ridiculing and blaspheming him. They came out of their tents with an erect and haughty posture and were not willing to change." Had they felt shame they would have repented because shame is the basis for one to understand and appreciate the wrong that he had done. Without a sense of shame, one is not able to recognize or internalize the wrong of his actions.

The Gemara in Tractate Yevamos tells us that there are characteristics that are unique to the Jewish people because they descend from the Holy Patriarchs; Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The Jew possesses the

characteristics of "Compassion/mercy, shame/conscience, and the propensity to do acts of kindness." Because of the Jew's innate sense of conscience he will naturally be unable to live with the wrong that he had done. His conscience will compel him to repent and correct his ways.

The Gemara tells us that the First Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people had violated the three cardinal sins (idolatry, murder, and forbidding sexual relationships). The Second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred among Jews (*sinaas chinam*). The Gemara tells us that Reb Yochanan was asked, "Which generation was greater – that of the First Temple period or that of the Second? It would seem that violating the three cardinal sins would be considered more severe than baseless hatred, thus causing them to have greater culpability." Reb Yochanan responded, "Look at the Citadel (Temple). After 70 years of exile, the Temple was restored. However, after the destruction of the Second Temple, it has not yet been rebuilt. Evidently baseless hatred is more severe than violating the three cardinal sins." Why is this so?

The three cardinal sins are obviously wrong to any moral and ethical person. Thus, understanding and appreciating the evil of these actions would seem to be relatively simple. One initially can be overtaken by lust and other issues which causes one to be blinded to the obvious. However, over time, one regains his rational understanding of right and wrong, thus causing him to repent. On the other hand, baseless hatred which is seen as something that is part of the human condition can be easily justified on many levels. One does not feel a sense of shame when he sees no wrong in his negativity towards his fellow. Therefore, one will not repent as he should.

Moshe said, "Perhaps if they will see me (the leader of the Jewish people) coming to them, they will feel ashamed and repent." However, because they did not feel shame and they remained defiant in order to bring about the destruction of Moshe.

Avraham, our Patriarch was one of the most humble people to ever live. It was because of his selfless quest for truth that he came upon G'd as the Omnipotent Being. He espoused monotheism to all mankind. The motivating factor behind his quest was his desire to know who is his benefactor. Avraham wanted to be beholden to the One who was the source of all good so that he could pay a debt of gratitude. Until he came upon the source of all good, he continued his search. Avraham's sense of indebtedness was rooted in his sense of conscience. How could Avraham continue to be a beneficiary without

locating his benefactor and expressing his appreciation. In contrast, Dasan and Aviram had not shame and thus could not repent.

4. Wisely Choosing One's Location

The Midrash states, "Our Rabbis of blessed memory said, 'Woe to the evil person (rasha) and woe to his neighbor. It is good for the devoutly righteous and it is good for his neighbor.' Where do we see this? Dasan and Aviram were destroyed because of the dissention of Korach. They were his neighbors and thus influenced by him. His location was in the south...The location of the camp of Reuvain was juxtaposed to the family Korach...It is because of their proximity to him that they joined with him in the mutiny against Moshe. In contrast, the camp of Yehudah which included Yissachar and Zevulun was on the east....They were neighbors of Moshe, Aaron and his children...Because they were in close proximity to Torah, they merited to become Torah Sages. As it states in Psalms, 'Yehudah the legislator of law...' The children of Yissachar were '*yodei binah*' (those who possessed special insight and clarity)... Even the tribe of Zevulun was also endowed with a special level of Torah."

Although the tribes that were included within the camp of Yehudah did not engage with Moshe to a greater degree than any of the other tribes, they nevertheless achieved a unique dimension of Torah scholarship. This is attributed to the fact that they were in the proximity of Moshe who was the tzaddik. Being a neighbor alone, is sufficient cause to be the beneficiary of the tzaddik's presence. It is not necessarily determined by one's degree of interaction with the tzaddik, but rather being in his proximity. If one is within the proximity of an evil person, he will become diminished because of the spiritual void and vacuum that is associated with the rasha. Because the rasha represents and pursues ideals that are contrary to the Will of G'd, the Divine Presence is not associated with him.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "Rabbi Chalafta Ben Dosa Of Kfar Chananya Said: "If ten people sit together and occupy themselves with Torah, the Divine Presence rests among them, As it states, 'G'd stands in the Assembly of the L'rd What is the source that teaches us that the same is true if even five sit together? It states, 'He has founded His band upon the earth.' What is the source that teaches us that the same is true even if three sit together? It states, 'Among the judges He renders judgment .' What is the source that teaches us that the same is true even if two sit together? It states, 'Then the

G'd fearing conversed with one another, and the L'rd hearkened and heard.' What is the source that teaches us that the same is true if even one Jew sits and learns Torah? It states, 'In every place where I have My Name mentioned I will come to you and bless you.'"

Maharal of Prague asks, "The Mishna cites verses to indicate that the Divine Presence is associated with various settings of Jews who engage in Torah study, including the individual who studies alone. Evidently, there must be a difference regarding each of these settings, since the Mishna cites various verses to establish the value of each situation. What is the difference?" He explains that although it is true that the Divine Presence rests even upon the one Jew if he is engaged in Torah study, the intensity of His Presence is not the same as that of more than one. Thus, if ten Jews, which is a quorum, are studying Torah, the intensity of Divine Presence is much greater than if only five engage in Torah study because ten Jews represent a microcosm of the entire Jewish people. This will bring about the most advanced level of attachment to the Divine Presence.

The Midrash states, regarding the holy Patriarchs, , "*Hein, hein haMerkava* – they are the Chariot (of the Divine Presence)." Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov because of their dimension of spirituality and accomplishments were the location for the Divine Presence in this existence. In this way they were the equivalent of the Holy of Holies in the Temple. If one were to be exposed to that level of intensity of spirituality, one would be positively impacted and influenced. Moshe, being the pillar and conduit of Torah was the location of G'd's Presence. In addition, he was the spiritual equivalent of the entire Jewish people. Aaron, the High Priest was to a degree the spiritual equivalent of his brother Moshe. His sons, the Priests (Kohanim) were the ones responsible for the service of G'd. Therefore, the fact that the camp of Yehudah was in their proximity, they were influenced to become some of the most advanced Torah sages of the Jewish people. The basis for their spiritual capacity was their proximity to G'd's Presence.

In contrast, if one were in the proximity of an evil person such as Korach who was self-absorbed and envious of Moshe, one would be spiritually diminished. The Divine Presence had no relevance to Korach because of what he represented. His objective was to usurp Moshe's authority and thus undermine the credibility of Torah. Because Dasan and Aviram's location was juxtaposed to the location of Korach, although they may not have initially interacted with him, they were negatively affected because

of the lack of holiness. This is the understanding of “Woe to the rasha and woe to his neighbor.”

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos states, “You should distance yourself from a bad neighbor...” It is not necessarily because of the subtle influences of the evil neighbor that one must be careful, but rather simply by being in the proximity of an evil neighbor one will be denied a relationship with G’d.

The Torah states in the Portion of Vayeitzei, **“Yaakov departed from Beersheva and went toward Charan.”** Rashi cites Chazal who ask, “Why is it important for the Torah to tell us from where Yaakov departed, it would have been sufficient to tell us that Yaakov was going to Charan.” The Midrash answers that the Torah is teaching us that when a tzaddik leaves a location it loses its radiance, beauty and splendor. Thus, although Yitzchak and Rivka remained in Beersheva, the level of intensity of the Divine Presence was diminished because of Yaakov’s departure. Wherever Yaakov went, the Divine Presence followed because he himself was the receptacle of His Presence.

It was known that the Chazon Ishe only remained in Europe as long as the Chofetz Chaim was alive. After the Chofetz Chaim had passed away he moved to the Holy Land. This was because he believed that as long as the Chofetz Chaim was alive, his dimension of spirituality brought about a level of sanctity upon Europe that was similar to that of the Holy Land. However, upon the passing of the Chofetz Chaim, when that special level of sanctity no longer existed, Chazon Ishe chose to depart.

5. Compensating for Spiritual Regression (from *Shelach*)

The Torah tells us that spies had returned with slanderous reports about the Land that G’d had promised to the Jewish people. They had said, **“It is a Land that devours its inhabitants.”** Rather than embracing the word of G’d with full trust, and agreeing to enter into the Land, they had said, **“We will not go in.”** They in effect accused G’d of misleading them. As a result of this sin, G’d decreed that the generation that was between the ages of 20 and 60 should perish in the desert over a 40-year period.

After the incident of the spies, the Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘...When you will bring a fire-offering to Hashem – an elevation offering or a feast offering...or a free-will offering, or on your festivals, to produce a satisfying aroma to**

Hashem...the one who brings the offering must bring a meal offering...and wine for a libation...” After the sin of the spies, if one were to bring a burnt offering it must be accompanied with a meal offering and wine libations. Why does the Torah choose to mention after the sin of the spies that the meal offering and wine libations must accompany one’s personal sacrifice?

Sforno explains, “Until the sin of the Golden Calf, if one wanted to bring a burnt offering to G’d it was sufficient for him to bring the meat offering by itself. Although it was not accompanied with the meal offering or wine libations it was considered an appropriate offering. The offering produced a satisfying aroma to G’d, as we find regarding the sacrifices of Abel, Noah, and Avraham. They had brought burnt offerings without any accompaniment. At the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the youths also brought burnt offerings that were not accompanied with a meal offering and libations. However, as a result of the spiritual diminishment of the Jewish people that was caused by the sin of the Golden Calf, when a communal offering was brought it was no longer sufficient to be brought by itself. It needed to be accompanied with a meal offering and libations. After the sin of the spies, which caused even further spiritual regression and diminishment for the Jewish people, when one would bring a personal offering, it was no longer sufficient to bring the meat by itself, it needed to be accompanied a meal offering and libations.” The meal offering and libations that accompanied the burnt offering after the sin of the Golden Calf and the sin of the spies were to compensate for the spiritual imperfection that the Jewish people had attained. It was only with this accompaniment that the aroma of the offering would be satisfying to G’d. Only in this manner would the Jewish people be fully atoned.

The Torah continues, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘...When you will eat of the bread of the Land, you shall set a side a portion for Hashem (challah)...”** Sforno explains, “After the sin of the spies, the Jewish people needed the mitzvah of *challah* to be introduced to them (in addition to the meal offering and libations). One needed to perform this particular positive commandment (the tithing of the dough) before partaking of the bread of the Land so that he should be worthy of G’d’s blessing to come upon him. As it states, ‘When you give the first of your dough to the Kohen (Priest), it will bring blessing into your home.’” After the Jewish people became spiritually diminished from the sin of the Golden Calf and the spies, the burnt offering alone was not sufficient to bring about atonement. They needed to also bring a meal offering and libations to be considered complete. In

addition, in order to be worthy of the blessing of G'd, the Jewish people needed to tithing their dough before partaking of it. Prior to the sin of the spies, they were sufficiently worthy without this mitzvah.

We find something similar regarding Yitzchak's blessing to Esav. Before Yitzchak had given his blessing to Esav the Torah states, **"Yitzchak said to Esav, ...go out to the field and hunt game for me. Then make me delicacies such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you..."** Sforno asks, "Since Esav was the first born of Yitzchak, who was qualified to be the Patriarch in the eyes of his father, why was it necessary for his blessing to be predicated on preparing delicacies for him?" Sforno explains that one needs to be worthy in order for a blessing to be effective, regardless of the holiness of the individual who is giving the blessing. Yitzchak wanted to create an opportunity for Esav to perform the mitzvah of honoring his father in order to be worthy to receive his blessing. Yaakov, on the other hand, because of his dimension of spirituality and holiness was innately worthy of receiving his father's blessing.

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 – Path of the Just
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Makkos
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Basra
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm	Talmud: Chagigah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00-2:00 pm	Ramchal: Derech Hashem Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45 th FL.)

Tuesday

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

11:30 – 12:30 pm	Talmud: Chagigah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm	Duties of The Heart Location: Yad Avraham
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Talmud: Chagigah Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL)