

D'var Torah by Rabbi M. Jaroslawicz for Parshas Korach 5775 (2015)

This week's Parshas Korach begins by giving us the lineage of Korach: the son of Yitzhar, son of K'has, son of Levi.

Most commentaries attribute the itemized listing of Korach's ancestry to make the following point.

"Even though" he came from such a good background, and had such an opportunity for greatness, he STILL sinned by succumbing to his Yaitzer Horah and craving immediate power.

The question asked by all is: Why stop there? If the point is to create a contrast between the righteousness of his heritage as compared to his inappropriate actions, make the contrast even greater. Go back one more step in the lineage to the most famous of all of his listed ancestors. Why not also list that he was a direct descendant of our forefather Ya'akov Avinu? That would surely make me realize how far Korach had strayed from the path!

We are taught that Ya'akov Avinu specifically prayed that he NOT BE mentioned in this event when he asked Hashem, "B'kahalam al teichad kevodee" in their congregation do not unite my honor [do not mention my name] (Beraishis 49:6). This seems very uncharacteristic of what we would think of Ya'akov. Was he so self-centered that he just didn't want his name associated with Korach? Would it not have been more "forefather-like" of Ya'akov to have prayed on Korach's behalf, rather than just trying to disassociate himself from him?

The Ohr Hachaim shares the following story as an insight to understanding our dilemma.

A police officer once arrested a young man holding a blowtorch, standing by a night deposit cash box outside of a bank.

The young man was immediately brought before a magistrate, who asked him:

"If I were to ask you what you were doing outside of the bank with a blowtorch, what would you say?"

"I would tell you the truth," the suspect responded. "But, because the truth is quite complicated and I don't think you'll believe me, would it be better if I just told you that I am the Chief Rabbi's son?"

"Quiet!" rebuked the magistrate. "Do not dare to repeat that in front of anyone else! If it were known that you are the Chief Rabbi's son, your punishment would have to be twice as severe."

Says the Ohr Hachaim. Ya'akov did not try to avoid being associated with Korach for selfish reasons. He did so because he knew that being associated with Ya'akov would only make it WORSE for Korach. He distanced himself in order to lighten the spiritual repercussions that Korach would have to endure later on. Therefore, Korach's lineage is listed in the Torah as going back only as far as Levi, and not the one step further to Ya'akov Avinu himself.

Fast forward to the year 2015. We must all remember that, in our world, we are constantly being judged by the company we keep and how those in our immediate circle behave. To maintain a good name, it behooves us to:

1. Associate with good friends and neighbors.
2. Encourage those around us to behave in a courteous manner . . . and give them positive feedback when they do.
3. Politely rebuke our friends to not talk negatively about others, and to not listen to them when they do. (Listening to Lashon Hara is as bad, if not worse, than speaking Lashon Hara yourself.)
4. Remember that the world watches our every move. We have an obligation to our forefathers and to our heritage to stand out as a nation amongst all other nations and to make a Kiddush Hashem with ALL of our actions, not just some of them.

We reiterate our heritage -- back to Avraham, Yitzchok and Ya'akov -- three times a day in the Amidah. They did not withhold their names from us. Let's not disappoint them in return.

Have a Great Shabbos!