

Korach - Rabbi Lerner - June 17, 2012

Abarbanel: There were three different issues, three different controversies, grievances that were hurled against Moshe. The first was the issue of the Kohein Gadol - Korach felt that he himself felt he was being slighted by not being chosen as the Kohein Gadol - it was an argument focused against Aharon. Korach, as **Rashi** brings down, was a great-grandson of Levi; his father was Yitzhar, his grandfather Kahos whose family carried the kaylim of the Mishkan. Levi had four sons - Amram was the eldest, and he was therefore entitled to the Meluchah - Moshe was essentially the king. The second son of Levi, Yitzhar, should have been awarded the second best job, that of the Kohein Gadol, so that should have been Korach's, along with all of the kohanim who came from him as well; he felt it was not fair for all of the top jobs to go to the family of Amram.

The second machlokes had to do with the replacement of the bechorim by kohanim and leviyim. The job was taken from the bechorim who were originally sanctified in Egypt when God killed all of the Egyptian first-borne. This was an enormous shame and humiliation to the bechorim, and it cut across the entire nation, not just a small sect of Levi. They accused Moshe again of nepotism, that he was taking all of the plum jobs for his tribe.

The third argument was with the tribe of Reuven, who was the real first borne of the nation and should have been treated as such - he should have gotten the leadership, and should have been given a double portion instead of Yosef. They accused Moshe of doing this when he chose as his prime talmid Yehoshuah from the tribe of Ephraim, the son of Yosef (even though it was Yaacov who had made this change).

So all of these arguments were hurled against Moshe to the effect that he was taking for himself, and for his tribe, and for his family, and for his special student all of the leadership positions and perks of inheritance. Many of these were old grievances and this then bring up another old machlokes of when did this rebellion happen. **Ibn Ezra** said that this rebellion happened in Midbar Sinai, before they began to journey away from Har Sinai. It happened when the bechorim lost their jobs after the sin of the Aygel - the Leviyim were the only ones who were clean of that sin, they were pure and holy while all of the other tribes and their first-borne were involved in the sin and were disqualified. The people thought that it was Moshe's idea to take the job away from the bechorim and give it to his tribe. And he chose to give special reward to his family from Kohas. Even amongst the Leviyim there was anger, with Kohas being elevated above all of the other branches of Levi, and his own personal family above the rest of Kohas, with Aharon being chosen as Kohein Gadol. **Ramban, Abarbanel, Rabbeinu Bachya:** this rebellion did not happen then - it happened after the sin of the Meraglim, as per the order in the Torah. **Ramban:** the Ibn Ezra is wrong because in many places he asserts that there is no set chronology in the Torah - this is absolutely wrong; the Torah is in order with rare exceptions, like the beginning of Bamidbar and Naso where dates are specifically given out of order; but when not given explicitly as such, it was in the correct chronological order. Why did it happen now? Because of what happened in parshas Shlach - that debacle allowed these grievances to surface; until this time Moshe's popularity was riding high; even with the sin of the Aygel, only a small percentage of the nation died and he got Hashem to overturn His decree and he saved the people; he was the hero. But since leaving Har Sinai there was one crisis after another with immediate punishment from Hashem. After the Chet Hameraglim, everyone was to suffer and die. At this point Moshe's popularity plummeted, allowing all of those who had festering grievances to rise up at this time and try to take Moshe down. This was the opportunity for them

to attack because Moshe had lost favor in the eyes of the nation, in the majority of the people. They felt he failed in his attempt to save the nation; there was a major difference between the tefillos he offered after the Chet Ha'Aygel and the Chet Hameraglim - he didn't mention the zechus of the Avos (which he could not do since they rejected the land of the Avos - the Avos were the greatest zionists and the people did not have this same love of the land). So Moshe did not have the passion to save the people; they felt that had he tried harder he could have averted this tragedy, just as he rolled back the tragedy of the Aygel. So this exposed him to a lot of attacks on him. [If the Ibn Ezra is correct and this happened earlier, why was it placed here in this place in the Torah - no one defends his view].

There are three different groups here attacking Moshe: there is Korach; there are Dasan and Aviram; and then there were the 250 men who were described as *Nesi'ay Edah, Keri'ai Mo'ed, Anshai Shem* - they were exalted, like Nesi'im; they were like the board of trustees at meetings; they were tremendously distinguished people. But who are they? **Ramban**: the best interpretation is that they were all bechoros, all first-borne, the group that was supposed to work in the Mishkan with special status; they lost out to the Kohanim and that is why Moshe tells them to take the censers of incense, and they were quite peeved. That is why Moshe said that they were going to prove together who should be bringing the ketores; this ketores would prove who was righteous and who was chosen to do the avodah in the Mishkan. This would be the litmus test.

Meshech Chachmah: these 250 men were Nesi'im, the heads of tribes. Elitzur Ben Shedayur from the tribe of Reuven was the ringleader of this group. According to some, Nachshon Ben Aminadav was the only one of the tribe leaders who was not part of this revolt; he was the righteous brother-in-law of Aharon. Each tribe had its own Sanhedrin of 23, and with 11 tribes that yielded 253 leaders. These were the dayananim and nesi'im, the best of the leadership, who participated in this revolt. **Rabbeinu Bachya**: these included the 12 Nesi'im, even Nachshon.

When they came to challenge Moshe, he fell on his face. Moshe then said that in the morning the outcome of this controversy would be settled - God will show who is the holy one, the one He has chosen to be close to him. He told them that they will all take censers with incense, set them on fire, and see whose offering is accepted. According to this pasuk, the 250 rebels and Korach would be bringing the censers. However, in 16:16-17, Moshe said to Korach that he and his group should appear along with Aharon at the Mishkan with their censers; the only ones left out were Dasan and Aviram. What happened? Each person took his censor and came to the Mishkan. Hashem appears, told Moshe that He will destroy the entire congregation. Moshe begged Hashem to have mercy on the congregation and not destroy the evil ones. Hashem then told him to tell the people to separate from the evil group lest they be destroyed. In 16:28-30 Moshe then says what will happen if he is correct, that there would be a new creation never before seen; the earth would swallow them up. **Ramban**: Hashem never told Moshe how He will kill these people; it was Moshe's idea - he forced God's hand based on what he decided would be the test - that the earth will open up and they would be swallowed alive. This then happened - Korach, Dasan, Aviram and their families were swallowed; but the 250 men who brought the censers were burned, not swallowed up by the earth, just like Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon. Where does Korach fit in? Which category was he in? Was he not part of the group bringing the censers who were burned? In the end, it is clear that only the 250 people were burned. **Netziv**: it is clear that Korach did not offer ketores, even though he was told to; that is why he was not burned. This is actually very significant. Because of this distinction it is clear

that these 250 were sincere, pious Jews - they were intelligent, true Avdei Hashem. Their denial of being allowed to enter and serve in the Mishkan was like a destructive fire burning within them; they were so on fire with love of Hashem, all they wanted were opportunities to get closer to Hashem. They were incredibly sad and depressed that they could not approach closer to Hashem. It wasn't about false honor; they wanted to become mekadesh to get closer to Hashem; they believed in Moshe and Hashem - they had such an intense love they almost could not stop themselves. They had such a desire to be close to and to serve Hashem that even though they trusted Moshe, they felt they had to do this from the most pure of motives. But, as the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. In 17:3 it describes the censurers of the sinners *benafshosam*, a term also used to describe the Nazir. Like a Nazir who had to purify himself after coming in contact with a dead person; he normally avoids wine and dead people; a Nazir wants to go to a higher level to get close to Hashem. When the Nazir is in contact with a dead body he becomes Tamei he is called a *Chotei Al Hanefesh* - he strove to reach a higher level with his soul than he was capable of achieving; he overstretched his bounds; he tried to take on religious obligations that were beyond him and he was wrong in that attempt - it was too difficult and he became Tamei; had he not been a Nazir he wouldn't not have been considered a Chotai; he was clearly not ready for this type of obligation with these restrictions; it was too difficult for him and he shouldn't have taken on these obligations. Similarly over here, these 250 wanted to take on additional obligations, but they were not at that high enough level for them. It was not the right thing for these 250 people; they should not have tried to take on these additional obligations, they were not ready for it, and that is why they were struck down.

Why was Korach different? He was not in it Leshaim Shamayim. **Rav Nissan Alpert**: Korach came from Kohas; among their jobs was to carry the Aron Kodesh; Korach had Ruach Hakodesh and saw that his family would be destined for greatness. But it was through his children, who ultimately did teshuvah; he erred though and thought the greatness would be his. He had to be on a very high level to get this Ruach Hakodesh; he was a very righteous individual. He was lifted up by the Aron Kodesh. So how could he be so evil, accusing Moshe of making up mitzvos, appointing his brother as Kohein Gadol on his own? How could it be? There are many layers in the mind of a human being. On the outer layer he was a big tzadik; but below the radar he had a deep problem. He wanted great honor, he was consumed with jealousy. He quotes **Rav Yisrael Salanter**: a person can appear to be a great tzadik on the outside, but there are dark sides that are base, lowly and corrupt; and sometimes these underlying traits can come to the surface and we are shocked that a person of such holiness can be this way. We are suddenly struck by this. **Rashi**: on the first pasuk of the parsha - when it says Korach took, it means he took himself aside from the right path - not that he took others to sin with his great persuasive words; but he took his brilliant self and allowed it to be dominated by his evil inclinations. As **Unkelus** says, he was a split personality; and had he just been able to completely sublimate his darker feelings, he would have remained a great tzadik and leader; a dark side of him came out. The proof, as said by the **Meshech Chachmah** and others is that had he been a tzadik he would have died by the fire, like the other 250 people who were true Ohavei Hashem. He didn't even bring the ketoras, like the good people; he died with Dasan and Aviram, who were evil; he showed himself to be a lowly personality at the end.