



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles
Study Guide

Korach
תשפ"ג

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Partners In Torah

Mission Statement:

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant. Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Welcome.

Thank you for coming!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

This week, Moshe Rabbeinu, the humble leader who intervened successfully and who many times saved the Jewish people, even putting his own life on the line, uncharacteristically presented Hashem with an ultimatum: Either You kill Korach and his cohorts in a miraculous way, or I am not Your servant sent to lead the Jewish nation. (Numbers 16:28-30)

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּזֹאת תִּדְעוּן כִּי יְדוּד שְׁלַחְנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים הָאֵלֶּה
כִּי לֹא מִלְּבִי

(כט) אִם כָּמוֹת כָּל הָאָדָם יִמְתּוּן אֵלֶּה וּפְקֻדַת כָּל הָאָדָם יִפְקֹד עֲלֵיהֶם לֹא
יְדוּד שְׁלַחְנִי

(ל) וְאִם בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא יְדוּד וּפְצֻתָה הָאֲדָמָה אֶת פִּיהָ וּבִלְעָה אֶתְּם וְאֶת כָּל
אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם וַיִּרְדּוּ חַיִּים שְׂאֵלָה וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי נֶאֱצַו הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה אֶת יְדוּד
28) Moshe said, “Through this shall you know that Hashem sent me to perform all these acts, **that it was not from my heart.** 29) If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me. 30) But if Hashem will create a phenomenon, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive into the pit – then you shall know that these men have provoked Hashem!”

With Moshe’s last words, the earth under Korach and his family, men, women, and children, opened and swallowed them alive. The “earth’s mouth” then closed up as if nothing had ever happened. Unlike an earthquake today, which leaves deep cracks and fissures in its wake, here the earth returned to its previous state.

Korach challenged Moshe’s authority claiming that Moshe out of nepotism chose his brother Aharon to be the high priest.

This is what happened to Korach and his family as a result of Moshe's words. But why did Moshe demand a *miraculous* demise for Korach and his co-challengers?

Moshe realized, and Hashem concurred, that Korach's challenge threatened to undermine the integrity of the Torah's transmission through Moshe, to the Jewish people.

Korach alleged that Moshe made up the laws of the Torah instead of bringing them straight from Hashem. When Moshe passed over Korach to appoint a leader for the *Kehat* family who was inferior to Korach by a league, Korach was convinced that it was Moshe's own choice and that he chose the less qualified individual because Moshe had something against him personally. Hashem surely knew that Korach, a 130-year-old sage and one of only four people holy enough to carry the Holy Ark, was the most qualified member of the *Kehat* family to be its leader. It couldn't have been Hashem Who overlooked him; it *had* to be Moshe. So, if Moshe could choose a leader that Hashem wouldn't have chosen, so, too, Moshe could invent laws that Hashem wouldn't have given.

Korach decided that once he was going to argue with Moshe, he should seek the highest position possible, *viz*, that of the High Priest, Aharon's position.

People would say, "Moshe couldn't even convince the people of his time, so why should we believe him? Look at Korach! He

challenged Moshe's authenticity. And, although Korach may have been killed, Hashem killed him out of respect for Moshe!"

This is why Hashem had to create a new type of death penalty, one never seen before, which would prove that Hashem chose Moshe to give His Torah to the Jewish people.

Rabbi Moshe Eisemann ל"צ as quoted in the book *Depths of Majesty* by Rabbi Zev Bhatia, adds a deep insight to this punishment.

A very important part of Moshe Rabbeinu's proof was that Korach and his henchmen would remain alive! This is telling us something very important. You see, had their punishment been to die, and to die in a terrible fashion, we would have learned that machlokes (fomenting an argument) is a terrible aveira (sin) one which carries a gruesome death penalty. However, that was not the case.

Machlokes, as terrible as it is, does not carry a death penalty. But something else is triggered in its wake. That something is a summary rejection by the physical world. It is as if the earth says, "Although your time to die has not come, you cannot stay here. Your life has become so filthy and loathsome that I cannot bear your presence here. You will therefore be swallowed alive..."

The verse in the Torah that describes the creation of man says (Genesis 2:7):

(ז) וַיִּצְרֶה יְדֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים
וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה :

7. And Hashem God formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being.

Rashi comments:

ויפח באפיו - עשאו מן התחתונים ומן העליונים גוף מן התחתונים ונשמה מן העליונים. לפי שביום ראשון נבראו שמים וארץ. בשני ברא רקיע לעליונים. בשלישי תראה היבשה לתחתונים. ברביעי ברא מאורות לעליונים. בחמישי ישרצו המים לתחתונים. הוּזַקַק בששי לבראות בו מעליונים ומתחתונים ואם לאו יש קנאה במעשה בראשית שיהיו אלו רבים על אלו בבריאת יום אחד (ב"ר פי"ד וע"ש יח):

Hashem made man from the lower realms and from the upper realms, the body from the lower realms and the soul from the upper realms because on the first day the heavens and the earth were created. On the second day He created the sky for the upper realms and on the third day He created the land for the lower realms. On the fourth day He created the lights for the upper realms, and on the fifth day He created the fish for the lower realms. On the six-day He needed to create something of the upper realms and the lower realms, for if He did not, there would be an imbalance in nature.

We see that, from its inception, Hashem was careful to create the world with a balance between the upper and lower realms. There

had to be peace in the world. The world could not be a place where an imbalance would exist.

Similarly, we say in our daily prayers that Hashem is:

יֹצֵר אֹר וְבוֹרָא חֹשֶׁךְ. עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם וְבוֹרָא אֶת הַכֹּל
*The Creator of light and darkness, **makes peace** and creates everything.*

The world exists on a very delicate balance. All the forces of nature are extremely fine-tuned and operate in harmony with each other to perfection.

When one creates an argument, he upsets the world's balance and is no longer entitled to remain here. This is the lesson of the earth swallowing them alive.

In addition to Korach and his family being swallowed alive, 250 people from the tribe of Reuven who joined with Korach in his rebellion for other reasons all died instantaneously when they attempted to bring an incense offering, which Hashem had not commanded.

In spite of all of this, still, the Jewish people were not completely convinced that Moshe was right.

The Torah tells us (Numbers 17:6):

(ו) וַיִּלְנוּ כָּל עֵדֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֶּחֱרַת עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר אַתֶּם הַמֵּתִים אֶת עַם יְדֹד

6) The entire assembly of the Bnai Yisroel complained on the morrow against Moshe and Aharon saying, "You have killed the people of Hashem!"

This complaint itself triggered another plague from Hashem which killed another 14,700 people. What would convince the Jewish people completely once in for all? If all of these miraculous events were insufficient to convince them, what *would*?

Hashem, of course, knew the answer. He told Moshe (Numbers 17:17-20)

(יז) דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְקַח מֵאֵתָם מִטָּה מִטָּה לְבֵית אָב מֵאֵת כָּל
נְשִׂיאֵיהֶם לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר מִטּוֹת אִישׁ אֶת שְׁמוֹ תִּכְתֹּב עַל מִטָּהוּ
(יח) וְאֵת שֵׁם אֶהְרֹן תִּכְתֹּב עַל מִטָּה לְוִי כִּי מִטָּה אֶחָד לְרֹאשׁ בֵּית אֲבוֹתָם
(יט) וְהִנַּחְתֶּם בָּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִיעַד לָכֶם שְׁמָה
(כ) וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אֶבְחַר בּוֹ מִטָּהוּ יִפְרָח וְהִשְׁכַּתִּי מֵעַלֵי אֶת תְּלִנּוֹת בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵם מְלִינִם עֲלֵיכֶם

17) *“Speak to the Bnai Yisroel and take from them one staff for each father’s house, from all their leaders according to their fathers’ house, twelve staffs; **each man’s name shall you inscribe on his staff.** 18) And the name of Aharon shall you inscribe on the staff of Levi, for there shall be one staff for the head of their fathers’ house. 19) You shall lay them in the Tent of Meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. 20) It shall be that the man whom I shall choose – his staff will blossom: thus I shall cause to subside from upon Me the complaints of the Bnai Yisroel, which they complain against you.”*

Moshe conveyed Hashem’s message to all the tribes who each gave staffs to Moshe with their names carved on them. The staff with Aharon’s name was placed in the Tent of Testimony among the other staffs.

The Torah reports: (Ibid 23).

וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרַת וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶל אֱהֲרֹן הָעֵדוּת וְהִנֵּה פָּרַח מִטֵּה אֱהֲרֹן לְבַיִת לְוִי
וַיֵּצֵא פָּרַח וַיֵּצֵץ צִיץ וַיִּגְמַל שְׂקָדִים
(כד) וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַמַּטֹּת מִלִּפְנֵי יְדֹדָאֵל כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּרְאוּ וַיִּקְחוּ
אִישׁ מִטֵּהוּ:

23) On the next day, Moshe came to the Tent of the Testimony and behold! The staff of Aharon of the house of Levi had blossomed: it brought forth a blossom, sprouted a bud, and almonds ripened.

24) Moshe brought out all the staffs from before Hashem to all the Bnai Yisroel; they saw and they took, each man his staff.

And that did it! This successfully quieted all the complaints against Moshe.

What? Another miracle conclusively settled the matter? What was wrong with all the previous ones? And what a whimpy miracle at that! A stick that was detached from the ground grew a flower, a bud and some almonds? How could that compare to an earthquake which pinpointed the people who needed to be swallowed up, and then closed up as if nothing ever happened?

Our Sages teach us that it wasn't the miracle at all that convinced them, rather, it was the message inherent in the miracle that made them realize that Korach's claim to the High Priesthood was not a possibility.

The Chidushei Harim explains the significance of Aharon's staff blossoming and bring forth a fruit in the Holy Tent of Testimony.

A branch when cut from the tree can no longer grow because it has been severed from its source of life, the tree. When Aharon's

branch in the Tent of Testimony filled with flowers, buds, and almonds, it was because it was still connected to its source of life, the Holy place in which it resided. This was a clear give-away that Aharon's roots and source of life was in the Holy Tent of Testimony; his staff was still connected to its source of life so it could continue producing fruits. Therefore, because no one else shared his holiness, he was the one chosen for the job of High Priest.

Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel, the Lakewood Mashgiach זצ"ל (1910-1998), provided the following explanation.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot instructs us to be like Aharon HaCohen.

(יב) הַלֵּל וְשִׂמְאֵי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם. הַלֵּל אֹמֵר, הֲוֵי מִתְלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן, אֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם, אֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמְקַרְבֵּן לַתּוֹרָה

Hillel said: "Be a student of Aharon the Cohen, one who loves peace, and pursues peace. He loves Hashem's creatures (humankind) and brings them closer to the Torah."

Aharon's mission in life was to bring peace and harmony to people who were at odds with each other. This could be husband and wife, partners in business, neighbors, or family members. The Torah teaches us that when Aharon died, the *entire Jewish nation* mourned his loss, including the women. Indeed, when Moshe died, the women didn't mourn him because he had little to do with them. But Aharon was involved in bringing peace between husband and wife, and, as such, was beloved by the women who benefitted from his peacemaking efforts as well.

The Midrash astoundingly shares that when Aharon died, 80,000 children had his name. These children were born after their parents were on the threshold of breaking up, and Aharon had saved their marriages. Out of gratitude, they named the next boy born, after him.

The Mishna moreover relates that Aharon *ran after peace*. When two people were in an argument, Aharon would go to one of them and tell him that his friend really feels terrible about the fight and wishes to make up, but that he is too embarrassed to come forward. Aharon would then go to the second party and tell him the same. When each person heard that the other wanted to make up, when they next crossed paths, each went over to the other and apologized.

With Aharon being the peacemaker between people, he was the natural choice to be the Cohen Gadol, the High Priest. After all, what is the job of a Cohen? To bring peace between man and his Creator. By bringing people's sacrifices to Hashem and bringing atonement to the person, the Cohen restored the peace between man and his Father in Heaven.

To acquire the trait of an **אוהב ישראל**, one who loves the Jewish people, was something that Aharon worked on every day of his life. It is not something that comes naturally to a person but must be focused on and developed within the person step by baby step, one step at a time. Throughout his life, Aharon worked on himself and ultimately became the perfect agent for peace.

This is what the staff of Aharon, which grew flowers, buds and almonds, represented. It taught that to become a High Priest, one must work on himself and grow into the person worthy of bringing peace between man and Hashem. Only Aharon was qualified for this job. Korach had no track record or experience in this area at all. Although he was a great man on his own and had worked on himself to get to where he was - a bearer of the Holy Ark - in the matter of working in the trenches with people and their issues, to this he had no connection.

This realization is what quieted the complaints against Moshe claiming that he chose his brother for the High Priest position based on nepotism. Of course, Aharon was the only man for the job! He was supremely suited for this role, and Korach was not! How could we not have seen this?

The Talmud (Yoma 52b) says:

והתניא משנגז ארון נגנזה עמו צנצנת המן וצלוחית שמן המשחה ומקלו של אהרן ושקדיה ופרחיה
*When the Holy Ark was hidden away, with it went the little flask of manna, the bowl of anointing oil and **Aharon's staff with its almonds and flowers.***

We see from the Talmud that Aharon's staff had the flowers and almonds on it at the same time. This is very unusual. When a fruit grows on a tree, first comes the blossom or the flower. After pollination, the petals fall off, a bud is formed, and the bud grows into the fruit. It was a miracle that both the flower and fruit were

present on the staff at the same time. What was the need for this miracle?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל explains that the flowers that precede the fruit represent the preparation and toil that precede the mitzva (the fruit). This is because Torah and mitzvot are unlike any other endeavor. In any other endeavor, say learning a profession, all the study and practice that one does is only beneficial if, in the end, he achieves his goal of ordination in that profession. But if he fails his exams and after all his efforts cannot practice the profession he so arduously prepared for, he has wasted all his time. In Torah and mitzvot, contrarywise, all the effort put into performing the mitzvah or trying to understand a piece of Torah are holy and an eternal part of the mitzvah. Moreover, even if it turns out that the person does not fulfill the mitzvah or understand the piece of Torah, *he will be rewarded for the effort alone*. The toil is holy because it is an effort to serve Hashem, and on its own merit is deserving of reward.

This is the lesson that Hashem wanted to teach us. The toil is part of the mitzvah and remains forever. This concept applied to Aharon also. He was a person who toiled greatly to achieve the level of אהבת ישראל - love of his fellow Jew. The ever-present flower represented the toil that made him who he was and therefore, worthy of the position of High Priest.

Korach was jealous of Aharon's position of honor. Had Korach thought about it just a little, he would have realized that

he lacked the skill set to be the High Priest. He should have concentrated on his own unique qualities and worked on them to perfection. He then would have reached his purpose, and Hashem would have placed him in his proper role.

This is a lesson for all of us. We tend to look at others' wonderful qualities and wish those qualities for ourselves. While it is okay to learn from others, we should not wish to have their qualities; we should rather look into ourselves and determine what our qualities are and work on the unique qualities that Hashem has given each of us. When we would do that, we will reach our purpose for being in this world.