



Parashat Korach 5771 - #191

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Attn: Mordechai Tzion

On the Parashah...

Differentiation or Generalization

[Tal Chermon]

Korach was not just anyone. He belonged to Kehat, the family of Levi'im who carried the Holy Ark (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:3), and, according to our Sages, was on the highest spiritual level (ibid. 8). In fact, according to our Rabbis, it was precisely this fact which misled him. Our Sages say that his descendents were among the Levi'im who served in the Beit Ha-Mikdash. One of the Psalms was composed by the "Sons of Korach" (see Midrash Shocheir Tov 1:6). His descendant, the prophet Shmuel, is compared to both Moshe and Aharon together (Berachot 31b). Thus, his challenging of Moshe and Aharon's authority has a legitimate basis.

Korach was a great man and he made great mistakes. Moshe himself had a hard time contending with his claims (see Bamidbar 16:4 and Rashi's commentary). Korach objected to

Moshe and Aaron's authority, claiming that "The whole Nation is holy. Why should you impose yourselves upon the Congregation of Hashem?" (ibid. 16:3). At first glance, it seems that he was right. The Holy One chose the entire Nation of Israel. When man chooses, he selects certain figures out of a group, but has no control over that group's existence. When Hashem chooses, He is completely free. He created everything - that which He chooses and that which He rejects. Thus He has effectively "chosen" the Chosen People by creating us to be chosen! This is what is meant by the special Jewish character (Am Segula). Hashem created all of us as a Holy People. This "chosenness" is intrinsic, comprehensive and irrevocable. No matter how wicked a man is, he remains a human being "in the Image of G-d." Likewise, no Jew can forfeit his "Segula" - his special Jewish qualities. The command, "You shall be holy" (Vayikra 19:2) is not dependent upon free will - it is simply how we were created. In this respect, there really is no difference between one Jew and another. As Korach stated, "The whole Nation is holy."

This leads Korach to complain that Moshe and Aaron are "imposing their rule over the Congregation of Hashem." The people need no mediators, they can relate directly to G-d. Indeed, our Sages, in describing the days of the Messiah, teach that the Messiah's task is to educate the non-Jewish world (see "Na'ot Deshe" of the Admor of Sochatchov). The Jews "shall teach no more every man his neighbor ... for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Yirmiyahu 31:33 and Orot Ha-Kodesh 95 of Maran Rav Kook). "And the Land shall be filled with knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea" (Yeshayahu 11:9). The Or Ha-Chaim Ha-Kadosh teaches us that when the Messiah arrives, "a whole tribe of Israel will arise" (Bamidbar 24:17). It will not be some external supernatural phenomenon or personality who brings the Redemption, but rather a force within the Nation as a whole shall bring the Redemption. On Shemot, 19:6, the Or Ha-Chaim explains that the differentiation into Cohanim, Levi'im and Israel is the result of the Sin of the Golden Calf. Before the Giving of the Torah, we were promised that "You shall be to Me a Dynasty of Cohanim and a Holy Nation." Were it not for the Sin of the Golden Calf, we would not even need a Cohain Gadol, since the whole Nation would be Cohanim. This is the ideal, which will be actualized with the Redemption.

Thus Korach's vision of a classless society is not without a basis. It is anarchism in the best sense, attempting to create a society in which there is no coercion or hierarchy. Every individual would then be able to build his own life and seek his own spiritual and material happiness with no external interference. The problem with this is that one man's cure may be another man's poison. Anarchists are willing to depend on man's good will to prevent clashes. Korach's vision is the epitome of idealistic anarchism, "Why should you impose yourselves upon the Congregation of Hashem?"

This premise, however, is basically unsound. It is true that every Jewish person is inherently and equally holy. Nevertheless, "In the morning, G-d will make known to you who is His ... and will cause him to come near to Him" (Bamidbar 16:5). Moshe told them that G-d has created limitations in His world. Just as you cannot turn morning into night, you cannot turn Cohanim into Israelites. This world is characterized by differentiation, in nature and in human and Jewish society.

There are two types of differentiation: "In the morning, G-d will make known to you who is His ... and will cause him to come near to Him, and the one whom He chooses" G-d chooses some, and causes others to come close to Him. "Chosenness", as we have already explained, refers to Divine Creation of that which is chosen. Just as G-d chose the Nation of Israel from all other nations, so did He choose the Cohanim from the rest of our Nation. This is an absolute irrevocable choice. However, there is also a "coming near," and this depends on

each individual's own efforts. "G-d is near to all who call Him, to all who truly call Him" ("Ashrei"). Divine light falls upon all of us equally, but it is absorbed better by some than by others. G-d makes Himself accessible to those who make an effort to reach Him (see Sukkah 53a). This approach is equally accessible to all. "I swear in the name of the heavens and the earth: be it Jew or non-Jew, man or woman, slave or maidservant - everything depends on one's actions, and in accordance with them is one blessed with Divine inspiration" (Tana De-Vei Eliyahu Rabbah 9 and Maran Ha-Rav Kook in Ikvei Hatzon, chapter on thoughts). As the Rambam declares, "Any human being whose spirit moves him ... to stand before G-d ... becomes holy in the utmost" (Hilchot Shmitta and Yovel).

The Crown of Priesthood is Divinely ordained, but the Crown of Torah is accessible to all. It only depends upon us (Rambam, Laws of Talmud Torah 3:1). Indeed, the Halachah rules that a Mamzer who is a Torah scholar takes preference over a Cohen Gadol who is unlearned (Mishna Horiyot 13).

We therefore see that there are two types of differentiation within the Jewish People: One divinely ordained and one based upon one's own effort. This divinely ordained differentiation affects all dimensions of life - society, time, and space. In general society, there is a difference between Jews and non-Jews, and within the Jewish people there are the Cohanim, Levi'im and Israel. In time, there is a difference between weekdays and Shabbat. Shabbat is not merely a psychological frame of mind, it is an objective, divinely ordained phenomenon. Were one to light candles, sing Zemirot, and rest on Tuesday, it would not be Shabbat. Likewise, there are areas which have the Kedusha - the sanctified status - of Eretz Israel, and others which do not. One who lives in South Dakota and claims that it's just like living in Eretz Israel because he is so devoted to the Mitzvot is mistaken. In the same vein, areas which are geographically part of Eretz Israel, but are inhabited by non-Jews have lost none of their sanctity. It is not Man who decides which, when, and where is holy but the Holy One of Blessed Name (see Rashi to Bamidbar 16:5).

Together with this, there is a uniting factor: "There are two lines which guide us regarding society and the individual, one line differentiates and the other unites" (Orot Ha-Kodesh vol. 2, 439-440)... Differentiation is not the result of egoism, but is rather a process which brings benefit to all. For example, the separation which Cohanim must undergo in the Beit Ha-Mikdash results in a spiritual uplifting for the whole Nation.

The guiding rule is separation in order to bring about unity. It is not "equality" in the gross sense of the word. It is not Korach's vision of all being equally holy. That kind of equality eventually results in gross egoism: "The evil impulse begins with unity (i.e. the false alliance between Korach, Datan and Aviram, and the Levi'im - to claim that all are equally holy), and ends in division (each of the above had different aspirations and met a different fate). In contrast, the impulse for sanctity begins with separation (of Cohanim from Israel) and ends in unity" (Orot Ha-Kodesh *ibid.*).

Korach's sin and the sin of the Spies are actually two sides of the same coin: The Spies denied the possibility of that holiness could infuse the material world: army, agriculture, politics, etc. They endowed the material world they saw in Eretz Israel with a power too strong to overcome (Bamidbar 13:31 and Sotah 35). They thought the only way to achieve sanctity was through complete detachment from anything secular.

Korach, on the other hand, saw holiness everywhere. He was great enough to take in the sanctity of the upper and lower worlds, to appreciate the holiness inherent in the shoemakers as well as in the prophets. But he blurred the differences between them. Our world is one of gradation: The Tanach contains the Five Books of Moshe, the Prophets and the Writings (Mishnah Megilah 26). Even in the Five Books, four were written by G-d Himself, and the

fifth by Moshe Rabbenu.... Among the holidays, Shabbat, Yom Kippur, and Passover each has a different status. Even a house full of Torah Scrolls needs a Mezuzah, even a Talit which is all Techelet must have a Techelet string (see Rashi to Bamidbar 16:1), because there are distinctions and levels within the general sanctity. As we learn from the Parashah of Korach, false unity eventually leads to division, whereas sanctified division eventually leads to true unity.

Rav Aviner on... I am No Longer Jealous

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Shelach 5771 – translated by R. Blumberg]

I try so hard, but I do not seem to succeed at anything. I am not talking about academic success or professional success. I gave up on that a long time ago. I am talking about success in Torah learning, Mitzvah observance and good character. I am simply running in place. The same spiritual difficulties I experiences a year ago, two years ago, five years ago, I still have now.

I really try and I don't succeed. For others, everything is easy. Why was I created to be such a sad sack? It's aggravating. It's depressing. It makes me despair. It makes me sad. It's frustrating. I am jealous of others. Yes, I am jealous. I know that isn't right: so suggest something else for me!

It's really not a fair race. I feel myself in a dark room while others are in a room full of light. They march forward in security and happiness, with everything open before them, and I trudge along, stumbling, zigzagging, getting lost and confused.

Such was my attitude for a long time. For many years. I would grade myself compared to others, and emerge the loser each time. I was a chronic loser.

Then, one day, a brilliant idea popped into my head. I'm not brilliant, but the idea was brilliant, a gift from heaven. I would stop grading myself against others, and would start grading myself against myself. Since then, my life has become heaven. True, my achievements are beneath those of my peers, and my talents and abilities are second-rate as well. Yet in terms of my abilities, perhaps I surpass my peers. The secret is this: I'm doing my best.

That's the secret. I didn't invent it myself. Rather, I found it in the Mishnah Berurah at the start of the Shulchan Aruch (1:12). It's right there at the beginning – I'm not really capable of moving much farther than that. There, at the beginning of the first chapter, it says, "In G-d's eyes, everything depends on one's doing one's best."

Since then I am "happy with my lot", and not just in the material sense of Avot Chapter 4, but also in the spiritual sense of Avot Chapter 6, referring to Torah and mitzvot, character, and serving G-d. I discovered that G-d is not achievement-oriented. He does not judge man according to results but according to his efforts – "According to the pain, so the reward" (end of the fifth chapter of Avot).

If my friend succeeds much more than me, so what?! "A lot or a little – the main thing is to have heavenly intent" (Berachot 17a). And that is precisely what I do – the best I can, with heavenly intent. Yes, I try. I run. "You should run to a light-weight mitzvah as much as to a heavy-weight mitzvah, for you do not know what reward awaits mitzvah observance" (Avot, the beginning of Chapter 2). The reward is for the running!

I am no longer jealous of anyone. If G-d ordained that such is my lot, it is a sign that that is precisely what I need. "No man can touch what is prepared for his fellow, even to the extent of one hair's breadth" (Yoma 38b, quoted in Mesillat Yesharim, Chapter 11, regarding jealousy). "Each shall keep to his own camp and his own banner" (Bamidbar 1:52).

True, I am living fulfillment of "He has made me dwell in darkness" (Eichah 3:6), so everything is that much harder. Yet quite the contrary, every little thing that I succeed in doing is enormously precious in G-d's sight. Every little corner of light carries greater weight than the achievements of my peers in their rooms awash with light.

So very many times I felt myself too far away. I felt I could not connect myself to G-d, that my very ability to feel was blunted – compared to my peers who experience and taste all of G-d's goodness. Now I understand that the opposite is the case. This is an opportunity for me to serve G-d with sincerity, not so that I can attach myself and experience excitement, but for the sake of G-d, and for His sake alone. Not for me. It is all for G-d's sake. I don't have much, but that little bit that I do have is all for G-d. I am no longer jealous. I am happy. Thank you G-d, for giving me this soul.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

"Churva"

Question: I heard in the name of the Vilna Gaon that the building of the "Churva" Synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem is a sign that the Third Temple will soon be built. What is Ha-Rav's opinion?

Answer: I have not heard this idea in the name of the Vilna Gaon. What is correct is that the second rebuilding of the "Churva" Synagogue was performed by the students of the Gra who made aliyah with Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Shaklov. But this occurred 200 years ago and, and the "Churva" was again destroyed. The "Churva" was built three times: The first time by Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Chasid from Poland, the second time by the students of the Gra from Russia and the third time by the entire Nation of Israel – by the State of Israel – and the "Churva" will therefore not be destroyed again. The Gra himself says in the book "Kol Ha-Tur" not to involve oneself with signs and hints but that we must build the Land and renew the life of the Nation of Israel in our Land, and then the Redemption will come.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

Reading

There are those who claim that reading does not help a child of three years old. In contrast, there are others who claim that a delay in reading can cause damage which is difficult to repair. Neither of these extremes is correct. It is impossible to build a child's education based on general theories. It must be accomplished by the facts on the ground.

We should not pressure a three year old to read, but it is not forbidden for him to read. Therefore, the educator who said that it is good to teach a three year old to read and write is correct, on the condition that it is a joyful experience for him.

This is indeed the guidance given by Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, which is brought in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 255:5 in the Rama): we should begin to teach a three-year-old the letters of the Torah.

It is similar to a fruit: for the first three years it is Orla and forbidden to eat. Only at the beginning of the fourth year is the fruit for us (Biurei Ha-Gra ibid. in the name of the Tanchuma).

Nevertheless, we do not need to establish age requirements. It depends on the individual child and his will. Everything must be done with pleasantness, without pressure or tension. This will serve as the foundation for all of his future learning.

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