

Parshat Korach 5782

This week's parasha opens with the words "Korach took". Or HaChayim points out that while the Torah tells us that Korach took, it doesn't tell us what (or who) Korach took. Grammatically, "to take" is a transitive verb, which requires an object, and that object is seemingly missing in the wording of the Torah.

Rashi fills that gap with two possible explanations. Rashi's first answer is that Korach took himself. He took himself to one side. He separated himself from the community, to raise objections to the leadership. Rashi's second answer is that Korach took others. He persuaded others to support him.

I would like to suggest two additional explanations of what Korach took, both of which are consistent with Rashi's comments on this first verse of the parasha.

The verse commences: "Korach the son of Itzhar the son of Levi took". Levi of course was the son of Yaakov, but the verse stops with Levi, without mentioning Yaakov. Rashi states that this is because in his deathbed blessings Yaakov prayed that his name should not be associated with Korach's dispute. Therefore the lineage stops with Levi.

My first additional explanation is that Korach took his lineage – he took the fact that he was a descendant of great people to try to persuade others to join him.

He wanted to go even further than Levi but could not. Korach sought to take in others, backed by his "yichus". Many try to obtain honour for themselves by quoting their "yichus". But they miss the fact that yichus on its own is not a sign of greatness. Rather it is a standard that we have to live up to.

My second additional explanation is based on putting together Rashi's comments that he took himself aside; he took in others; and later Rashi recounts that he took talitot made of techelet – blue wool – and asked did they need also need tsitsit – strings of blue. Korach took, and took, and took. In other words, I suggest that "Korach took" does not have to be transitive. Those simple words are effectively a narrator's comment: "Korach was a taker".

In conclusion: First, we may have illustrious forebears, in which case we must not just "take" their names, but rather must live up to their behaviour. Second, it is important to be a "giver" to our communities, and not just a "taker".