

SHABBAT PARSHAT KORACH · 3 TAMMUZ 5772 - JUNE 23, 2012 · VOL. 19 NO. 35

PARSHA INSIGHTS

NO OBJECT OF DESIRE

“And Korach took...” (16:1)

“**A**nd G-d said, ‘Let Us make Man in Our image.’” (Gen. 1:26) Artists throughout the ages have taken this verse and stood it on its head. Man has ‘created’ G-d in his image. The G-d of Michelangelo, Donatello and others appears as no more than a venerable grandfather, complete with a long white beard and robes. Save for a few thunderbolts, their G-d looks like an Italian *zeide* in fancy-dress.

What does the Torah mean when it says that G-d created man “in His image”?

When G-d created man, He gave him two powers: the power of giving and the power of taking. The power to give is the elevated quality that imitates G-d, for G-d is the Ultimate Giver. There is nothing you can give Him in return, He already owns everything. Man is created specifically to imitate G-d by being a giver.

The desire to take is the antithesis of G-d’s purpose in creating man. Furthermore, taking is not about amassing a vast fortune, or a fleet of Porsches. It’s not a matter of “*He who dies with the most toys, wins.*” In truth, the desire to take has nothing to do with toys, or trophies, or physical objects at all.

The desire to take is the dark side of the power to give. It is the anti-world of giving, its negative doppelganger. The desire to take is never satisfied by the object of its desire. It’s amazing how quickly the sheen wears off a pristine new computer, or a new car, or a new wife (if that’s your view of marriage.) For once the object becomes our possession it ceases to interest us, the desire is gone, and we focus on

something else. Why?

The desire to take is never satisfied by the object of our desire because the desire to take is really the desire to enlarge ourselves, to make ourselves more, to take up more real estate in reality – to “exist” more.

And that desire is insatiable.

All physical desires have their limits – there’s just so much *pâté de foie gras* you can consume, but the desire to be more, the dark side of giving, is insatiable.

This week’s Torah reading starts with the following sentence, “*And Korach (the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kohat, the son of Levi) together with Datan and Aviram (the sons of Eliav) and Ohn ben Pelet (sons of Reuven), took.*” There is no object in this sentence. It just says that “Korach took”, without revealing what or whom he took. What then is the object of the sentence?

What did Korach take?

Korach “took” the entire sad episode that followed: his rebellion and demise are the object of the first sentence of the weekly Torah portion.

Korach was the quintessential taker. What he wanted was more, more and more.

Korach wanted to devour the world.

And thus it was apt that the earth opened its mouth and devoured him.

• Sources: Based on Rabbi E. E. Dessler’s *Kuntras HaChessed* and Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Korach, Datan and Aviram, and 250 leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed by the earth. Many resent their death and blame Moshe. G-d's "anger" is manifest by a plague which besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people. He instructs Aharon to atone for them and the plague stops. Then G-d commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the Mishkan. In the morning the staff of Levi, bearing

Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that Levi's tribe is chosen for priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as Kohen Gadol, High Priest. The specific duties of the Levi'im and Kohanim are stated. The Kohanim were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week's Parsha are laws of the first fruits, redemption of the firstborn, and other offerings.

ISRAEL Forever

THE DANGER OF DISSENT

“**T**hat there shall not be anyone like Korach and his assembly...” (*Bamidbar* 17:5) The literal meaning of this phrase is that the terrible fate suffered by those who rebelled against the authority of Moshe would deter others from following this suicidal route. The copper plates used by some of Korach's followers to offer incense were placed on the altar as a cover to serve as an ongoing reminder of what lay in store for those who attempted to usurp the unique right of Aharon and his descendants to do

this sacred service.

Commentaries have already pointed out that the general tone of the above phrase indicates that it is a commandment to all generations to desist from any form of dispute, especially when it takes the form of rebellion against Torah authority. Certain political parties in Israel whose maneuverings threaten the unity of the Jewish people should take heed of this warning and reflect on the fate of its violators.

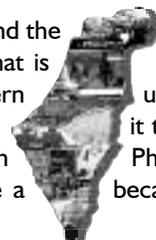
LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

BE'ERSHEBA – A SPRING AND AN OATH

Be'er means a spring and Sheva means an oath, and the two combine to form the name of the city that is known as the capital of the Negev of modern Israel.

Ancient Be'ersheba is where the Patriarch Avraham discovered a spring, and where he made a



covenant with the Philistines which he sealed with an oath. The well built on this spring was eventually stuffed up by the Philistines until the Patriarch Yitzchak restored it to use. Like his father he also made a covenant with the Philistines and reinstated the name given to it, which became the name of the city that grew around it.

לע"נ
מרת פייגא בת ר' דוד ע"ה
נלב"ע ט' תמוז תשע"א
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Datan and Aviram join Korach?
2. Why is Yaakov's name not mentioned in Korach's genealogy?
3. What motivated Korach to rebel?
4. What did Korach and company do when Moshe said that a *techelet* garment needs *tzizit*?
5. What warning did Moshe give the rebels regarding the offering of the incense?
6. Did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol*?
7. What event did Korach not foresee?
8. What does the phrase *rav lachem* mean in this week's Parsha? (Give two answers.)
9. What lands are described in this week's Parsha as "flowing with milk and honey"?
10. When did Moshe have the right to take a donkey from the Jewish community?
11. What did Korach do the night before the final confrontation?
12. What sin did Datan and Aviram have in common specifically with Goliath?
13. Before what age is a person not punished by the Heavenly Court for his sins?
14. What happens to one who rebels against the institution of *kehuna*? Who suffered such a fate?
15. Why *specifically* was incense used to stop the plague?
16. Why was Aharon's staff placed in the middle of the other 11 staffs?
17. Aharon's staff was kept as a sign. What did it signify?
18. Why are the 24 gifts for the *kohanim* taught in this week's *Parsha*?
19. Who may eat the *kodshei kodashim* (most holy sacrifices) and where must they be eaten?
20. Why is G-d's covenant with the *kohanim* called "a covenant of salt"?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 16:1 - Because they were his neighbors.
2. 16:1 - Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion (*Bereishet* 49:6).
3. 16:1 - Korach was jealous that Elizafan ben Uziel was appointed as leader of the family of Kehat instead of himself.
4. 16:1 - They laughed.
5. 16:6 - Only one person would survive.
6. 16:6 - Yes.
7. 16:7 - That his sons would repent.
8. 16:7,3 - *Rav lachem* appears twice in this week's Parsha. It means "much more than enough greatness have you taken for yourself (16:3)" and "It is a great thing I have said to you (16:17)."
9. 16:12 - Egypt and Canaan.
10. 16:15 - When he traveled from Midian to Egypt.
11. 16:19 - Korach went from tribe to tribe in order to rally support for himself.
12. 16:27 - They all blasphemed.
13. 16:27 - Twenty years old.
14. 17:5 - He is stricken with *tzara'at*, as was King Uziyahu (*Divrei HaYamim* II 26:16-19).
15. 17:13 - Because the people were deprecating the incense offering, saying that it caused the death of two of Aharon's sons and also the death of 250 of Korach's followers. Therefore G-d demonstrated that the incense offering was able to avert death, and it is sin, not incense, which causes death.
16. 17:21 - So people would not say that Aharon's staff bloomed because Moshe placed it closer to the *Shechina*.
17. 17:25 - That only Aharon and his children were selected for the *kehuna*.
18. 18:8 - Since Korach claimed the *kehuna*, the Torah emphasizes Aharon's and his descendants' rights to *kehuna* by recording the gifts given to them.
19. 18:10 - Male *kohanim* may eat them and only in the *azara* (forecourt of the *Beit Hamikdash*).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

- The forty-day miscarriage
- Cleopatra's experiment
- Pre-natal paradise, learning and oath
- The hidden miracle
- Why atonement required after birth

- The status of females in Kutim and Tzedukim communities
- Status of menstrual blood of non-Jewess
- The stages of purity and impurity following birth
- Menstrual flow preceding birth

WHAT MAKES THEM DIFFERENT?

There are many differences between man and woman as a result of the difference in the raw material from which the original man and woman were created by G-d. In our *gemara* the focus is on two of them – one regarding personality and the other regarding voice.

“Why is it,” ask our Sages, “that a man is flexible in accepting appeasement while a woman is not?”

The answer given is that man was created from soft earth while woman was created from man's hard bone.

“Why is a woman's voice so much more pleasant than that

of a man?”

Man was created from earth and if one strikes earth no sound comes forth. Woman was created from bone that does produce a sound when struck.

To prove the quality of the feminine voice, a passage from *Shir Hashirim* (2:4) is cited:

“Let me hear your voice,” is said to the beloved woman, “for your voice is pleasant.”

Tosefot points out that when she speaks of her beloved, she describes him as “pure and ruddy” (*ibid.* 5:10) but offers no praise for his voice.

• *Nidah 31b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“There are no days in which one enjoys so much good as those days in his mother's womb before birth.”

• *Gemara - Nidah 30b*

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SING ALONG

From: Benny

Dear Rabbi,

Perhaps you can help me. Singing seems to be a pretty important part of Jewish custom. I mean, the Shabbat meals all revolve around singing, as do a lot of the prayers, and also events like bar and bat mitzvahs, or brit mila and other joyous occasions. So my problem is that I never really liked to sing, and that's probably because I don't have a good voice. And that means that I don't really feel comfortable singing with everyone else, and I end up feeling left out or not a part of things. Do I have to sing? Does it look strange if I don't participate? Do you have any advice about how to deal with this situation? Thanks.

Dear Benny,

There was a very charismatic and controversial personality and musician/singer in recent times. During his lifetime he pioneered a genre in traditional Jewish folk music that became very popular among many different segments of Jewry, uniting them all with moving, heart-felt music and inspirational stories. Needless to say, he drew many followers, and, particularly after his passing, his songs have been incorporated into a special Shabbat service that is practiced

in many places.

Once, a close follower of his mustered up the courage to ask him the following question: "Rebbe, your music and singing has certainly been a great influence on so many people. But, let's be honest, you don't have the nicest of voices. So why has your singing been so successful?" He smiled and answered, "That's exactly the point. If my voice were so nice, people would listen to my singing, but not sing themselves. But since my voice isn't so beautiful, people don't mind singing along and this way everybody makes beautiful music together!"

This story underscores the dynamic of the singing in the scenarios you mention. It's not about impressing or being impressed by yours or others' singing. You see, there are no solos. Rather, it's about collectively blending as one voice in joy and praise of G-d and His blessings. A person who understands this need not be embarrassed, and those who understand this won't judge others by their voices.

Since this is the case, your not singing is out of tune. Instead of thinking how you sound to others, consider how your silence sounds to G-d. And since the singing is not to gain praise but to give it, give it what you got. And precisely because your voice is not the greatest, your singing will all the more so testify to your pure intention. But the truth is, once you learn the songs, get used to the tunes, and overcome your mistaken sense of embarrassment, you'll gain a confidence and comfort which will enable you to sing along fluidly in a voice much better than you realize you have.

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A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Question: A very wealthy friend of mine was recently approached by the head of a promising young yeshiva for a major gift to his building fund. My friend has other commitments and is unsure of how much to invest in this institution. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, a renowned communal rabbi, author and lecturer residing in Monsey, New York, told us this story while visiting Israel to establish a new yeshiva, Mesores Mordechai, in Beit Shemesh. (The yeshiva, which is named for Rabbi Feuer's late great father-in-law, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, *zatzal*, Rosh Hayeshiva of Telz, is for *Beit Midrash* boys from the States.)

Rabbi Meir Shapiro, *zatzal*, the rav of Lublin who established the famous Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin, came out of his office one day in a very distraught mood. One of his students, Rabbi Pinchas Hirshprung (who later served for many

years as a renowned rav in Montreal), who was sitting outside the office, asked the rav what had happened to make him so upset.

A Jew just came into my office with a bitter complaint against me, explained the rav. He told me that when I started the yeshiva and approached him for a donation he gave me a modest sum. Little did he realize until today what sort of a yeshiva I built and what quality students there are here. He claims that he is a very wealthy man who could have supplied me with all the money I needed for the yeshiva and he can't forgive me for not pressing him harder to gain such a great merit.

And you know what, concluded the rav, he is right!

Tell your friend that he should devote the same serious thought to investing in this yeshiva as he would to a business investment and to make sure he doesn't miss out on a great opportunity.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

POMEGRANATE PIECE PEACE

A Moslem neighbor of the rabbi of the Jewish community in Djerba came to him with his tearful story. "My beloved wife," he said, "insisted on paying a visit to her father's home against my wishes. I couldn't budge her but I demanded that the visit be a very brief one. If she would not be back home before I finished eating the pomegranate I had just started, I warned her, she would be divorced. This apparently upset her and she intentionally came back much later. According to Moslem law, she is no longer my wife and the truth is that I want her back."

The rabbi, author of a commentary on *Mesechta Me'ilah* called "*Me'il Yaakov*", came up with a brilliant idea.

"It is well known," he said, "that when one eats a pomegranate, some of the pieces which make up its fruit fall to the floor. Go back home and search the floor under your table if there are any pieces there. If so, you did not complete eating that pomegranate and your divorce declaration is not binding."

The fellow followed these instructions and indeed found some of the pomegranate seeds on the floor. The local Moslem kadi absolved him of his vow to divorce his wife and praised the brilliance of the rabbi whose fame subsequently spread throughout the entire region.

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