

PARSHA

KORACHJUNE 20TH, 2015
TAMUZRD 5775**600**Publication of
HEVRAT PINTOUnder the Direction of
**Rabbi David Hanania
Pinto Shlita****CHEVRAT PINTO**207 West 78th Street
New York - NY 10024

Tel: 1 212 721 0230

www.hevratpinto.org
hevratpinto@aol.comEditor-in-Chief:
Hanania Soussan**A LESSON FROM KORACH'S WEALTH***Rabbi David Pinto Chlita**It is written, "Korach, the son of Itzhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, separated himself" (Bamidbar 16:1).*

It is not a coincidence that Parsha Korach is found between the passage of the tzitzit and Parsha Chukat in the Torah. In regards to the tzitzit we read, "You shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of Hashem and fulfill them" (Bamidbar 15:39), and Parsha Chukat states: "This is the Torah: When a man dies in a tent" (ibid. 19:14). Our Sages explain that the Torah cannot be acquired unless a person sacrifices himself for it. What follows are two fundamental and essential conditions for meriting the crown of Torah.

First, "You shall look upon" – we must recognize G-d, be aware of His greatness, know Him, and remember all His commandments.

But this is not enough. In fact we look at our tzitzit each day, but without sensing that it affects and influences us. Therefore how are we to understand the rest of the verse: "You shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of Hashem and fulfill them"? Hence Parsha Chukat adds an additional condition for receiving the Torah: "When a man dies in a tent." That is, we are obligated to sacrifice ourselves for the Torah, to yield before it, and to annul our desires for its glory. We must recognize our insignificance compared to it, and we must demonstrate tremendous humility.

The mitzvah of tzitzit certainly allows us to remember the greatness of G-d and recognize His superiority. However we must also learn not to grow proud, and to rid ourselves of negative character traits. In fact if we are mindful of G-d's greatness, yet filled with pride – considering ourselves to be honorable – then we will not try to fulfill His commandments. Hence recognizing the supremacy of the Shechinah must go hand-in-hand with submitting ourselves before the Torah and those who study it.

This was Korach's mistake: He was among those who carried the Holy Ark, and therefore he was aware of G-d's greatness. Yet on the other hand, he did not know how to humble himself and recognize man's frail state. He did not want to fulfill the verse, "When a man dies in a tent," for it was difficult for him to kill his own desires before the Torah and Moshe, the leader of all Israel. Korach was filled with pride and said, "Why should Moshe lead us, rather than I?" Since he lacked humility and failed to submit himself to the Torah and the Sages, he ended up rebelling against the Torah and even denying G-d. This happened because anyone who rebels against the tzaddikim and despises them is considered to be rebelling against G-d Himself.

Rashi says the following: "But what did Korach, who was intelligent, see [that pushed him to commit] this folly? His vision deceived him" (Rashi on Bamidbar 16:7). We have been given two eyes: One to recognize the greatness of G-d, and the other to recognize our own insignificance and lowliness. Korach properly used one eye,

for he even recognized G-d's glory. However he did not properly use his other eye, since he failed to recognize his own insignificance. He was not wise enough to yield to the holy Torah and the Sages of Israel. It was therefore pride that led to his fall. This is the meaning of the expression, "His vision deceived him." He became arrogant, mainly because of his many possessions. The verse, "Yerushun became fat and kicked" (Devarim 32:15) was fulfilled in Korach, for he was blinded by wealth, which he attributed to his own efforts.

Regrettably, there are many people today who act just like Korach. When we are going through a rough patch or a misfortune strikes us, we usually turn to Hashem and beseech Him for help. Only then does faith awaken in us. Yet when all is going well – when G-d provides us with food in abundance – that is when we forget G-d and turn our backs on Him, for we attribute our successes to our own efforts. This is precisely what the Torah warns us against: "Lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep and goats increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves...and your heart will grow proud and you will forget Hashem your G-d" (Devarim 8:12-14). This is why the Torah commands us, "You shall remember Hashem your G-d – that it was He Who gave you the strength to make wealth" (v.18).

During one of the worst aviation disasters in history, an airplane carrying about 280 passengers, including three Israeli Jews, crashed into the middle of the ocean. The state of Israel therefore made every effort to find traces of the airplane and recover the bodies of the victims. But it was useless. The sister of one of these Jews contacted me, and in the depths of her despair she tearfully asked me: "What do you think? Is my brother still alive?" I said to her, "What are you hoping to hear me say? Rational people all understand that there's no hope of finding survivors at this point, since the plane crashed into the middle of the ocean." However she replied with faith, "But Rabbi, as a Jew I've always had hope and faith that my brother is still alive!"

Her response stunned me, and I realized that this is what the faith of every Jew should resemble: We must believe in G-d; we must believe that nothing can prevent Him from saving us. Our Sages have affirmed this by saying, "Even if a sharp sword rests upon a man's neck, he should not desist from prayer" (Berachot 10a). However we have to ask ourselves: Do we only demonstrate such faith when confronted by worries and misfortunes that make us look to G-d and depend on Him? Yet when things are good, do we recognize that everything comes from Him, that we have an abundance of things, and that we are in good health? Otherwise (G-d forbid), in times of success we may distance ourselves from faith in G-d and declare, "My strength and the might of my hand has made me all this wealth" (Devarim 8:17). Whoever we may be, we are obligated to heed this warning and reflect on it.

Even the Smallest Dispute

The Torah is strewn with advice designed to guide each Jew along life's path. Included in this advice is a warning that follows from the incident described in this week's parsha, namely: "Be not like Korach and his assembly" (Bamidbar 17:5). The Ramban cites the Yereyim (345) in stating that this warning prohibits us in general from contesting the priesthood or thinking that we can also perform the service in the Temple, rather than a kohen.

Nevertheless, our Sages point out that every conflict is covered by this warning, as the Yereyim states: "We must never contest the honor that is accorded to others for a mitzvah, this on account of the prohibition against acting like Korach and his assembly, who contested the authority of Moshe and Aaron by saying: 'Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?'" [Bamidbar 16:3]."

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 110a) affirms that anyone who involves himself in a conflict is transgressing a Torah prohibition and deserves to be struck by leprosy (tzara'at). From where do we learn this? It is written, "As Hashem spoke about him by the hand of Moshe" (Bamidbar 17:5), and elsewhere we read: "Hashem said to him, 'Bring your hand to your bosom'... and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow" (Shemot 4:6).

The Midrash also brings this subject to our attention as follows: "Look at how grave strife must be, given that the Holy One, blessed be He, removes all memory of one who foments strife! For it is written, 'A flame came forth from Hashem and consumed the 250 men' [Bamidbar 16:35]. Rabbi Berekiah commented: 'How grave must strife be! As a rule, the Celestial Court inflicts penalties only on sinners who are 20 years and older, while the earthly court does so only on those who are 13 years and older. Yet for Korach's strife, babies of a day old were burned and swallowed up in the bottomless abyss, as it is written: "With their wives, children, and infants" [v.27]' " (Bamidbar Rabba 18:4).

Rabbi Eliyahu Hacohen of Izmir wrote, "To appreciate the value and power of peace, we just have to see how destructive strife is and what evil decrees affect those who take part in it. For having provoked and maintained a dispute, Korach and his assembly suffered a terrible and bizarre death that nobody had ever heard of before: They and all their possessions were swallowed up by the earth [Midrash Rabba 18:4-13]. Even babies who never sinned died, and on that day the manna did not fall. Furthermore, the men who were swallowed up remained in Gehinnom until Hanna came and prayed for them [Sanhedrin 109b]. We must therefore understand just how serious and abhorrent is strife in G-d's eyes."

The Shevet Mussar advises us to distance ourselves from any dispute, for the Satan is present to intensify and make it burn, a fire that consumes both body and soul, as it is written: "A dispute is compared to an opening made by a rush of water that widens as the water presses through it" (Sanhedrin 7a). It is also said that the Satan incited two men against one another, which resulted in a long and bitter dispute, until finally Rabbi Meir was able to reconcile them. He then heard the Satan complaining that Rabbi Meir had removed it from the home where it had ignited the fire of strife (Gittin 52a). From here we learn that strife increases to such a point that the Satan comes and finds a home to dwell in. Hence we must not view any dispute lightly, but must commit ourselves to resolving it immediately.

Silence is a Fence for Wisdom

When a dispute broke out between the chassidim of Rozhin and those of Sanz, the Rebbe of Chekov instructed his disciples not to get involved,

but instead to stay completely out of it. To make them realize the gravity of a dispute, he told them the following story:

A lion was strolling in the forest and stopping animals that crossed its path. He asked the first animal, "Do I have bad breath?" The animal cringed in response, for a horrendous odor was emanating from the lion's mouth on account of its hunger. Considering its reaction as an affront to the honor of the king of the beasts, the lion was enraged with the poor animal and ate it. The lion then continued and encountered another animal and asked, "How is the odor from my mouth?" Learning from the mistake of the first animal, it replied: "An excellent odor, a divine and delicate fragrance." The lion then roared: "What insolence! Lying with such brazenness to the king of the beasts!" It then ate the second animal as well. Afterwards, once its hunger was satiated, the lion came across the fox. It opened its mouth wide and asked it, "And you, what do you think: What odor is coming from my mouth?" Crafty, the fox prostrated itself and replied: "Excuse me, my majesty the king, but my nose has been blocked for three days now, and I can't smell anything for the moment."

The Rebbe of Chekov concluded by saying, "It is preferable to distance ourselves from this sad conflict. In fact our noses are blocked – we are unable to make sense of things and decide. We will therefore be saved from the teeth of the lion."

Regardless of Where You Live

The gaon Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Zatzal recounted the following story: One day the residents of the Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood in Jerusalem received some very good news: Rabbi Aaron Cohen, the son-in-law of the Chafetz Chaim, had just settled in Eretz Israel and was going to be moving to their neighborhood! The event was arousing great interest, and all the residents welcomed him with tremendous honor. They also prepared a comfortable and fully-equipped home for him.

After a few months, the residents of the neighborhood were stunned to learn of Rabbi Aaron's sudden and mysterious disappearance. After not seeing him for an entire week, they decided to go knocking at his door. When there was no response, they walked in and discovered a completely empty home! They tried to find out from his neighbors if they knew where Rabbi Aaron had gone, but without success. Nobody had any idea.

In synagogue, they again tried to find out if anyone knew what had happened to Rabbi Aaron. An old Jew then approached them and innocently said that a week earlier, he saw Rabbi Aaron leaving the neighborhood with a cart filled with all his things. He was headed towards Jaffa.

When they heard this, the leaders of the community were truly upset. What could have caused Rabbi Aaron to leave their neighborhood, and so secretly too?

Absolutely determined to learn why he had left, they decided to send a delegation to Jaffa to meet the Rav and find out what had happened, and to also try and bring him back.

In the book Shalom Rav, it is said that Rabbi Aaron warmly greeted the representatives of the community, but then he said to them: "You're no doubt surprised by my unexpected departure. I will explain. When I left my father-in-law to come and live in Eretz Israel, I asked him where I should live: In Jerusalem, Sefat, or perhaps Hebron or Jaffa? He replied, 'It is of no importance. On the other hand, I am asking you to promise me that you will avoid every place where dissension resides. And if by chance you come across it, then you must immediately leave that place.' I firmly promised him that I would.

"Yet recently a conflict arose in your synagogue concerning the treasurer. I was then overcome by trembling, for I could no longer live there because I was liable to transgress the serious sin of breaking an oath. That was why I had to leave the neighborhood so quickly."

It is written, “The one He chooses, He will draw near to Him” (Bamidbar 16:5).

We know what Rav Tzadok Hacoen of Lublin asked in regards to this verse: Why is it that every kohen from the line of kohanim does not recite the daily blessing: “Blessed are You...Who has made me a kohen”? After all, every regular Jew recites, “Blessed are You...Who has not made me a woman.”

The answer from the Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai, is the following:

We learn in the Mechilta that before the sin of the golden calf, everyone was worthy of serving as a priest (kohen), as it is written: “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests” (Shemot 19:6). It was sin alone that caused the sons of Aaron to be chosen as priests (kohanim) to serve in the Temple. As a result, if a kohen were to recite the blessing: “Who has made me a kohen,” he would be glorifying himself at the expense of his fellow Jews.

Another reason is that this promise was made for the future, for a time when everything will be completely rectified. It is then that, “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests” will be fulfilled as written.

All the Children of Israel are equal to one another. Hence we cannot say, “Who has made me a kohen,” for the choice of a single group among the Children of Israel is not meant to last forever.

With Honor Must Come Humility

It is written, “Is it not enough for you that the G-d of Israel has separated you...yet you seek the priesthood?” (Bamidbar 16:9-10).

The Chatam Sofer explains:

“Is it not enough for you” – you should have annulled yourselves and attained the heights of humility. Why? Because “the G-d of Israel has separated you” – to serve Him, and the more honor given to the servants of G-d, the more they should annul themselves. However “you seek the priesthood.” How is this possible?

Living in Society

It is written, “The earth covered them over and they were lost from among the congregation” (Bamidbar 16:33).

In his book Menorat HaMaor, Rabbi Yitzchak Abohav wrote: “Since by nature humans live in a society, each helping the other with all their needs, civilized life depends on friendship, love, and fraternity among men, on harmony and justice for all. Hence every dispute that occurs between them destroys community life.

“In the realm of Torah, students must study together, and if they argue about something which they don’t agree on for the sake of Heaven – in order to penetrate to the heart of the matter – this is a way of serving Hashem so as not to reach a mistaken halachah, and for it to be perfectly clear.

“Nevertheless, if a difference of opinion exists between students, it should be for the sake of arriving at the truth, not for the pleasure of arguing.

“However one who remains stubborn in an argument, even when it concerns words of Torah, will not achieve anything good, and he sows destruction in the world. Peace and patience is appropriate in every domain, and Hashem will bless His people with peace.”

The Incense

It is written, “He placed the incense and provided atonement for the people” (Bamidbar 17:12).

The incense thus possessed the power to completely break the evil spirit in man. As the plate possessed miraculous powers, so did the incense, nothing in the world having power to crush the “other side” as the incense. Thus we read, “Take the fire-pan and put fire on it from the altar and place incense...for wrath has gone forth from Hashem. The plague has begun!” [Bamidbar 17:11]. For there is nothing so beloved by the Holy One, blessed be He, as the incense. It can banish sorcery and all evil influences from the house. Seeing that fragrances prepared by men possess the virtue to counteract, by their odor and fumes, the ill-effects of evil things, how much more so did the incense!

It is a firmly established ordinance of the Holy One, blessed be He, that whoever reflects upon and recites the section of the incense each day will be saved from all evil things and sorceries in the world, from all mishaps and evil thoughts, from evil decrees and from death. No harm will befall him on that day, for the “other side” has no power over him. However it must be read with devotion. – Zohar II:218b

In the Light of the Parsha

Punished Measure for Measure

by Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

Our Sages have said that Korach was very intelligent, among those who carried the Ark (Bamidbar Rabba 18:3). They also said, “Now Korach, who was a clever man, what reason did he have for such foolishness?” (ibid. 18:8).

The answer is that he was deceived by what he saw, namely that a great dynasty would emerge from him. This dynasty would include the Prophet Samuel, who was as important as Moshe and Aaron, as it is written: “Moshe and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel among those who invoked His Name” (Tehillim 99:6). Korach thought, “Is it possible that all this greatness will emerge from me, and yet I should remain silent?” In reality, this has always surprised me, for just because Samuel would descend from Korach, did that give him the right to oppose Moshe and Aaron, whose every word came from Hashem? I thought that I would explain this by the fact that Samuel rendered a halachah before his teacher Eli (Berachot 31b), something for which he would have been punished if his mother had not prayed for him. Korach therefore made the following assumption: “The son of my son, who will descend from me and become a great leader of Israel, will oppose his teacher and render a halachah before him. Therefore I too can oppose my teacher Moshe, and I will bring the Sanhedrin so they render a halachah before him.” However he did not see correctly. He had pure intentions and sought greatness, but the Sages have said: “Do not make it [the Torah] a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor a spade with which to dig. So too Hillel used to say: He who exploits the crown [of Torah for his own ends] shall perish. Indeed, you have learned from this: Whoever derives personal gain from words of Torah removes his life from the world” (Pirkei Avot 4:5).

From where did he learn this? From Korach, who thought that since he was among those who carried the Ark and was very intelligent, this gave him the right to make the Torah into a crown with which to glorify himself. Furthermore, his view of his grandson the Prophet Samuel deceived him, which is why he wanted to turn the Torah into a spade for digging and oppose Moshe and Aaron. Korach was therefore punished measure for measure, and Heaven opened the abyss for him, into which he vanished from the world.

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

Words of Mockery? Not From Us!

Words of mockery were at the center of a dispute that resulted in a great tragedy for those who started it, which is precisely what occurred in this week's parsha, when Korach and his entire assembly were forever shamed on account of such words. On the verse, "Korach assembled the entire congregation against them" (Bamidbar 16:19), Rashi comments as follows: "Korach assembled... against them – with words of mockery. All that night, he went to the tribes and enticed them." In the Midrash, our Sages explain the verse, "Nor sits in the seat of scorners" (Tehillim 1:1) as follows: "This refers to Korach, who ridiculed Moshe and Aaron. What did he do? He gathered the entire people against them, as it is written: 'Korach assembled the entire congregation against them.' Then he began to disparage them" (Shocheh Tov, Tehillim 1).

In his book *Orchot Yosher*, the gaon Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky wrote: "Some individuals speak to their friends, even their older friends, with a tone of scorn and mockery. This stems from their arrogance. Just like every foolish person, they think they are more intelligent, as it is written: 'Have you seen a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him' [Mishlei 26:12]. Such people think that they are wise and intelligent by disparaging others, not realizing that the very opposite is the case, and that their attitude is a clear indication of their foolishness."

Rabbi Chaim adds that mockery itself, even in regards to something insignificant, is a very grave sin, as our Sages have said: "If a word of mockery enters [the heart], a word of Torah leaves it" (Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:21). They have also said, "Four classes will not receive the presence of the Shechinah: The class of scoffers" (Sotah 42a) as well as, "It is indeed a grievous sin, since it incurs affliction at first and extermination at last" (Avodah Zarah 18b). The Yerushalmi also recounts a few terrible incidents in which people were punished for having denigrated a Sage, not to mention the punishment awaiting them in the World to Come: "Even in this world, whoever imitates his fellowman or mocks him will end up being imitated and mocked by everyone in all places" (Berachot 2:8). In fact G-d deals with us measure for measure. Everyone will despise such a person, including his wife, his children, and other members of his own family, which will make his life intolerable. Even those who speak to him with a smiling face will secretly detest him, for such an attitude is unbearable.

A Subtle Difference

King David has already encouraged us to stay far from scoffers: "Praiseworthy is the man who walked not in the counsel of the wicked, and stood not in the path of the sinful, and sat not in the session of scorners" (Tehillim 1:1).

As we have said, our Sages were very strict when it came to scoffers: "Four classes will not receive the presence of the Shechinah: The class of scoffers, the class of flatterers, the class of liars, and the class of slanderers" (Sotah 42a). It is also taught: "Rabbi Eleazar said, 'He who scoffs, affliction will befall him, as it is said: "So now, do not scoff, lest your affliction become more severe" [Isaiah 28:22].' Rabba used to say to the Sages: 'I beg you, do not scoff, so that you incur no punishment' " (Avodah Zarah 18b).

Contrary to a scoffer, for whom joy is unacceptable, joy is a foundation of serving G-d, as it is said: Serve G-d with joy.

The Torah goes even so far as to declare us guilty if we do not serve G-d with joy, as it is written: "Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy and goodness of heart" (Devarim 28:47).

Rambam defined the subtle difference between joy (which is wanted) and frivolity (which is banned):

"When a person eats, drinks, and celebrates on a festival, he should not let himself become overly drawn to drinking wine, mirth, and levity.... For drunkenness, profuse mirth, and levity are not rejoicing; they are frivolity and foolishness.

"And we were not commanded to indulge in frivolity or foolishness, but rather in rejoicing that involves the service of the Creator of all existence.

Thus [Scripture] states, 'Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d with joy.' This teaches us that the service [of G-d] involves joy. And it is impossible to serve G-d while in the midst of levity, frivolity, or drunkenness" (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:20).

Along the same lines, the Maharal defines it as follows: "Acting without annulling ourselves or being serious, as well as seeking mockery and frivolity, is absolutely forbidden."

The Sages have taught us that when we pray, we must be serious and solemn, the very opposite of frivolity and scorn. Prayer is a labor of the heart, and every labor must be performed seriously, with solemnness and joy. Now frivolity prevents labor from being accomplished, whereas joy enables it.

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

Never Before in Her Life

Rabbi Bensimon (whose daughter is married to the grandson of Rabbi Haim Pinto) told our teacher Rabbi David Pinto that in order to earn a living, he worked in Morocco as a gold jeweler. One day Rabbi Haim entered his store and said to him: "Give me [such and such] an amount of money." (It is known that the Rav would often ask for an exact amount, and nobody dared refuse him lest he reveal their sins. In fact he knew exactly how much each person had in his pocket. Hence everyone he spoke to agreed to his request without protest.) However the jeweler said to him, "I don't have that amount."

This answer did not please the tzaddik, who replied: "A Jew cannot say, 'I don't have.' Instead say, 'With G-d's help, He will grant me and then I will give you.' In fact saying, 'I don't have,' is like speaking evil, implying that G-d cannot provide. And if a person is lacking, it means that he should examine his deeds."

The jeweler carefully listened to the Rav's words, agreed with them, and immediately modified his response: "With G-d's help, He will provide me with money, and I will give you what you need!"

Satisfied, the Rav declared: "I'll wait here. In a few moments, a woman who must marry off her daughter and purchase some jewelry will arrive. Sell her what she wants."

Rabbi Haim waited in the jewelry store, and after a certain time a woman who was simply dressed walked in and asked about the price of some gold jewelry. The jeweler gave her a price much greater than the value of the gold it contained, thinking that her financial situation wouldn't allow her to purchase such an object.

However the client, who was impressed with the jewelry, exclaimed: "I've never seen such craftsmanship!" She was interested in other jewelry as well, and the jeweler, stunned by his client's reaction, quoted exorbitant prices to her.

The woman in question did not haggle about the price given by the jeweler. Instead she took money out of her pocket, paid for the jewels, and left.

The jeweler looked at Rabbi Haim, then lifted his eyes to Heaven and said, "Sovereign of the universe! This woman seemed so poor, and yet she purchased all this jewelry!"

The Rav then explained to him, "That woman has never given money to tzeddakah. That's why I didn't react to your behavior. For now, keep an amount equal to the cost of the gold in these jewels, as you do with other clients, and give me the remainder for tzeddakah."

That was precisely what the jeweler did. Rabbi Haim later addressed the woman who had purchased the jewels and said to her: "You paid for the jewels well above their true cost, so here's the difference. Do you want to keep it, or would you prefer to give it to tzeddakah as well?" The woman replied, "I would like it to go to tzeddakah, since I've never before given charity in my life."