

WAS KORACH BALD?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

"Korach, son of Yitzhar, grandson of Kehas, great-grandson of Levi ..."

(Bamidbar 16:1)

What's in a JEWISH name?

One can just imagine standing around at a Bris, just as the one honored with the pronouncement of the name of the newly circumcised baby turns to the father to hear the name announced publicly for the first time.

"Korach ben Yitzhar, HaLevi."

Would that not raise eyebrows? "Korach"? "Bald One?"

Perhaps he was hairless at birth, as many babies are. However, is that any reason to give him a name that would remind him of this the rest of his life? Hardly. Perhaps, then, Yitzhar and his wife were prophets and knew something about the future, even though the Jewish people were still gainlessly 'employed' in Egypt, with no hope of redemption?

The Midrash says yes, whether they knew it at the time or not (and it is true of all parents when they give their children Jewish names). For, in last week's parshah, as part of their inauguration ceremony into the Temple service, all the Levi'im were shaven clean. In fact, this is one of the 'events' that so angered Korach's wife that she used it to 'intimidate' her husband into following through with his proposed rebellion.

The Arizal explains why:

This is why he called him 'Korach' ('Bald One'), because, Korach son of Yitzhar also came from the root of Kayin. Now, he was called 'Korach' because all the Levi'im had been completely shaven bald, because of the strong "din" that was in them. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 34)

In other words, the removal of hair from each Levi was more than just a cleansing process; it was also a way of softening a Levi's propensity to be judgmental -- to be din-oriented. For, the Temple was a place of mercy, a place representative of Divine love, not Divine judgment, and this had to be expressed through the very people who performed the Temple service and participated in its

upkeep.

Now, Kabbalistically, hair (se'ar) represents 'din,' just as barley (se'ora) does, which is why it was the Omer-Offering between Pesach and Shavuot, during which time 24,000 of Rebi Akiva's students died for less than perfect 'social' behavior.

Interestingly enough is the fact that Rebi Akiva himself was called 'Korach,' at least as a nickname:

Ben Azzai used to say of Rebi Akiva: All the chachamim of Israel are to me like the peel of an onion, except for this "Bald One." (Bechoros 58a)

Without a doubt, Ben Azzai, who actually ended up marrying the daughter of Rebi Akiva for a short while, was not speaking disrespectfully about this great teacher of Israel. On the contrary, Ben Azzai may have been alluding to the secret of Rebi Akiva's great success: his ability to overcome the 'din' within himself, unlike the original Korach before him:

.. With this you can understand the sod of Rebi Akiva, who, in the beginning, had been a complete simpleton who, for forty years, hated torah scholars. He would say, "If someone would give me a torah scholar I would bite him like a donkey!" (Pesachim 49b) ... (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 34)

In other words,

Rebi Akiva was also from the root of Kayin, which is the 'Crown of Gevurah,' and, as a result of his piousness, all the hairs of his body became 'shaven' which sweetened the strength of his din. Thus, he was called 'Korach' ... This is also the sod of why Rebi Akiva is called "Chasid," though he was the 'Crown of Gevurah,' as the Talmud says: They left Rebi Akiva to his piousness (Sanhedrin 110b). The Zohar also calls him the 'Pious Elder.'

Just another glimpse into the esoteric under-currents of history, and, a reminder once again of just how complex people can be. Perhaps we shouldn't be SO quick to judge people, even when the Torah gives us the right to judge their actions.

Shabbos Day:

"Tomorrow, put in them fire and place upon them incense before G-d, and the one whom G-d will chose is the holy one; you have enough children of Levi!"

(Bamidbar 16:7)

YOU HAVE ENOUGH CHILDREN OF LEVI: Korach had been a very smart man, so why did he act so foolishly? He erred in that he saw a great lineage coming from him from which would descend Shmuel who would equal Moshe and Aharon. Therefore, he said, "Because of him I will challenge." (Rashi)

This is a great example of how a little bit of (future) knowledge can be a dangerous thing. According to the midrash Rashi is quoting, it seems as if Korach might have lacked sufficient confidence to challenge Moshe and his leadership had he not been somewhat aware of the future birth of the great prophet Shmuel, destined to descend from his family.

This 'fact,' Korach took to be, was confirmation that whatever path he would choose would be the correct one. Otherwise, why would such a great descendant emanate from him? HOW could such a great descendant emanate from him, for, if he was wrong in his challenge against Moshe Rabbeinu, would he not suffer horrible consequences that would prevent him from be the ancestor of Shmuel HaNavi?

History has supplied the answers to Korach's questions, and, they were not what Korach himself imagined them to be. Indeed, what Korach did NOT see, but Moshe Rabbeinu DID see was that Korach's own sons would divorce themselves from his rebellion at the last moment, and therefore, Shmuel became destined to descend from one of them, while Korach himself 'descended' into the depths of the earth.

The Arizal, in Sha'ar HaGilgulim (33) once again provides a deeper look into what actually happened at such a difficult and confusing moment in Jewish history (the parenthetical comments are mine):

Korach son of Yitzhar was from the level of the Ruach of Kayin from the side of evil, as the verse indicates, "*And Korach took*" (Bamidbar 16:1) ...

(There are five parts to the soul, from the bottom up: Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chiyah and Yechidah. As the Arizal explains, one of the main consequences of Adam HaRishon's sin was the mixture of good and evil, even on the level of the lower souls. Thus, there are 'good' and 'evil' parts to a soul, both of which can reincarnate into different people through history. In this case ...)

This evil Ruach of Kayin was enclothed within him, and therefore, he accused Hevel his brother, Moshe Rabbeinu.

(As it is well-known, Moshe Rabbeinu was the reincarnation of Hevel, Kayin's brother.)

However, Yisro, though he too was also from Kayin, as it says, "Chever the Kenite separated from Kenites (kuf-yud-nun)" (Shoftim 4:11), was from the level of good of Kayin. Therefore, he gave his daughter Tziporah to Moshe, was good to him, and fed him bread.

(As Rashi points out at the beginning of Parashas Yisro, one of Yisro's names was 'Chever HaKini,' the 'Kini' -- kuf-yud-nun-yud -- part being allusion to 'Kayin' --kuf-yud-nun, thus showing that his soul too came from Kayin.)

Korach thought he had rectified Kayin the firstborn ...

(To whom the priesthood rightfully belongs, for which Korach was fighting.)

... and therefore, he tried to overcome Moshe, who was Hevel. However, he had erred in this, for, the tikun of Kayin could not have come through Korach, since he was from his evil side. Rather, it come only come through his descendant, Shmuel HaNavi, who was also from the good side of Kayin.

(That is, even though Shmuel HaNavi physically descended from Korach, still, his soul came from another place in Kayin.)

Chazal have said that Korach prophesized but did not know, because he saw a fire go out from him (Tanchuma, Korach 5) ... (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 33)

That is, the fire coming out of him symbolized the 'fire' of Torah and devotion to G-d of the future Shmuel HaNavi. And, yes, Shmuel was going to be his descendant, but no, it was not to be from him, but from an already existing son.

Therefore, unbeknownst to Korach at the time was the 'missing' piece of information that by challenging Moshe Rabbeinu he had indeed put himself into mortal and spiritual danger. He tried to hint this to Korach when he ended with the words, "you have enough children of Levi!"

And, had Korach taken the hint and kept his peace, then, even the 'evil' part of Kayin's soul within him would have achieved rectification. Had he swallowed his pride, he could have avoided being swallowed by the earth, just as Hevel's blood was 'swallowed' by the earth after Kayin murdered Hevel.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Moshe called for Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav, but they told him, "We will not come to you. Does it mean nothing that you have brought out of the land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the desert, just to make yourself prince over us?" (Bamidbar 16:12-13)

Doeschutzpah know no bounds? Not when it came to Dasan and Aviram, who went back a long way with Moshe Rabbeinu.

In fact, remember this:

After some time, when Moshe was grown, he went out to his brothers and saw their burdens. He saw an Egyptian beating a Jew, one of his brothers. He looked both ways, and when he saw that no one was around, he killed the Egyptian, and buried him in the sand. The next day when he went out, he saw two Jews fighting with each an-other, and said to the evil one, "Why do you hit your fellow?" He answered, "Who made you a noble, an officer, or a judge over us? Do you in-tend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Shemos 2:11-14)

The 'evil one' was none other than Dasan, who was trying to hit his brother-in-law, Aviram (Devarim

Rabbah 2:12), with whom he had been quarreling. And yet, it was just yesterday that the young Moshe had saved Dasan's life, who had been in the process of being beaten to death by the Egyptian taskmaster Moshe had killed in Dasan's defense. That's gratitude for you!

And what had Dasan and Aviram been arguing about? Dasan's wife, and Aviram's sister, Shlomis bas Divri (mentioned later in Vayikra 24:11)-- whom had been defiled by the Egyptian who had been trying to kill Dasan the day before, and whom Moshe had killed instead. Dasan, knowing the facts, wanted to divorce his wife, while Aviram, knowing that she had not been violated willingly, insisted that they remain married.

Moshe had walked in just as Dasan was about to express his will in physical terms, and this time, saved Aviram from blows.

What was their response to Moshe's interference? BOTH of them turned on Moshe together, and even reported to Paroah that he had killed the Egyptian (Yalkut Shimoni 1:167), forcing him to flee Egypt. Nice guys, this Dasan and Aviram, no?

Then of course there was the episode of the manna. Moshe Rabbeinu had taught the Jewish nation what G-d had told him:

Moshe said, "Eat [the remainder] today, because today is G-d's [day]; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you will collect it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none." However, some of the people tried on the sev-enth day to collect some, but found none. (Shemos 16:25)

So what did Dasan and Aviram do? In advance of Shabbos, they even went out and spread some manna over the ground to make sure those lacking faith could find some the next day, and make Moshe look like a liar! That's why G-d sent the birds in to eat it all up, leaving the manna in THEIR mouths and the egg on Dasan's and Aviram's faces.

However, before we shake our heads in disgust at Dasan and Aviram, we should recall the warning of the Talmud:

Had the Torah not been given to Israel, no nation or people could stand before them, and this is like what Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: Three are brazen: Israel amongst the nations, a dog amongst wild animals, and, a rooster amongst the birds ... (Beitzah 25b)

What a group to be numbered amongst! However, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish wasn't simply heaping a burning insult onto his own people, but offering a warning to the Jews of history: Without Torah, there is a Dasan and Aviram in just about all of us. This week's parshah completes the warning, reminding us of the final fate of two of the greatest of instigators the Jewish people have ever produced.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Part Four: Holy Sparks

Before discussing Yemos HaMoshiach, there is yet another concept that is important to understand regarding the 'End-of-Days.'

The Torah begins with Day One of history, when G-d ended primordial chaos and darkness with the creation of primordial light. The rest is history, of which we are a part. What happened before the first 'bais' of 'Bereishis'? That the Torah does not discuss, giving the impression that we are not to know.

However, that is not the case, for, what happened prior to creation is the subject of the deepest parts of Kabbalah (the 'aleph' before the 'bais,' so-to-speak), explained by the Zohar, and, later, by the Arizal. In short, it is a discussion about how completely spiritual 'light' was guided by the will of G-d to produce, eventually, the quite physical world we live in, and, the spiritual world that governs it.

Abstract, technical, and complex are gross understatement to describe this part of Torah learning. However, a very simplified version of how creation came into being and remains that way involves a discussion of 'Nitzutzei Kedushah' -- 'Sparks of Holiness.'

I have said it this way because it is easier to relate to 'holy sparks' than it is to 'sparks of holiness.' 'Sparks' sound physical, and, we can appreciate that the physical can be imbued with holiness. However, how can you package an abstract reality of holiness up as a spark, as something physical?

The answer is, you don't, because Nitzutzei Kedushah are not physical. But, somehow, it is such 'packets' of spiritual 'energy' that make all of physicality possible, and keep it running. Somehow, they imbue all of physical creation with life enough to exist, and more, when deemed by G-d. They may be 'sparks of holiness,' but they are really 'sparks of life.'

Joining pre-creation towards the end (just prior to creation itself), there existed a 'pool,' if you will, of a finite number of Nitzutzei Kedushah. Finite in as much as they have a Divinely-ordained, exact limit, but, if you would have seen them at the time, they would have appeared infinite, being so many in number.

The duration of history -- the true measure of time -- is the 'using up' of Nitzutzei Kedushah. The goal of existence is, through free-will choice, to make decisions and expend energy in such a way as to draw on these sparks and expend them in the most spiritually-effective way.

In other words, Nitzutzei Kedushah are to life and living what gasoline is to an automobile -- the fuel and potential to do something. Thus, the entire 'pool' of Nitzutzei Kedushah represents the entire pool of human potential throughout all of history -- potential to do either good or evil (just as a car can be used for a mitzvah or a sin).

To make creation, G-d 'drew' from the same pool of sparks, and brought creation close to perfection. Adam HaRishon, had he CHOSEN to abstain from eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil for three hours, would have drawn on the balance of the sparks, and would have participated in the completing and perfecting of creation.

Of course, he didn't. And, as a result, not only did he NOT use up the balance of the sparks left over by G-d when making creation, but, he even reversed some of what G-d had done, and, tragically, returned many previously perfected sparks back to the pool of impurity from which they had been drawn and purified. A sin can do just that.

As a result, what could have been accomplished over the course of three hours at the beginning of history has still not even been accomplished over 5,761 years! We are still very much working on it -- the rectification of Adam HaRishon's sin -- and the Final Redemption can and will only come once the last spark is spent.

'Working on it,' ideally, means performing mitzvot. Mitzvot are able to draw sparks out of the 'Impure Depths,' cleanse them, and return them to their place in the Sefiros (thus life is like an upside-down hour-glass). The greater the mitzvah, the more sparks that are spent, like putting your foot on a spiritual gas pedal. It brings redemption closer, faster.

Performing a sin, G-d forbid, also requires Nitzutzei Kedushah. However, a sin 'drags' them through the world of impurity, necessitating a spiritual cleansing process before they can ascend to their rightful place in the Sefiros. That is the power of 'teshuvah' -- sincere repentance for sinning -- or, the pain of punishment, which acts as atonement.

Whether only the individual sinner is affected or others as well depends upon many factors, such as, how many sins, how great the sins, etc.

A crucial dynamic here is that the exhaustion of Nitzutzei Kedushah is not an open-ended matter. There is a fixed time-limit by which all the sparks MUST be used up, determined by the Divine will. In other words, there is a LAST POSSIBLE DATE by which Moshiach MUST COME (called 'b'ittah' -- 'in its time' -- by the prophet Yeshayahu) within the 6,000 years of history, for Kabbalistically-mathematical reasons built into the Sefiros.

Thus, then, there are really only TWO possible scenarios for world history. The first is that mankind, through free-will choices and positive actions, consume all the possible remaining Sparks of Holiness in advance of this 'Final Date.' Then what? Then Moshiach comes early, a date in history referred to by the prophet Yeshayahu as 'achishenah' -- 'I will hasten it.'

It is unlikely that the world will finish its task precisely at the last moment possible. It is possible, but, unlikely.

So, then, what happens if the date of the Final Redemption approaches before mankind has successfully exhausted the sufficient amount of sparks to warrant such a fantastic redemption? The

redemption is pushed off? Not possible. The sparks go unused? Equally impossible. Then what?

Back to the car analogy: What happens when you are driving and you are behind schedule to arrive at your destination? Exactly -- you step on the gas pedal and speed up.

However, speeding up while driving is more dangerous and adds stress to the car, not to mention to the driver and passengers. Likewise, 'speeding up' in history is also dangerous for mankind and it also adds stress to the entire world -- to say the least -- as we have witnessed throughout history, and, as we are realizing now at this late stage of time.

For, what we did not demand of ourselves over a longer, more 'relaxed' period of time becomes demanded of us over a shorter, quicker, more intense period of time.

Another analogy. Imagine an Olympic athlete who has fallen behind in his training schedule. Had he begun his training on time, and maintained the curriculum religiously, he might have even enjoyed the progression from state of fitness and readiness to state of fitness and readiness. Instead, he has only two choices: drop out of the running, or, greatly intensify the balance of the schedule.

For the sake of this discussion, we will assume that he has chosen the latter decision. As a result, his diet is stricter, his exercise is more intense, and, his trainer is probably going to be more ruthless to 'whip' him into shape. He'll probably hate every minute of it, though, it will all be for his own good, and, the result of his own carelessness.

Now, the trainer could take a different approach. He could take the 'Mr. Nice Guy' approach, and feed the athlete whatever he wants to eat, let him exercise however much he wants to, and never pressure him the rest of the training schedule. It's the 'Chesed-approach,' which, more than likely, will fail dismally at that late stage of the game. It simply assumes too much about human nature and responsibility in such situations.

On the contrary, it is the 'ruthlessness' of the trainer that will make it work in the end. It is his 'Koach-HaGevuros' -- his strong-hand approach -- that will 'force' the potential Olympic athlete to make up for lost time and put the extra 'umph' into his training in order for him to be prepared by the 'fixed date' up the upcoming Olympics. It is the positive channeling of the trainer's 'negative' energy that will make the athlete burn up the sufficient energy to be ready for his moment of glory at the scheduled competition.

So it is the same with mankind and history.

However, the analogy is not finished yet. Should the athlete build on the will of his trainer, and take even more responsibility for himself, recognizing the need to make up for lost training, he can soften the 'Gevuros' of the trainer. For, it is easier to be 'pushed' by our own will, than by that of another.

And that is PRECISELY where the Jewish people stand today. History is coming to a close, and, there are more Nitzutzei Kedushah remaining than is supposed to be at this very late stage. This is evident

by the 'Gevuros' being imposed upon the Jewish people all over -- terrorism, severe illness, assimilation, negative growth, etc.

The date for the Final Redemption is immutable, and, waiting another 'few years' for the 'next one' is, of course, not realistic. We've done that all along with potential early dates -- achishenah -- but, it is impossible with the Final Date. The pain we feel today is the 'crunch' of General History coming into hard contact with our particular history, like cars colliding.

To speed up, or to be sped up, that is the question. However, how we answer that question, either through intensified yearning for G-d and all things Jewish, or, by simply throwing ourselves at the mercy of the 'Trainer,' will determine the severity of the events -- such as the prophesied 'War of Gog and Magog' --and their outcome from this point onward.

The War of Gog and Magog, whatever it will be and whomever it will involve will, undoubtedly, be a frightening example of Gevuros (temporarily) in control of history. Logically, then, the extent of such a war will be entirely dependent upon how many Nitzutzei Kedushah remain at the end of history as we know it. If that is not a wake-up call, 'Children of Israel,' then what is?

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston
