

הַיְהוּדִים THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE SIN OF KORACH: PRIDE AND VANITY

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

The verse that states, "Korach, son of Itzhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi took ..." (Numbers 16:1) presents some difficulties. Why is it stated that he "took", and not that he "assembled", since in fact he assembled the community to make it rise up against Moses? If the verse wants to tell us, as Rashi explains in the name of the Sages (Sanhedrin 109b), that Korach separated himself from the community and thereby brokered a bad deal for himself, we still would have understood this if the word "assembled" had been used in the verse. For in assembling the community against Moses, Korach created a controversy that was not for the sake of Heaven (Perkei Avoth 5:17) and thus took himself out of the community of Israel to contest the allocation of the priesthood.

It must also be understood how Korach dared to contest the authority of Moses, even though he had seen all the miracles in Egypt and in the desert. We should, as well, explain the connection between Parsha Shelach and Parsha Korach, as well as, more specifically, the connection between the passage concerning tzitzit (at the end of Parsha Shelach) and Parsha Korach that immediately follows it.

To see this more clearly, let us begin by citing a well-know passage: "At the moment that the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to give the Torah, all the mountains battled among themselves, each one saying, 'It is upon me that G-d will give the Torah,' while Mount Sinai humbled itself and said, 'What am I that G-d should give the Torah upon me?'" (Sotah 5a). And it was precisely because of its humility that the Torah was given upon Mount Sinai, for the Torah is acquired through humility (Perkei Avoth 6:5), as well as by a broken heart, a modest manner, and the sense of being as completely barren as the desert (Pesikta Zutah Terumah 25:16). Moses possessed such humility, as it is said, "Moses received the Torah from Sinai"

(Perkei Avoth 1:1), for it is from the mountain that he took this attribute.

One may add that the Torah itself alludes to this idea in the verse that states, "and they stood at the bottom of the mountain" (Exodus 19:17), for the Children of Israel reasoned, a fortiori, that if Mount Sinai, which has neither spirit nor soul, merited by its humbling itself to be sanctified and to become for several days the place of G-d's abode, how much more so should the Children of Israel – which have both spirit and soul, and who constitute a permanent dwelling place for G-d (as it is written, "they shall make a Sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them" [Exodus 25:8]) – humble themselves more than the mountain if they want to receive the Torah. And it is in this way that it will continue to live in them. This is what "and they stood at the bottom of the mountain" means: They were lower and more humble than it.

Concerning this subject, I have seen in the book entitled *Minhat Yehudah VeYerushalayim* that the Torah is not allowed to dwell among one who is not humble and modest, as was Moses, whom the Torah attests "was exceedingly humble" (Numbers 12:3). The Sages have affirmed this several times: "The Torah can only abide among one who is imbued with humility" (Derech Eretz Zutah 8), and again: "The Torah is not found among the proud" (Tanhuma Ki Tavo 3). Above all, it is said, "The Torah is compared to water, as it is written, 'Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water' [Isaiah 55:1]" (Bava Kama 17a). "Why is the Torah compared to water? In the same way that water flows towards lower ground, the words of Torah abide only with those of humble spirit" (Taanith 7a). It seems to me that they cite the verse in Isaiah that states, "go to the water" because all men should go in the same direction as water, which is to leave that which is high and to go towards that which is low, and to learn Torah only in a spirit of humility.

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From this point, we may return to our subject, for the questions that we have asked at the outset can now be completely and satisfactorily answered.

Why did we receive the command that tzitzit should hang down, rather than point up? With regards to tzitzit, we know that because of them a man will remember all the mitzvot and the study of Torah, which leads him to action. As the Gemara states, sight brings about recollection, and recollection leads to action (Menachot 43b), just as it is written, “you shall see it and remember” (Numbers 15:39). This is why the tzitzit hang down. One must view them in a spirit of humility, and so one’s resulting action will also be marked by this spirit. Consequently, we see that the tzitzit teach man to serve G-d and to perform His mitzvot in a spirit of humility, without which a man would risk being entrapped by the desires of this material world. Therefore the Gemara states, “His tzitzit struck him in the face, saving him from sin” (see Menachot 44a).

If our views are correct with regards to this, we will be able to understand just what Korach and his supporters claimed. Korach believed that the if the Torah abides only with one who is humble, and if it is necessary for a person to behave modestly, how would it be possible to be king or High Priest all while remaining humble? After all, a king must conduct himself with all the honors due his position, as it is written, “Set over yourself a king” (Deuteronomy 17:15). To this the Gemara adds; “His fear should be upon you” (Ketubot 17a) and also, “A king who pardons a wrong done to his honor, it is not pardoned” (Kiddushin 32b). How could Moses therefore take this great position upon himself? This is why the Torah places the passage concerning the tzitzit next to Parsha Korach, for Korach believed that the tzitzit represented humility, which seemed to him to be incompatible with the behavior required of a king.

Yet Korach contradicted himself, for he wanted to be High Priest instead of Aaron. How was it possible, on one hand, for Korach to reprimand Moses and Aaron for their lack of humility, and on the other to claim honors for himself? In fact, the Torah rejects Korach’s assertions, for it attests to the fact that “the man Moses was exceedingly humble” (Numbers 12:3). He was king and conducted himself in a dignified manner, yet nevertheless with perfect humility.

It is not by chance, either, that Parsha Shelach is found next to Parsha Korach. The Midrash says that the sin of the spies was to not have drawn a lesson from the punishment of Miriam, who had spoken against Moses, even though he had kept quiet. Now Korach himself didn’t draw a lesson from the severity of the punishment against the spies (for having spoken badly against Eretz Israel), nor from the incident involving Miriam. Without having learned anything from all this, he said to Moses and Aaron, “Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of the L-

RD?”(Numbers 16:3), meaning that Korach accused them of not being humble and therefore not worthy of teaching Torah to the Children of Israel, for only those things which come from a modest heart enter into the heart of the listener. True, Korach knew perfectly well that the Eternal spoke face to face with Moses, however pride and jealousy made Korach transgress, and he assembled the community against Moses and Aaron. In fact, it is written, “Jealousy, desire, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world” (Perkei Avoth 4:21). Their dissension continued to the point that they still protested even when G-d descended into the Tent of Meeting, as it is written, “Dathan and Abiram came out standing at the door of their tents” (Numbers 16: 27). Instead of asking forgiveness and repenting, they continued to contest the authority of Moses and Aaron.

We see from this just how serious controversy is, for a man that takes pleasure in it (all while knowing that his arguments are not valid) ends up by justifying himself in his own eyes, thus bringing disaster upon himself and his family. This is precisely what is meant by a controversy that is “not for the sake of Heaven” (Perkei Avoth 5:17). Korach contradicted himself, and from here we note that “whoever pursues honor, honor flees from him” (Tanhuma Vayikra 3). This is what Rashi meant when he wrote, “He took himself to a different side, to be disassociated from the community and to cast aspersion on the priesthood,” for his words were not true enough to be satisfactory, and he was therefore not able to assemble the community against Moses and Aaron except through means of deception.

Yet in reality, one also finds the following declaration of the Sages: In the future, the third Temple will be built by Messiah the king, and Korach will be the priest, for his controversy dealt with the desire to be G-d’s priest (see Shir Hashirim Rabba 7:10). This seems to indicate that his actions contained some aspect of selflessness. Yet if so, why was he punished? It is because he had the ability to stop the controversy yet did not do so. He did nothing to avert the disaster that came upon himself and his family, and he continued to fight for the priesthood with all his strength. Now we know that G-d pays special attention to give to every righteous person his reward (Perkei Avoth 2:16). This is why He will give the priesthood to Korach in the future, notwithstanding that his sons said, “Moses is truth and his Torah is truth” (Bava Batra 74a). Korach, therefore, will receive his reward in order to show that, in reality, Moses is truth and his Torah is truth, and that Moses was truly a humble man and that there is no reason to oppose the leader of the generation.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHEERSON

THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson took the position of Lubavitcher Rebbe after the passing of his illustrious father-in-law, Rabbi Yoseph Yitzchak, who himself issued from a long line of Tsaddikim, among others the Tzemach Tzedek and Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, author of the Tanya.

Born on the 11th of Nissan 5662 in Nikolaev, Russia, he received his first education from his famed father, the Tzaddik, Torah genius, and Kabbalist Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, the chief Rabbi of Yekatrineslav, an important city in the Ukraine. From his earliest youth, Rabbi Menachem Mendel showed great intellectual abilities and was gifted with an exceptional memory. Later on, he demonstrated a particular liking for solitude and meditation, as well as a profound diligence for study in different disciplines of Judaism. His teenage years were difficult. A violent wind encircled him, a wind of war and pogroms that worsened the condition of the Jews. His family knew persecution, flights from danger, and trials. Yet in every situation, even the most difficult, he continued to study Torah.

It was about 1925 that he had his first contact with the Lubavitcher Rebbe of that time, Rabbi Yoseph Yitzchak Schneerson, who resided in Leningrad. They say that the previous Rebbe was impressed by his young visitor, notably by his scholarship and the qualities that he sensed in him. He chose him to become the husband of his second daughter.

At that time, the Lubavitch movement experienced difficulties. The previous Rebbe was arrested in Leningrad in 1927, but then set free. This occurred on the Hilloula of his father, Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber. They say that a military man burst into the office of the previous Rebbe with a gun in hand. He menacingly pointed the gun at him and ordered that he stop praying. Rabbi Yoseph Yitzchak looked at him without blinking, and without the slightest hint of fear said, "The toy that you hold in your hands can only scare those who have many gods and one world. However I have but one G-d and many worlds. I fear nothing."

It was armed with this unshakable conviction that Rabbi Yoseph Yitzchak withstood his painful captivity in Russia. It was also equipped with this same weapon that he arrived in the United States in 1940, a country that he had often heard was like another world, quite different from the one that he had known up to then. "Here," they would say, "it was impossible to spread Chassidut as in Europe or Eretz Israel." Yet a new era was about to begin for the Lubavitch movement.

His son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, had settled in Paris after leaving Russia. There he pursued his electrical engineering studies in Sorbonne and obtained a diploma in the field. Then in 1941 he rejoined his father-in-law in the United States, where he was employed in an American Navy research laboratory and worked on materials for naval construction.

As one of those close to the previous Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel was interested in everything that his father-in-law undertook, particularly in the area of education. He soon became his right hand man and was appointed to head the educational department of the Lubavitch movement in the United States. He thereafter undertook to begin a veritable spiritual evolution in the heart of American Jewish youth, a group that was seriously threatened by the dangers of assimilation and of which a large section was completely detached from sources of Judaism. He showed himself to be a truly effective organizer, and with the help of his father-in-law he founded the Chabad Youth Movement, into which he breathed a spirit of Torah and Chassidut. He also encouraged the young to show evidence of their devotion towards their brothers in awakening their own energies for

prompt and permanent action. Today, there exists dozens and dozens of Yeshivas and Talmud Torahs where thousands of students are invited to the United States from around the world in the spirit of Torah and Chassidut. If all this was possible, it was only because of the untiring and devoted work of the one who, before succeeding his father-in-law, became his father-in-law's devoted assisted, and who successfully carried out (through with his invaluable actions) his father-in-law's instructions. It was in this way that the United States experienced a veritable spiritual revolution.

A program with the goal of establishing "a regular time for study" was then undertaken. In an effort to preserve the teaching of Judaism, Rabbi Menachem Mendel also succeeded in organizing Torah courses in public schools, to be taught for an hour a day after the regular curriculum. It was thus that thousands of young American Jews were saved from assimilation. When the previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yoseph Yitzchak, passed away on the 10th of Shevat 5710, it was only natural that the Chassidim turned towards his son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, to ask him to take charge of the Chabad Movement. However, it was only after a year of insisting, and subsequent refusals, that he accepted (after the mourning period had ended) to officially succeed his prestigious father-in-law. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson thus became the seventh Rebbe of the dynasty.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel was a man both known and unknown. Numerous were those who have heard of him, but few really knew him. That which we know and hear concerning him describes but a small part of his rich persona and inner qualities. His abilities in the area of both revealed and concealed Torah knowledge went above even his understanding; it was inherent in his own being. His influence on those close to him, as well as on those more distant, was widely acknowledged. Moreover, he had an incredible ability to mentally concentrate, and completely mastered the language of Chassidut. Although he penetrated the deepest aspects of Chassidut, the Rebbe was close to everyone, to the inner essence of every Jew.

When one would hear the Rebbe speak, both when he addressed the public and during private discussions, his words were clear and his expressions precise and without extra words. It was this clarity that reached the soul of his listener. The Rebbe based his views not on the emotional aspect of things, but rather by appealing to the intellect. Through his words an entire world was revealed to you, a profound world of thought and sensitivity, in perfect harmony with a fervent and solid faith, to the point that a person would ask himself, "Is it possible to think otherwise?"

The Rebbe was informed about everything that happened in the world, particularly with that which concerned the Jewish people. Yet he was also attentive to the various problems of individuals. People came from everywhere to see the Rebbe. High-ranking officials, famous men, and ministers and representatives from Israel would often come to see him. They all recognized his outstanding character and competence in every domain. His goal was to promote the strengthening of Judaism and the observance of the Torah and practical mitzvot. It was to awaken the heart of the Children of Israel and to conduct them towards Teshuvah (returning to G-d), and to the study of Torah and the performance of good deeds.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson z"l left this world on the 3rd of Tammuz, 5754. May his merit protect us. Amen.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS

A teaching of the Maguid of Dubno

In the morning, the L-RD will make known the one who is His own and the holy one, and He will draw him close to Himself” (Numbers 16:5).

The Midrash states that Moses told Korach and his followers: The Holy One, blessed be He, placed limits in His world. Can you mix the day with the night? At the start of Scripture it is already stated, “And G-d divided between the light and between the darkness ... and it was evening, and it was morning” [Genesis 1:4-5]. He separated them so that they could be of use to the world, and therefore in the same way “Aaron was separated and charged with an exceedingly holy mission” (Divrei Hayamim 23:13).

Let us first present another explanation of the Sages: “And G-d called the light Day’ – these are the actions of the righteous. ‘And the darkness He called Night’ – these are the actions of the ungodly” (Bereshith Rabba).

The Maggid of Dubno explains this to us by means of the following parable.

Someone went to a store in the middle of the night to purchase some items. The owner of the store hastened to light some candles to see what he was going to purchase. The owner asked, “Are you looking for something of regular quality or something special?” The other replied, “It doesn’t matter. It’s all the same. They’re equal, and I’ll take what I want.”

At these words, the owner extinguished the candles and the store was once again dark. The other was surprised. “What have you done?” he shouted.

“If you see no difference among the merchandise or the prices, why should I light up the store for you? Purchase whatever happens to come into your hands!”

In the same way, the Holy One, blessed be He, created the light of wisdom together with the light of day in order that it be possible to distinguish between people and to appreciate each according to his or her value. Now Korach said, “The entire assembly – all of them – are holy” (Numbers 16:3), meaning that Korach claimed that they all had the same value, that there was no difference among them, and that the great and the lesser were similar.

Consequently (according to Korach’s view), the light of wisdom and discernment are completely superfluous. This is why Moses responded: “The Holy One, blessed be He, placed limits in His world,” and light is necessary to discern the difference between things. As for you, you want to mix day with night and extinguish the light of day, for if all things have the same value, light would no longer be needed to distinguish between them.

Now despite your actions, you yourselves realize that no one can operate in such a mix. It will always be necessary to distinguish between light and darkness, for the world needs light, and this is why, “Aaron was separated and charged with an exceedingly holy mission.”