

# GET A REBBE

*by Shlomo Katz*

## **Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz**

### **Korach**

**Volume XVI, No. 34  
5 Tammuz 5762  
June 15, 2002**

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Today's Learning:

Avot 2:14-15

Orach Chaim 662:1-3

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 87

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Challah 24

Much of this parashah relates the story of Korach's mutiny. Near the end of that story we read (17:4-5), "Elazar the Kohen took the copper fire-pans that the consumed ones had offered and hammered them out as a covering for the Altar. As a reminder to Bnei Yisrael, so that no alien who is not of the offspring of Aharon shall draw near to bring up the smoke of incense before Hashem, that he not be like Korach and his assembly, as Hashem spoke about him through Moshe." According to some authorities, the phrase, "that he not be like Korach and his assembly" contains one of the 613 Commandments. Usually, this is understood as a mitzvah not to act divisively. However, R' Avraham Moshe Rabinowitz shlita (the "Skolye Rebbe" in Brooklyn, New York) finds another message in this commandment. He writes:

Korach argued against Moshe and Aharon (16:3), "For the entire assembly -- all of them -- are holy and Hashem is among them; why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?" What

was wrong with this argument?

The answer, writes R' Rabinowitz, is that attaching oneself to tzaddikim and sages and placing one's trust in their authority is essential to the service of Hashem. Do not be like Korach and his assembly. Do not think that because all Jews are holy, you do not need a rebbe / spiritual mentor. Rather, accept the authority of a "Moshe" so that he may place some of his majesty upon you (paraphrasing Bemidbar 27:20). (Chakima Be'remiza)

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*"And Korach took..." (16:1)*

Rashi (to verse 7) writes: "Korach was an intelligent [literally, 'open-eyed'] man. What reason did he have to commit this folly? The answer is that his eye misled him. He saw by prophetic vision that a line of great men would descend from him, amongst them the prophet Shmuel, who was equal in importance to Moshe and Aharon together [see Tehilim 99:6 and Berachot 31b]. Therefore Korach said to himself, 'On his [Shmuel's] account I shall escape the punishment'."

Why, asks R' Boruch Sorotzkin z"l (1917-1979; Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe), does Rashi write that Korach's "eye" (singular) misled him? After all, a person has two eyes! Indeed, we read at the end of last week's parashah (15:39), "You shall not explore after your heart and after your eyes (plural), after which you stray."

He explains: One of the distinguishing characteristics of a great person is that he looks at every issue or problem from multiple perspectives and does not jump to conclusions based on his first impression. Rashi is teaching that Korach did not do this. He used only one eye, so-to-speak, and thus was misled. (For example, he did not consider the possibility that he would be punished, but his sons would repent and be saved, as in fact happened.)

R' Sorotzkin adds that the above lesson is closely related to the teaching in Pirkei Avot: "You shall judge kol ha'adam favorably." The expression "kol ha'adam" usually is translated, "every person." Literally, however, it means, "the whole person." The Mishnah is teaching that when we judge the whole person - when we look at him from numerous angles so that we see all of his strengths and weaknesses and all of the circumstances that affect his life - we will be likely to judge him favorably. (Ha'binah Ve'ha'berachah)

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*"For the entire assembly -- all of them -- are holy, and Hashem is among them." (16:3)*

R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter z"l (1847-1905; the "Gerrer Rebbe" known as the "Sefat Emet") explains Korach's challenge as follows: "Should not each person choose his own path in the service of G-d, rather than having one Torah for all people?" Korach claimed that Bnei Yisrael did not need a Kohen Gadol such as Aharon, for every Jew is a "High Priest." [Note that Korach contradicted himself by

seeking the position of Kohen Gadol for himself.]

Moshe told Korach that he was wrong. As Rashi writes: "We have only one G-d, one Holy Ark, one Torah, one Temple, and one Kohen Gadol."

If Korach had understood the nature of the Kohen's position, he would not have wanted it. One is not necessarily deserving of honor merely for being Kohen, for it is an inherited position which does not depend in any way on the qualifications of the holder. (This is what Moshe meant when he said to Korach, "What is Aharon that you should complain against him?") True honor is found in working oneself up the ladder of improvement through one's own righteousness and accomplishments. (Sefat Emet)

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*"Do this! Take for yourselves fire-pans -- Korach and his entire assembly - and put fire in them and place incense upon them before Hashem tomorrow." (16:6-7)*

R' Avraham Moshe Rabinowitz shlita (the "Skolye Rebbe" in Brooklyn, New York) asks: Why did Moshe choose incense as the means of testing Korach's claim? He answers: We read in Shmot (30:35), "You shall make it into a spice-compound, rokach ma'aseh rokeach / the handiwork of a perfumer, thoroughly mixed, pure and holy." Rashi comments (on Shmot 30:25): "Any thing which is mixed with another so thoroughly that one becomes impregnated with the smell or the taste of the other is called a 'mirkachat' [from the root rokach]."

It was this mirkachat that Moshe was alluding to in his words to Korach. "If you are correct, Hashem will accept your sweet-smelling mixture of spices. But be warned! The very letters that spell mirkachat can be rearranged to spell "Korach mait" / "Korach shall die." (Chakima Be'remiza)

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"Dabair / Speak to Bnei Yisrael and take from them mateh / one staff for each father's house [i.e., each tribe], from all their nesi'im / leaders according to their fathers' house, twelve staffs; each man's name shall you inscribe on his staff. . . Ve'hinachtam / You shall lay them B'ohel Mo'ed / in the Tent of Meeting before the Testimony [i.e., the Aron], where I meet with you. It shall be that the man whom I shall choose -- his staff will blossom; thus I shall cause to subside from upon Me the complaints of Bnei Yisrael, which they complain against you." (17:17-20)

R' Moshe David Lida z"l (early 19th century Galician rabbi) interprets these verses homiletically. He writes:

The Talmud relates that, on a number of occasions, a bat kol (a form of communication from G-d that is below the level of prophecy) was heard to proclaim: "There is someone in this room who is worthy of prophecy, but the generation is not deserving." This teaches us that the spiritual stature of a tzaddik and his generation are intertwined. On the one hand, the generation can impede the

tzaddik's own spiritual growth. On the other hand, however, the tzaddik can raise the generation's level and he is obligated to do whatever he can toward that end.

This is the lesson of our verse: "Dabair" - be the "dabar" / spokesman and leader of the generation. Rebuke them for their bad deeds "and take [yourself]" - set yourself apart as an example (through your good deeds).

"Mateh" is related to the verb "le'hatot" / "to lean" or "to turn." (A staff is an object on which one leans, especially while changing direction.) Turn your generation in the right direction when they start to go astray.

What causes people to turn down the wrong path? "Their nesi'im" - from the root meaning "to elevate." In other words, haughtiness.

However, a person can repent. "Ve'hinachtam" - lead them (see Shmot 32:34) to repentance. How?

"B'ohel" - by the light (based on Iyov 29:3 - "When His lamp would shine / 'be'hilo' over my head). Which light?

"Mo'ed" / of time. In other words, make sure that at a minimum, your generation performs each time-bound mitzvah at its proper time. This includes davening within the time limits prescribed by halachah. [Ed. note: R' Lida apparently is alluding to the habit of many of his contemporaries among the leaders of Polish chassidut to daven outside of the times prescribed by halachah. This was one of the issues that split the Polish chassidic movement into two camps in its formative years.] (Migdal David)

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### **Rabbi Dr. Esriel Hildesheimer z"l**

R' Hildesheimer was born on 27 Iyar 5580 / May 20, 1820 in Halberstadt (in what later became Germany). At the age of seventeen, young Esriel traveled to Altona (then in Denmark) to study under R' Yaakov Ettlinger, author of the Talmud commentary Aruch La'ner. R' Ettlinger was a strong opponent of the budding Reform movement and was well-versed in both Torah and secular knowledge, all qualities that he would pass on to his two leading students, R' Hildesheimer and R' Samson Raphael Hirsch, the two foremost leaders of Torah-true German Jewry in the 19th century.

After leaving Altona in 1842, R' Hildesheimer studied in the "Beth Hamidrash" in Berlin (where his teachers included R' Michoel Landsberger and R' Elchonon Rosenstein, a student of R' Akiva Eiger) and attended the University of Berlin, where he studied philosophy, oriental languages, mathematics and astronomy. Later, he studied at the University of Halle, where he earned a doctorate in Bible.

In 1851, R' Hildesheimer was elected rabbi of Eisenstadt, Hungary (near Vienna, Austria), a position he accepted on the condition that the community would support a yeshiva. Orthodox Jewry in Eisenstadt was in a dismal condition at that time; for example, relatively few children were seen in

shul with their fathers. To help bridge this generation gap, R' Hildesheimer decided to introduce limited secular studies in the Jewish elementary school. The older students received a secular education as well, but with a focus on areas of mathematics and other subjects that would enhance their understanding of gemara. Also unusual in R' Hildesheimer's yeshiva was that time was set aside for studying Tanach and the Hebrew language. (After beginning in 1851 with six students, the yeshiva had 128 students in 1868, including one from the United States.)

To be continued . . .

*Sponsored by Rabbi and Mrs. Samuel Bramson  
on the yahrzeit of mother Evelyn Lewko z"l*

Dr. and Mrs. Irving Katz  
on the yahrzeit of mother Sarah Katz a"h  
(Sarah bat Yitzchak Hakohen)

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