

BE WARNED

by Rabbi Label Lam

Korach the son of Itzhar, **the son of Kohas, the son of Levi** took [himself to one side] along with Dasan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and On the son of Peles, descendants of Reuvain. (Bamidbar 16:1)

the son of Itzhar the son of Kohath the son of Levi: [The verse] does not mention, "the son of Yaakov," because he [Yaakov] prayed not to be mentioned in connection with their quarrel, as it is stated, "my honor, you shall not join their assembly" (Breishis. 49:6). –Rashi

This is a complicated story with loads of personal intrigue. Without the Sage's statements it is admittedly hard to put the puzzle together and even with the background they provide it is hard to make the pieces fit neatly. Why does the lineage of Korach reach back to Levi and not Yaakov. Rashi spells Yaakov's declared intention not to be mentioned in the anticipated dispute of the future. How could Yaakov know such an event would take place? Why did he not want his name to be mentioned? Was it just to protect his honor?

Part of Korach's argument against Moshe was that the entire nation is holy since everyone heard the first of the two Ten Commandments explicitly stated. Why then does the nation need leaders? However, his real subconscious intent was to usurp leadership for himself. He was empowered by a prophetic vision of the success of his surviving progeny. This future look enhanced his sense of righteousness. According to the Malbim, he felt that his father's lineage was skipped over and he also appealed to the children of Reuvain's sense of entitlement since Reuvain was the oldest brother of the 12 tribes. At the risk of oversimplifying, Korach claims authority, under the guise equality, while accusing Moshe and Aaron of a power grab.

It's interesting to note that in the 2nd of the Ten Commandments which everyone heard, are stated the following words, "You shall neither prostrate yourself before them nor worship them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a zealous God, Who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and the fourth generation **of those who hate Me.**"

Challenged by the seemingly unfair notion of visiting the iniquity of fathers upon sons, Rashi explains, "**of those who hate Me:** when the sons continue to sin following their fathers, i.e, when they cling to their fathers' deeds."

Why is the punishment visited for three *or* four generations? Why not an exact number? I once heard a clever answer from Rabbi Tuvia Singer. A person looking back at the generations that precede him

is warned by the fault line he perceives. It becomes apparent over time and with the gift of hindsight what character traits happily survived and which wreaked havoc. Anyone who continues the bad way is forewarned by multiple streams of familial examples reaching back and rippling through family history, aunts, uncles, cousins, and brothers, going back three or four generations. For that same reason good Doctors also ask if there is any history of heart disease or diabetes.

It's reported in Sparks of Musar the following analysis of the Alter from Slobodka; "The child of a good family who stole apples from a cart did not become a thief overnight. The deed has its roots in previous generations. Perhaps his very pious grandfather hid behind the bimah of the synagogue, in the name of humility, but the act contained a trace of deception (geneivas ha daas). His scholarly son went a step further and stole chiddushei Torah (novel thoughts) by saying them in his own name. His grandson, in turn, became an apple thief."

Levi received a sharp rebuke from Yaakov on his death bed for the righteous indignation he displayed by killing out the city of Shechem. That anger needed to be tempered by the discipline of Torah study. Levi led the way in Egypt on that front. By the Golden Calf Levi gained greatness again by answering the call of Moshe, "Mi L'HASHEM Alai- Who is with me on HASHEM's side?!" Levi stepped up big! Now Korach, the grandson of Levi, erupts again with righteous indignation, to unhook from Torah authority. That's a dangerous precedent. He is cautioned by Moshe, "you have a lot-Children of Levi"- meaning to say, "Go study your past and **be warned.**"