



KORACH BE YOURSELF

After the disaster of the last *parsha*, when it was Divinely decreed that the Jewish people would have to spend an additional forty years in the desert, Moshe's popularity understandably waned. Korach therefore seized the moment to challenge the leadership of his cousin, Moshe. In the process of doing so, 250 great men joined Korach because they wanted more for themselves. They lost their lives. In addition, Korach, Dasan, Aviram and their respective families, lost their lives as well. A plague consumed 14,000 people in *Parshas Korach*. It is not a happy story at all.

By relating the account of Korach, the Torah is not only relating a story of the historical past. The Torah is telling each and every person to look deeply and carefully into themselves and to see how the story of Korach is really the story of (almost) each and every one of us. One has to learn from the mistakes of Korach, and, please God, rise above that which became his unfortunate downfall.

Let us try to focus on one aspect of Korach's character. Hopefully, it will move us to take a quick peek at ourselves. Perhaps we too have just a little bit of what Korach suffered from.

Korach's primary mistake is that he did not realize what he had. He did not appreciate the gift which God gave him. Korach was a *chacham* (wise man). He had prophecy, and saw in *ruach ha-kodesh* (Divine inspiration) that from his progeny would emerge the *navi* Shmuel.

And there was more. Within the family of *Levi'im* (Korach was a *Levi*), there were three families: Gershon, Kehas and Merari. Regarding the activities of Gershon and Merari, the Torah uses the term *avodah* to describe their service in the *Mikdash*. The *Chir HaChaim Hakadosh* and the Chasam Sofer, *zt"l*, note that regarding the service of Kehas, the Torah does not use the term *avodah*. Rather, the term *melachah* is used. The "service" or labor was of a different nature. The nature of what Kehas did was that they were *nosei ha'aron*. They had the incredible privilege of carrying the Ark. The *gemara* in *Sotah*²² teaches that among the many miracles which occurred during this period of time in Jewish history, was that the *aron* was "*nosei es nosav*." This means that when men were carrying the Ark, it only gave the impression that they were carrying it. In reality, though, the Ark was carrying them. Korach was *ni'nosei ha'aron*, one of the bearers of the Ark.

In other words, he had unbelievable accomplishment and stature! If only he would have realized what he had, Korach could have been truly great. In addition, the *Imrei Emes* brings, in the name of the *Zohar*, that just as we are all familiar with the position of *Kohein Gadol*, which exists in *Am Yisrael*, there was to have been a position of *Levi Gadol* as well. The first to have been able to hold this position would have been none other than... Korach! If only he could have appreciated what he had. Unfortunately, he did not. Because he was always looking over his shoulder to see what Moshe had, Korach could not develop his own potential.

This is the first thing which each of us has to learn. God gave each person his and her unique talent, their own gift. You cannot develop what the next person has and the next person cannot develop what you have. You have to be who you are.

²² 272 35b.

The second thing Korach did not learn was that he did not realize who he was not. He did not realize that he was not Moshe. He did not have the capabilities of Moshe. Also, we have to understand that the last of the Ten Commandments, “*Lo sachmod*,”²⁷³ which means literally you are not to covet or be jealous, is not simply a *midvah megunah*, a negative character trait. It goes much deeper. If one covets what the next one has, one is actually being *bogeid*, he is actually transgressing and violating the *first* of the Ten Commandments. It is as if he is saying to God, “You, Who controls the world, got it wrong. What You gave the next person, You really should not have given them. You should have given it to me. It is as if You put the money in the wrong account. How could You do this?”

Let us consider another historical example of this idea. There was an incredibly great man²⁷⁴ Yeravam ben Nevat, who was chosen by God Himself to be the successor of Shlomo HaMelech over ten of the tribes of Israel. After Shlomo’s passing, God wanted Shlomo’s son, Rechavam, to reign over two tribes and Yeravam to be king over ten. God would not have chosen him to be king if he hadn’t been worthy of the position.

Achiah hashiloni, the *navi*, gives him the honor and presents him with the kingship. Unfortunately, Yeravam ben Nevat is concerned because *aliyah le’regel*, going to the Beis Hamikdash on Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkos, would bring the people to Yerushalayim. As a result, they would see Rechavam, the king of the other two tribes, sitting in the Beis Hamikdash. After all, only a king from *malchus beis David* (David’s dynasty) can sit in the Beis Hamikdash. Unfortunately, Yeravam could not live with this jealousy. It possessed him to the extent that we are taught in the Book of Kings²⁷⁵ that he put a golden calf in Beir El and in Dan, the north and the south of the Land of Israel.

God Himself even invites Yeravam to do *teshuva*. He says to Yeravam, “I hereby give you and I the opportunity of doing *teshuva*. And when you do, you and ben Yishai will walk in Gan Eden.” Can

you imagine being invited to take a stroll with God Himself together with King David (the son of Yishai)?

Shockingly, Yeravam asks God, “Who is going to lead this procession?” The answer is clearly that God will lead. Yeravam really wanted to know who would be next. When God says to him, “Ben Yishai, David, is going to be second and you, Yeravam, are going to follow David,” Yeravam immediately responds that he is not interested. “Thanks, but no thanks, it is not for me,” says Yeravam.

This is what we are taught in *Pirkei Avos*.²⁷⁶ Jealousy removes a person from this world. They do not enjoy what they have. They do not enjoy this world, and unfortunately they lose out on the next world too.

This is why the Torah teaches us about Korach. It is not just history. There is something in this story for each and every person to learn from and incorporate into his life.

²⁷³ *Shemos* 20:14.

²⁷⁴ As the *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* 102b points out.

²⁷⁵ *Melachim* I, Ch. 12.

²⁷⁶ 4:21.