

# CLASS 13 - KORACH

*by Rabbi Heshy Grossman*

"And Moshe said: with this you will know that Hashem has sent me to perform these deeds, not my own heart. If these [individuals] will die a death like all others, and the end of all men will be their end; Hashem has not sent me. And if G-d creates a new creation, and the earth opens its mouth, swallowing them and all that they have, and they descend alive to Gehinnom, then you will know that these people have angered Hashem." (Bamidbar 16, 29-30)

What does the sin of Korach and his men warrant total extermination? Why was it necessary that they be punished with a new form of death rather than standard execution?

Let us describe the connection between this incident and the act of creation, and explain why Moshe calls upon G-d to re-enact the Ma'aseh B'reishis.

1

Unlike the other days of creation, the Torah does not conclude its description of the second day with the words 'Ki Tov'. On this day, G-d completes His work without seeing the good. Chazal explain that Gehinnom and Machlokes (dispute) were both created on Yom Sheni, as indicated by the splitting of the heavenly and earthly waters. This day remains unfinished, its Tov not evident until Yom Shlishi.

Each of the daily songs, the Psalms recited at the close of morning prayers, reflect the particular aspect of creation revealed on that day. Hence, on Yom Rishon, we proclaim that 'the world is God's and everything in it'.

On Yom Sheni we repeat the song of the B'nai Korach, the beauty of Jerusalem and the palace of the King.

Who were the B'nai Korach and why do they sing on Yom Sheni?

"And the sons of Korach did not die - They were in the original plan. At the time of the Machlokes, they had thoughts of Tshuva, therefore an elevated place in Gehinnom was established for them, and there they dwelled." (Rashi, Bamidbar, 26,11)

The rebellion of Korach is the epitome of dispute. His sons, in parting from their fathers' cause, repair the damage of the original Machlokes, the splitting of the waters on Yom Sheni. Therefore, on that day, it is they who sing the praise of G-d.

The division of Yom Sheni marks the separation of the heavenly and earthly spheres. From that point

on, the possibility exists that the earth will stray from its Divine task. Korach disputes more than the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu; he sees this world as an independent entity, removed from the intimations of Divine Providence that the Torah represents.

## 2

Why is the opening of the earth referred to as Pi HaAretz? Does the earth have a mouth? Does it have something to say?

"Said Rabbah bar Bar Chonah: A merchant said to me, 'Come and I will show you where Korach was swallowed.'

I went, and I saw two cracks in the earth, with smoke escaping. He took a bundle of wool, soaked it in water, and placed it on the end of a spear. He stuck it in the hole, and when he removed it, the wool was scorched.

He said to me: 'Go listen, what do you hear?'

I heard them saying: 'Moshe and his Torah are Emes, and we are liars.'

He said: 'Every thirty days Gehinnom returns here, like meat being stirred in a pot, and that is what they say.' (Bava Basra 74a)

This is the message of the earth, its speech for all time. Korach is the vehicle by which this lesson is expressed. Though in his lifetime he had rebelled against the authority of Moshe and the truth of Torah, his punishment brings this mistake to light, proving that Moshe and the Torah can never be denied.

Let us explain.

## 3

Life originates with two different perspectives - "In the beginning, G-d created heaven and earth. While the heavens are an expression of the spirituality that permeates every corner of existence, the earth conceals the presence of G-d, waiting for man to uncover the Divine presence at its core.

The earth operates with a natural order of cause and effect, and it is this system of happenstance that dulls man's senses, slowly he forgets the G-d of creation.

Miracles are an exception to this humdrum existence, and it is for that reason they command such attention.

It is commonly understood that miracles are a sudden halt of the rules of nature, demonstrating G-d's total control over worldly affairs.

This is quite troublesome.

Since G-d is defined as unchanging, miracles cannot reflect a shift or modification, but must be built into the essence of life as an integral part of the Divine process.

This idea is alluded to by our Sages.

"Said Rebbi Yochanan: HaKadosh Baruch Hu made a condition with the sea to split before the B'nai Yisrael....not only with the sea did Hashem make a condition, but with everything created during the six days of creation...." (Midrash Rabbah 5, 4)

The Maharal explains that miracles are not an exception that proves Divine rule. Rather, they have an order of their own, reflecting a dimension higher than the natural world. This elevated state is not separate from Olam HaZeh, but concealed within, hinting at the underlying Divine process directing the world to a different destination.

This is the condition that G-d makes with the world. Not a change of plans or direction, but a fundamental element of the daily fabric, critical to the unfolding Divine plan that this earth is likewise destined to reveal.

The earth, as well, has something to say.

It is for this reason that the Pi HaAretz is one of the ten items created at twilight of the first Erev Shabbos. Twilight - Bein HaShmashos, is neither day nor night. Similarly, the miraculous items created at the very end of the six days.

Part of this world, yet separate, the mouth of the earth swallows whole those who deny G-d's word.

#### 4

Torah is not a matter of choice, but a necessary and indispensable component of creation. While life can continue without much of existence, the Torah is a physical expression of the Divine command, and the basis of our world. Without Torah, the world ceases to exist.

Korach's mistake is highlighted by his denial of Moshe's authority, the unwillingness to subjugate his individual identity before the Divine will. His insistence on personal autonomy places him at odds with the Torah, disassociated from the substance of existence.

One who resists an immovable object is doomed to failure.

Korach's battle with Moshe sentences him to an eternity of nothingness. The Torah is truth, it takes no prisoners. Its enemies are swallowed alive, their lives consumed by the hollowness of their existence. The Torah defines true substance, and its deniers remove themselves from that reality.

The very battle of Korach serves, ironically, as testimony to the truth he failed to recognize.

Sin is its own punishment. Heavenly retribution is the distance and impurity engendered by the evildoer's own behavior. The regret and despair he suffers is his personal Gehinnom, and it is then he

finally admits to the truth: Moshe and his Torah are true!

This is the message of the earth.

Though it conceals the Divine will, those who follow in its path are ultimately shown the flip side of truth, a snapshot in negative. A life of evil is transformed as eternal damnation, shadowing the timeless image of the man who truly stands in G-d's shadow, the Tzelem Elokim.

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