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Parsha

Korach

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Gematria on the Parshah: The Trap of Brilliance

By: Reb Moshe Herskovits



In Parshat Korach, we once again see a great man fall. Korach was no simple troublemaker. He was a man of wealth, wisdom, and came from a distinguished lineage. And yet he chose rebellion over humility, and it destroyed him. What was the reason for his downfall, and what can we learn from it for our own lives?

Korach's Arguments

The Midrash poses a fascinating question: why does the parshah of tzitzit appear immediately before Parshat Korach? Chazal derive that Korach brought an argument about tzitzit directly to Moshe Rabbeinu. He asked, "If a person has a garment that is completely techelet, what is the need for the strings to also be techelet?" Korach raised a similar challenge regarding mezuzah: "If a house is full of sefarim, why should it require a mezuzah? The house is full of scrolls. What is the need for this tiny scroll?"

These arguments are not arbitrary; they reveal the root of Korach's downfall. The gematria of קרח בן יצהר (Korach Ben Yitzhar) equals 665, the same as טעמי מצות (reasons for mitzvot). The Vilna Gaon teaches that when a person's name shares a gematria with a certain concept, it reveals the mission of their neshamah. Korach was meant to grapple with these questions. His arguments carried genuine holiness. But his brilliance became a trap, because he forgot that emunah must come first.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaches that every great person who sinned in the Torah did so for the same underlying reason: they placed their sechel before their emunah, their rationality before their faith. This was the same problem as the Spies. Whatever their reasoning for not wanting to enter the land, whether a lack of belief that they could conquer it or a desire to remain in the spiritual atmosphere of the desert, they allowed their intellect to override their faith. Korach made the exact same mistake.

Amazingly, the gematria of the opening pasuk of the parshah, ויקח קרח בן יצהר (Korach Ben Yitzhar took), equals 789, the same as the opening of Parshat Shelach

Lecha, שלח לך אנשים, and also the phrase used in Maamarei Chabad: על פי טעם ודעת (according to reason and understanding). Korach repeated the precise error of the Spies and failed to learn from their sin.

The Purpose of Tzitzit

What is the deeper meaning behind Korach's argument about tzitzit? The final paragraph of Shema teaches that the purpose of tzitzit is ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם, "And you shall not stray after your heart or your eyes." As human beings we are swayed by our emotions. Feelings can be so overwhelming that they carry us away from what we know to be right. We are also swayed by our eyes, meaning by what our rational minds tell us is logical. Tzitzit is the remedy for both.

When we look at them, we remember all the mitzvot. When our emotions and intellect tell us that a particular mitzvah is unimportant or that a sin is minor, the tzitzit keep us on track. As Rav Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk teaches, the performance of mitzvot must begin with emunah. We must continually ask: what mitzvah does Hashem want me to perform in this very moment? And perform it with simple faith.

Techelet also combats straying after the heart and eyes. Rabbi Meir teaches that techelet is meant for meditation. One gazes at it and contemplates the vastness of the ocean that Hashem created, then the sky above, and finally Hashem's Throne of Glory. A person thinks about the infinite greatness of Hashem, recognizing that He is utterly beyond human comprehension, and arrives at a simple, profound conclusion: we cannot fully understand, and we do not need to. We only need to trust.

The Purpose of Mezuzah

What is the deeper meaning behind Korach's argument about mezuzah? If a house is full of sefarim, why does it need a mezuzah on the outside?

This alludes to another dimension of Korach's flaw. A house full of sefarim can represent a person deeply dedicated to Torah learning within the home. But what happens when that person steps outside into the world? Does their learning shape how they conduct business? Does it influence

how they treat strangers? Perhaps this was part of Korach's failing: his Torah remained in the mind and never penetrated his whole being. He never fulfilled uvlechtechta baderech, the Torah did not walk with him into the world. Had it truly transformed him, he could never have stood in opposition to Moshe Rabbeinu. Instead, he would have shown him the deepest gratitude.

A Lesson for Our Own Lives

There is a story of Rav Zusha who once stood at a crossroads, uncertain which direction to take. He held his tzitzit and meditated upon them, and from that act of stillness found his answer.

This is the message for each of us. We need the daily reminder not to be swept away by our hearts and eyes. We must hold on to our tzitzit, literally and spiritually, and ask: what mitzvah does Hashem want from me right now, in this moment? And we must contemplate the techelet, reflecting on Hashem's infinite greatness, trusting that no matter what is unfolding in our lives, there is a deep and purposeful plan. From that trust, we can face whatever comes with the knowledge that we are never alone.

Start Soft

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



In Parshas Korach, as the rebellion against Moshe and Aharon intensifies, the Torah records a moment that is easy to overlook:

"And Moshe said to Korach: Please listen, sons of Levi" (Bamidbar 16:8).

Rashi reveals what is happening beneath the surface; Moshe begins by speaking to Korach with soft words. Only when he saw that Korach was stiff-necked did he shift, broadening his appeal to the entire group before they too were swept into destruction (Rashi on Bamidbar 16:8).

This two-stage approach – gentle first, firmer only when necessary – is not simply Moshe's personal temperament; it is Halacha.

The Sefer HaChinuch, in his treatment of the Mitzvah of Tochacha, codifies this precisely. At the outset, rebuke must be delivered privately and with soft, calm words so as not to embarrass the other person. Only if that fails does one escalate. And the




Gemara goes further still: the obligation to rebuke does not expire after one attempt, or five, but even a hundred times if necessary (Sefer HaChinuch 239; Bava Metzia 31a).

Moshe's response to Korach follows this framework. He did not open with condemnation. He opened with "listen please" – an invitation, not an indictment.

This is a harder to achieve than it sounds. When we see someone we care about making a serious mistake, whether a friend, a student, or a family member, the instinct is to meet the severity of the situation with the full weight of our concern. To make clear – immediately – how wrong they are and how much is at stake.

But Moshe teaches us that the goal of Tochacha is not to express our frustration, but to bring the other person back. Tochacha should not ever be about our own ego, but about our interest in the other. And people rarely return when they feel attacked. They return when they feel that the person speaking to them genuinely wants them to succeed.

The Mitzvah of rebuke begins not with the right words, but with the right intention. And the surest sign of the right intention is that you begin, as Moshe did, gently.

Stop Applying For Jobs That Are Already Taken!

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks



Why do people throw away everything they have, just to chase someone else's life?

Take Korach. He was a brilliant, high-ranking Levite with serious wealth. He was part of the royal family (he was Moses's cousin). By every measure, he was a man handpicked by Heaven for a specific and honored role in the divine plan. And yet, somewhere in the depths of his soul, a poison was fermenting.

He looked across the camp at Moses' brother, Aaron. He envied his Kohen Gadol position. He obsessed over what he didn't have, and ignored the gifts he did have. And those calculations hardened into a rebellion that swallowed him whole.

Listen to what the Torah is revealing to us through this story. Every human being has been dispatched with a mission no one else in history can fulfill. That means your life was handed to you on purpose, and your family was assigned to you for a reason. The talents you were born with are tailor-made to help you achieve your unique calling. The circumstances you wake up to every morning, with all of their beauty (and all of their mess), are the corner of the world

G-d placed into your hands to be your life's assignment.

Korach forgot this. He spent his days mentally living inside somebody else's reality. "If only I were Aaron." "If only I had Moses's authority." On and on it went, the endless audit of others' lives. And while he was busy auditioning for a role Heaven never offered him, his actual mission, the one custom-built for his soul, sat untouched.

The earth swallowing him was almost a physical metaphor for what had already happened on the inside. He had buried his own purpose long before the ground ever opened.

Here is the question that should keep you up at night. Are you willing to step into the role Heaven actually gave you, or are you still applying for jobs that are already filled?

The Secret of a Blossoming Staff

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



Korach's challenge sounded holy: "כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה'." "For the entire congregation is holy, and Hashem is among them" (במדבר ט"ז:ג'). But Chazal reveal that beneath the language of holiness was a desire for honor and position.

The Mishnah teaches: "אִיזוֹ הָיָא מַחְלוקָת? לְשֵׁם שְׁמַיָּם? זֶה מַחְלוקָת קָרַח וְכָל עֲדָתוֹ" "What is a dispute not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his congregation" (אבות ה:יז).

The Maharal (דרכי חיים, אבות ה:יז) explains that a dispute for the sake of Heaven seeks truth, while a dispute not for the sake of Heaven seeks self interest. When a person is searching for truth, disagreement can build. When a person is seeking honor, disagreement can only destroy.

Chazal teach: "אִין אָדָם נוֹגֵעַ בְּמוֹכֵן לְחִבְרוֹ כְּמֵלֵא" "A person cannot touch what is designated for another, even by a hairbreadth" (אבות לח).

Ben Azzai adds: "אִין לָךְ אָדָם שְׂאִין לוֹ שָׂעָה וְאִין" "There is no person who does not have his hour, and no thing that does not have its place" (אבות ד:ג).

The Arizal teaches in Shaar HaGilgulim that every soul enters this world with its own unique mission and tikkun. He also explains the concept of ibur, where a person can receive the spiritual assistance of a righteous soul to help him fulfill his purpose and reach his potential.

This is a remarkable idea. Heaven does not ask a person to become someone else. Heaven helps a person become himself.

Korach believed that greatness could only be found in Aharon's role. The Arizal teaches that Hashem provides every soul with the tools, opportunities, and even spiritual assistance necessary to fulfill its own mission.

After the rebellion, Hashem commanded that the staffs of the tribal leaders be placed in the Mishkan. By morning only Aharon's staff had changed: "וַהֲנִיחָהּ פֶּרֶחַ מִטֶּה אֶהְרֹן..." "And behold, the staff of Aharon had blossomed... it brought forth a flower, sprouted a blossom, and produced almonds" (במדבר י"ז:כ"ג).

The Sfat Emet notes that Aharon's staff did not merely produce almonds. The Torah emphasizes three stages: "צִיץ", "פֶּרֶחַ", and "שְׂקָדִים" flower, blossom, and fruit. Normally these stages unfold over time. Here, they appeared together.

Aharon's staff revealed that when something is rooted in the will of Hashem, it already contains within it the beginning, the process, and the fruit. True greatness is not created by taking someone else's place. It is revealed by allowing the potential Hashem planted within us to blossom.

Perhaps this is also hinted to in the words of David HaMelech: "צִדִּיק כִּתְמוֹר יִפְרַח" "The righteous person will blossom like a date palm" (תהלים צ"ב:י"ג). The softei teivot, the final letters, of פֶּרֶחַ spell צִדִּיק.

Korach wanted to blossom through Aharon's position. But the pasuk hints that there was a different path. קָרַח himself could have become כְּתוֹמֵר יִפְרַח. His greatness was not hidden in someone else's staff. It was hidden in his own.

And even after Korach fell, that potential was not lost. The Torah later tells us: "וּבְנֵי קָרַח לֹא מָתוּ" "The sons of Korach did not die" (במדבר כ"ו:י"א). From them came the Bnei Korach, who sang chapters of Tehillim. The blossoms that Korach failed to bring into the world eventually emerged through his children.

Korach saw Aharon's crown. Aharon saw his responsibility. Korach sought honor. Aharon produced fruit.

The tragedy of Korach was not that he failed to become Aharon. The tragedy was that he never discovered how great Korach could have been.

As we enter Shabbat, the question is simple: Am I still staring at someone else's staff, or am I finally ready to become the person Hashem created me to be?

Shabbat Shalom.

