

**Wembley Synagogue**

קנה

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Korach

קנה - ויקח קנה - Korach took (issue with Moshe) (16:1)

Korach assembled 250 prestigious men, and clad them with *tallitot* — garments made entirely of blue wool. They stood before Moshe saying, "a four cornered garment requires *tzitzit* — fringes — and one string must be of *techeilet* — blue wool; does a garment made entirely of blue wool require a blue string or is it exempt?" (See Rashi)

Korach's dispute with Moshe was over leadership. How is his question relevant? Korach was upset that Moshe and Aharon held leadership positions and that his cousin Elitzafan was appointed as leader of the Kohathite family. He argued that leadership is needed only when there are different levels of people in the community. Since the *entire* community was holy, it was unjustified that one should become holier than the holy.

He substantiated his argument with an example from the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit*. A four-cornered garment requires *tzitzit* and among them is a blue string. However, when the entire *tallit* is made of blue wool, logically a string of blue wool is unnecessary. Likewise, when the entire community is holy, there is no need for anyone to have special status. Moshe responded that according to *halachah* even a *tallit* entirely of blue wool requires a string of *techeilet* in the *tzitzit*, and regardless of the caliber of the community, leadership is always necessary. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

According to the *Midrash Rabbah* (18:3) Korach confronted Moshe with the following question: "Is it necessary to place a *mezuzah* on the doorpost of a room filled with *Sifrei Torah*?" Moshe replied affirmatively, and Korach argued, "the whole Torah which contains 275 *parshiot* cannot exempt the house, yet a *mezuzah* which contains only two *parshiot* exempts it?!" Logically, Korach's reasoning made sense: Why should a room filled with *Sifrei Torah* require a *mezuzah* on the outside? Moshe vehemently disagreed and insisted that even if a home or individual is saturated with Torah, it is imperative to also manifest one's Torah convictions in public, to let the world know that the home is a Jewish one with a *mezuzah*. From the turn of events, it was apparent that Hashem agreed with Moshe.

Although the Torah mentions a number of rebels, the singular term ויקח - "and he took" is used. This indicates that there was no unity of cause or ideology among the group, each individual rebelled against Moshe for his own personal reason. The only binding common denominator was that they all felt restricted by Moshe's spiritual stature and position. This idea is reflected in the Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:17) which contrasts those arguments that are for the sake of Heaven with those that are not. The example of an altruistic argument is that of the sages Hillel and Shammai. The opposite is that of Korach and his followers. At first glance, the parallel seems flawed. Should it not rather have said Moshe and Korach? R' Yonasan Eibenschutz explains Korach and his followers fought amongst themselves. While all of them wanted to depose Moshe, each one desired the honour for himself.

וְדָתָן וְאִבְרָם בְּנֵי יֶלְיָאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן-פֶּלֶת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן -And Datan and Aviram the sons of Eliav, and On the son of Pelet, the children of Reuven (16:1)

On the son of Pelet was originally a party in the rebellion but he withdrew. The Talmud tells us that On's wife saved him from the disaster. She told him "Regardless of who will emerge victorious, you will remain a follower. Why get involved in a dispute that does not directly benefit you?" He listened to her advice and abandoned the rebellion. The Talmud praises On's wife and applies the following verse to her: "The wisdom of women builds her home" applies to her. The reference to her having "wisdom" is puzzling. Her argument reflected logic, not necessarily wisdom. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz derived a lesson from this teaching. Tempers are hot and people do not have full control of their faculties during a dispute. Whoever can perceive the pure simple truth at such a time is truly a wise person. (Source: Peninim Mishulchan Govoha)

וְאַהֲרֹן מַה הוּא כִּי תִלְיֵנוּ עִלָּיו -And Aharon - what is he that you should quarrel against him?(16:11) This verse relates how Moshe attempted to dissuade the members of Korach's camp from campaigning against Aharon. Moshe told them that since Aharon's appointment as Kohen Gadol was divinely inspired; they were in effect taking issue with Hashem, not with Aharon. Moshe thus said "What is he (Aharon) that you should quarrel against him?" Instead, your quarrel is with Hashem. This verse lends itself to another interpretation as well. When Moshe asked "What is he that you should quarrel against him" he meant to say "Are you aware of Aharon's true worth that you dare to quarrel with him?" How can you entertain the thought of quarreling with such a great person? (Source: R' Menachem Mendel of Kotsk Itturei Torah)

.... לא תמוור אֶחָד מֵהֶם וְשָׂאתִי I didn't take anyone's donkey and I did not wrong even one of them (16:15) When Moshe prayed to G-d that Korach's rebellion should be unsuccessful, he mentioned that he did not obtain any benefit from the opposing camp, nor did he wrong any of them. The Chatam Sofer notes the order of the statements in Moshe's prayer. Usually, when a person's gift to a renowned person is refused, the giver feels hurt and/or disappointed. In his prayers, Moshe stated that he was careful with the needs and sensitivities of his adversaries. That is, he knew that he did not cause even an incidental insult, such as the refusing a complimentary gift. (Source: Chasam Sofer)

וְאִם בְּרָאָה יִבְרָא ה' - But if G-d will create a new phenomenon (and the earth open its mouth and swallow them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the pit.) (16:30) Moshe wanted the earth to open up and swallow Korach and his followers. But why did Moshe wish such a strange death upon Korach and his followers? Moshe loved all the Jewish people, including Korach and his followers. These people were sinning terribly, since by quarreling with him, they were actually defying Hashem's will. Had they died immediately, they would have left this world without doing *teshuvah*, and they would thus have lost their share in *Olam Haba* – the World to Come. Therefore, he prayed that they descend alive to the pit, hoping that while still alive, they would regret their wrongdoings and do *teshuvah*.

According to an opinion in the *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 109b) Korach and his followers do indeed have a share in *Olam Haba*.

וַתִּפְתַּח הָאָרֶץ אֶת פִּיהָ וַתִּבְלַע אֹתָם - The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses (16:32) Earlier in verse 27 their abodes are referred to as "tents." Here the Torah calls them "houses." Why does the Torah describe them differently? A tent is a portable temporary residence. A house connotes a permanent dwelling place. When the Jews were in the desert, moving from place to place, their homes were referred to as tents. However, once Korach and his followers were swallowed in the ground their tents became their graves, permanent resting places. Their places of residence were then called houses (Source: Imrei Shefer)

וַיִּהְיֶה פָּרַח מִטֵּה אַהֲרֹן ... וַיֵּצֵא פָּרַח. וַיִּצְיץ וַיִּגְמַל שְׂקָדִים - And behold the staff of Aaron (of the house of Levi) had blossomed; it brought forth a blossom, sprouted a bud and developed almonds (17:23) In this week's *sidra* we learn about the rebellion of Korach and his followers. In the aftermath of the rebellion, Hashem told Moshe to take a staff from the leaders of each tribe together with that staff of Aaron, representing the tribe of Levi. The staffs were to be put in the *mishkan*. On the next day the staff of Aaron blossomed flowers, buds and almonds. This miracle served as a sign that it was Hashem who chose Aaron to serve as the *Kohen Gadol* and his tribe as priests and their authority and positions of leadership were not fabricated by Moshe. It is noteworthy that the verse says that the staff of Aaron blossomed on the next day. In the *Sidra* of *Shemot* Moshe and Aaron were instructed to perform signs for the Jewish People in order to prove to them that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. Moshe's hand was smitten with *tzaraat* (leprosy), his staff turned into a serpent and he turned water into blood. (*Shemot* 4:2-9) We may note that there the signs were done instantaneously. Why then only here was there a delay in that the staffs did not blossom until the next day? The rabbis tell us that sometimes the Hebrew word *machar* is not to be translated literally as the next day but instead interpreted as referring to the distant future. With this principle we may suggest that part of the symbolism of Aaron's staff blossoming with flowers, buds and almonds was that it occurred precisely on the next day.

A leader's success or failure cannot be measured or judged immediately but only in hindsight and retrospect. Often, a leader's performance is not popular at the time but years, decades or even centuries later we look back and understand how correct his actions were. Similarly, Hashem here was conveying to the Jewish people that although at this time they did not appreciate the leadership qualities of Aaron and murmured against him, it will be in the distant future when they look back and realise that it was his tenure of leadership that brought forth flowers, buds and produced fruit. (Source: Hadrash Ve-Haiyun)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 10.26pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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