Points to Ponder

Korach 5779

**בֶּן־יִצְהָ֥ר בֶּן־קְהָ֖ת בֶּן־לֵוִ֑יThe Son of Yitzhar son of Kehas Son of Levi (16:1)** - Why the stress on Korach’s lineage? Some commentaries note that Korach recognized that he came from good stock and thought that it would protect him. **Rabbi Yehuda Kupperman ztl**. founder of the Michlalah suggested that having good yichus is more of a responsibility than an automatic advantage. He likened the possessor of Yichus to a pearl on a string. It shines when it is part of the string and acts as part of the necklace. However, when the pearl snaps the string it is on, not only does it lose its own place but it destroys the entire necklace.

**כִּ֤י כָל־הָֽעֵדָה֙ כֻּלָּ֣ם קְדשִׁ֔ים The entire congregation is holy (16:3)** - When Moshe Rabbeinu recounts the story of Korach at the beginning of the book of Devarim, he refers to this episode as “Chatzeiros”. Why? **Chuddushei HaRim** notes that when we speak of an Eiruv Chatzeiros everything unites into a single Reshus under the banner of the Tzaddik. What Korach attempted to do,was to take a Chatzer and make many Chatzeiros. **Rav Schachter Shlita** would add that we speak of 4 amos of Halacha -- that Halacha has a domain -- and that we need to be within the domain -- we do not need to be exactly the same with the same jobs but we all need to be in line with the will of Hashem.

**קְחֽוּ־לָכֶ֣ם מַחְתּ֔וֹת Take pans (16:6)** - Why the test with Ketores? **Rashi** explains that the message here is that when someone is full of Gaava, the Ketores can kill him. **Mishnas Chassidim** notes that the Ketores has Teshuva powers and this was Moshe’s hope here. **Rav Soloveitchik ztl** offered a third possibility. He suggested that Ketores is made up of many different ingredients including the foul smelling Chelbenah. The same can be said about Achdus Yisrael but the achievement of Achdus should not be built on the holder’s definition -- it should be based on Hashem’s. Rav Soloveitchik added that Mitzvos contain 2 levels in their completion -- there is the performance of the Mitzva and there is a “great romance” that one experiences when performing Hashem’s Mitzvos. Korach wanted to skip to the “Great romance” without sticking to the rules as to how the Mitzvos are to be performed. **Rav Schachter Shlita** would often point out to us that this is the intention of the Possuk Kee Yisharim Darchei Hashem -- that the way**S** of Hashem are just. Yes, there are multiple ways but the Tzaddikim need to lead us there or we might falter. **Rav Noach Isaac Oelbaum Shlita** added that while lighting the menorah technically does not need a Kohein, being Meitiv does. The main Avoda of the Kohein  is not the momentary act -- it is the ability to fix the past and improve it into the future.

**וְאִם־בְּרִיאָ֞ה יִבְרָ֣א  If Hashem creates a new creation (16:30)** - Why did Moshe ask Hashem to create something that went against the rules of nature? Why was that show of force necessary? **Ramban and Sforno** note that the issue was the creation of a Yeish M’Ayin **(Ibn Ezra** disagrees). Why? **Rav Gifter ztl** explains that Korach and company tried to change the rules of nature by subverting the Torah which is the blueprint of nature. Calling nature to defend itself would not prove anything. Thus, Moshe used a “neutral” proof -- the creating of a Yeish M’Ayin -- proving once and for all that this was the order of things from Hashem’s perspective.

**וַיִּקְח֖וּ אִ֥ישׁ מַטֵּֽהוּ The test of the staff (17:24)** - Why did this test prove anything? Why was it offered? **Rav Aharon Soloveitchik ztl**. suggested that it was an outgrowth of the lesson of Tzaddik KaTamar Yifrach -- why a palm tree? Rav Aharon noted that a palm tree can grow even in less than optimal conditions. Shevet Levi as well, despite being in less than optimal conditions spread out nicely (think Cheit HaEigel). The test of the staffs would prove the same -- as the staffs had been detached from the ground, growth should have been impossible, However, the selected staff would not only survive in the less than optimal, it would thrive -- budding and giving off almonds!

**תִּשְׂא֖וּ אֶת־עֲוֹ֣ן הַמִּקְדָּ֑שׁ You shall bear the sin of the Mikdash (18:1) - Rashi** explains that the entire Shevet Levi is to teach all of Am Yisrael not to touch things in the mikdash that are kodesh.  Why is an entire Shevet commanded to watch out for this? **Rav Yerucham Levovitz ztl** explained that we see how much the people desired to serve in the Kodesh, everyone wanted to play a part and as a result certain boundaries needed to be put up for protection and the Shevet needed to protect the others.

**כֵּ֣ן תָּרִ֤ימוּ גַם־אַתֶּם֙ This is how you should separate Terumah -- also you (18:28) - Rav Elazar M. Teitz Shlita** noted that the Torah is offering us a command but also advice as to how to grow spiritually. When a person observes the Mitzvos in the way s/he is commanded to, that makes an impression on him from within which he grows personally. Hence, the possuk reminding us to raise the Terumah but raise ourselves in the process. Dovid HaMelech told us the same when he praised Ashrei Yoshvei Beiseicha -- those already in the house of Hashem who will be able to praise him more. It is also why we greet the person who did a Mitzva with the command Yiyashar Kochecha -- not to the fact that you did a Mitzva but that you -- the person -- should have the strength to do many more.

**Haftara - אֶת־שׁוֹר֩ | מִ֨י לָקַ֜חְתִּי וַחֲמ֧וֹר מִ֣י לָקַ֗חְתִּי Whose ox did I take and whose donkey did I take? (Shmuel I 12:3**) - Moshe didn’t ask the people -- he declared to Hashem that he did not take a donkey. Why didn’t he use the tactic Shmuel does? **Rav Elyashiv ztl**. answered that while Shmuel had no beefs with the people, Moshe knew that the people were suspicious of him. Had he made a declaration, they would have challenged him openly -- even if they needed to lie to do so (See Moed Katan 18b and Rashi that the people accused him of infidelity with their wives). Hence he chose not to issue the challenge.