

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-known 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[6]), 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 characteristic.

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 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" (*Tanuma 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.

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 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"

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(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 for 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 who 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 aspersions 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 by 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 the fact 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.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

“WHEN THE RABBI SPEAKS ABOUT THE EARTH...”

The holy Admor Rabbi Aaron of Belz lived far removed from all the worries of this world, completely immersed in holiness and spirituality, and totally disregarded material concerns. Imagine the surprise of his family, therefore, when one fine day he uttered the following request: “Make sure to plant a beautiful garden near the house!” At first they thought that they didn’t hear him properly. What would the Rabbi, whose mind was immersed in exceedingly lofty spiritual thoughts, want with a garden?

However such was the explicit wish of the Admor and it had to be followed, even if it couldn’t be understood. Therefore his relatives rushed to find an expert gardener, whom they asked to plant and maintain a beautiful garden next to the house.

The gardener began the work with great enthusiasm. To plant a garden near the house of the Rabbi of Belz was literally a holy task, for obeying the Sages is a mitzvah! He therefore put a great amount of thought and effort into the design and creation of the garden. He prepared the ground without concern to the burden it placed on his strength, put down fertilizer, and divided it into segments where he would plant flowers and lush vegetation.

The results of his work did not take long to be noticed. Buds began to blossom everywhere, and after a short time its flowers and decorative plants amazed everyone who saw them. The gardener worked without stop, in accordance with the Rabbi’s openly declared wish, and continued to take care of the growth, remove the weeds and brambles, and water the ever-flourishing garden. A year passed, and the secret of the Rabbi’s garden was revealed. The following year would be a Shmita year, meaning a year in which we must abstain from working the ground and planting in it.

Rabbi Aaron of Belz wanted to perform the mitzvah of Shmita himself, which is why during the previous year he had asked for a well-kept garden to be planted near his house. Once he owned a garden, he could perform the Torah mitzvah of letting it lie fallow during the seventh year.

When his students understood his intentions, they told each other, “Even when the Rabbi speaks about the earth, his thoughts are of Heaven.”

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

RAV HUNA

Rav Huna belonged to the second generation of Babylonian Amoraim, and he was named Rosh Yeshiva of the academy at Sura after the death of Rav.

Despite his greatness, the Talmud does not say who his parents were, and only in one place is it stated that he was related to the family of the Exilarch.

Besides his considerable wisdom, what was remarkable about Rav Huna was his great qualities, particularly his generosity. With him, riches and the greatness of Torah went together as a pair. He also possessed abilities that characterize a leader of Israel. Early on, when Rav Huna was a student of Rav, he was extremely poor, and so he began farming. He worked the ground himself, irrigated it by his own means, and allowed only the flocks to graze on it. Obviously, he felt no shame in performing all these tasks, and he allowed no one to do it for him. One day, the Gemara says, he was walking with some farm equipment on his shoulder when a Talmid Chacham by the name of Chanah bar Chanilai met him and wanted to carry his load. Rav Huna told him, "If you are accustomed to carrying this type of equipment in your town, then you can do so here if you wish. But if not, do you think that I would allow myself to embarrass you so that I could derive personal honor from it?"

During this time Rav Huna's poverty was so great that once he didn't even have wine to recite Kiddush for Shabbat. He went and placed his belt as collateral in order to buy some wine, replacing his belt with a simple piece of string. When Rav noticed, he asked him, "What does this mean?" Rav Huna then explained that he was obligated to put his belt down as collateral in order to buy wine for Shabbat. Thus Rav gave him a blessing that Hashem should provide him with such wealth that he could wear clothes made of velvet!

Starting from then on, his business dealings began to prosper, to the point that he became extremely rich. Once, 400 barrels of wine that he owned became sour and turned into cheap vinegar, and he was faced with a huge financial loss. His friends, the Sages, came to him and advised that he should examine his ways, for he may have committed some sin.

"Do you suspect me of wrongdoing?" Rav Huna asked them.

"Do you suspect the Holy One, blessed be He, of making a Jew lose money for no reason?" the Sages replied.

"If such is the case, please tell me if you have heard anything concerning me that I should rectify. If so, I will immediately mend my ways," said Rav Huna in a spirit of repentance.

"We have heard," the Sages told him, "that you have not given your sharecropper his rightful portion of grapevine shoots. For the same reason as he has the right to a portion of a tree's fruits, a sharecropper has the right to a portion of its shoots and twigs."

Rav Huna was astonished. "But my sharecropper takes all the shoots, leaving me with hardly anything!" he replied. He then decided, "Perhaps starting from today I will set aside a fixed quantity of grapevine shoots for him. In this way he won't steal from me anymore!"

Success immediately began to smile on Rav Huna once again, and the price of vinegar started to rise, to the point that he lost nothing in the whole affair.

Rav Huna's incredible prosperity became well known, to the extent that it was said that whoever saw him in their dreams would experience miracles.

One day a fire broke out in Rav Huna's town, yet the flames didn't touch anything in the district where he lived. The residents of the town believed that they had been saved by his merit. However they were shown in a dream that this was insignificant compared to the greatness of Rav Huna, and that the district had been saved by the merit of a woman who each week lit her stove and allowed all her neighbors to benefit from its use. We can learn from this the power of generosity.

Rav Huna's yeshiva became ever larger. It had about permanent 800 students, and he paid for everything out of his own pocket. Moreover, thousands of students who studied independently during the whole year came to his yeshiva for two months out of the year (Yarchei Kallah in Adar and Elul). They came to listen to the Rosh Yeshiva's lectures, as well as to those of his colleagues, after which they would go back home and attend to their affairs. At that time Rav Huna had 13 assistants. He died at an advanced age.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID 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 set apart, to sanctify him as holy of holies” (I Chronicles 23:13).

Let us first present another teaching 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 buy. 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 set apart, to sanctify him as holy of holies.”

THE PATH OF THE JUST SHAME - PART VII

We must carefully watch that we not shame anyone, for our Sages have taught, “One who makes his fellow’s face blanch [shames him] in public loses his portion in the world to come” (Bava Metzia 58b). To make someone grow pale is a special form of homicide, according to which our Sages have said, “Redness [blushing] departs and paleness comes on” (ibid.), which resembles murder. They have also said, “The suffering caused by shame is worse than death. This is why a man should prefer to throw himself into a fiery furnace than to shame his fellow in public.” How is this to be understood? First, a person must reprimand calmly and privately. If he begins by reprimanding his fellow in public and humiliates him, he will have sinned because of him (Erchin 16b). How much more is this true of one who freely shames his fellow, without the intention of reprimanding him. The destruction of the second Temple occurred because of the offence made to Bar Kamtza (Gittin 58b). We should therefore be careful not to do anything that shames others.

If during a Torah discussion a person notices that his listener is mistaken, in order not to embarrass him he shouldn’t say, “You’re wrong” or “You don’t understand.” He should pretend that he hasn’t noticed his listener’s mistake. A person should also not humiliate his fellow by calling him by a nickname. We should not say, either in public or in private, “[So and so] wanted to set me up with his daughter, but I didn’t want to,” for we become haughty by shaming others. We should therefore be scrupulous and constantly watch so as not to shame others with our words.