

Parshas Korach – David Freedman

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ויקה קרח [Bamidbar 16.1] and Korach took. What did Korach take? As the verb has no object, how do we know what was taken. Many commentators have provided a variety of explanations.

Rashi initially states "This parasha is well explained in the Midrash of Rabbi Tanchuma". Rashi then states "He (Korach) took himself to one side, to be set apart from the congregation, to contend against the Kehuna." Ramban, explaining Rashi and Ibn Ezra, suggest various reasons and that Korach took himself to stir himself into action.

Two questions immediately spring to mind:

Why state ויקה קרח (in the singular of just Korach) when there were others involved as well, including Dathan, Abiram and Ohn. Indeed the second posuk, [16.2] begins with ויקומו, and they arose.

Many commentaries explain the singular usage, as the Torah is teaching us that when there is an opposition to a leader, a number of factions might join together with a common goal of removing the current leader, they are united in opposition – but individually they each have their own agenda. Had Korach and his followers succeeded in their opposition to Moshe, trouble would have continued amongst themselves, as who should do what. In fact, this was the basis of Ohn's wife of taking her action to prevent her husband becoming involved.

As outlined in Pirkei Avos [5.17], the Mishna contrasts the arguments for the sake of Heaven to those that are the opposite. "For the sake of Heaven like Hillel and Shammai, whereas the opposite is Korach and his followers." Was Korach's argument not with Moshe, so why does the Mishna state Korach and his followers and not Korach and Moshe. R. Yonasan Eibeschitz explains Moshe only wanted the truth, whereas Korach and his followers had their own agenda. Moshe revealed himself completely as the servant of Hashem, so Korach's claim was one sided and doomed to fail. Korach claims with his followers were certainly not for the sake of Heaven.

Another question also puzzles our commentators. What was Rashi's purpose of directing us to the Midrash of R Tanchuma, before his explanation? Normally, Rashi provides clear and concise explanations to what is troubling him, so what is in the Midrash the Rashi wants us to know.

Without looking at the Midrash, we might have thought that Korach's complaint was Moshe's interpretation of Hashem's requirements of whom should be chosen to serve Hashem. After all, we are all Holy. כולם קדושים [16.3]. The Midrash explains that Korach's complaint was prompted by personal jealousy, and not the right or wrongs of Moshe's appointment of Elzaphan ben Uziel as a prince over the Sons of Kehat. Rashi, from the outset, insists we examine the Midrash, so we can glean an insight to the real issue and Korach's true motives.

Possibly this explains why Korach's revolt appears immediately after the 3rd paragraph of the Shema on the laws of Tzitzit, (at the end of last week's Sedra). ולא תתורו אחר לבבכם [15.39] "You shall not go astray after your heart". As Rashi explains, the heart and the eyes are the spies of the body, and are agents for sins.

It is interesting to note that the Shiur Shel Yom, for Monday, Yom Sheni, was composed by the Sons of Korach. For in Bereshis, Hashem himself on the second day of creation, separated between the Heavenly and earthly components of the universe, [Rosh Hashana 31a] and ruled over both. On the second day, division (Machloches) was created, and Hashem separated the heavenly and the earthly, the spiritual and the physical. We learn that Korach's sons composed this Psalm whilst tottering on the brink of Gehinnom, and if they had not realised their profound error and repented, they would have fallen without escape. From personal experience, the sons of Korach understood the ways of Hashem, and composed this Psalm to Hashem's everlasting greatness. There is no mention of כי טוב on the second day, but with acceptance of Hashem, and repentance to our errors, we can immediately reach Hashem's kindness.

As Psalm 48 concludes [48.15] "For this is G-d, our G-d forever and ever; He shall lead us as in youth." With Rashi explaining "in Youth," as a man slowly leads his young son, an expression of eternity.

May we all learn to curb our enthusiasm of always being right and accept without question the words of our leaders. Rav Moshe Feinstein was once asked by a non-Jewish journalist of how he reached his position as Godol Hador. His response was apparently "no one elected me. They just asked me questions and I answered. Eventually word went around that I was a good person to ask." Even if we do not realise it, Hashem provides us with leaders to follow.

Written with an expression of thanks for all the kindness, good wishes and prayers for a continued Refuah for Eliyahu Yosef ben Devorah Chana Sarah