



Rabbi Joseph Dweck | Senior Rabbi

הרב יוסף דוויך | רב הראשי

### Korah 5776: All of Me

***"Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live,  
it is asking others to live as one wishes to live."***

— Oscar Wilde

No sooner had the Children of Israel begun serving their forty year penalty for the ill report of the Spies, when internal rebellion literally caused the earth to shake beneath the people's feet.

Korah, a cousin of Moshe and Aharon, insists that they have wrongly assumed power and control and that they are misrepresenting G-d and his message.

*They assembled against Moshe and against Aharon and said to them: 'Too much is yours! Indeed, the entire community, all of them, are holy, and G-d is in their midst! Why then do you exalt yourselves over the assembly of G-d?' (16:3)*

This was a direct attack on the established leadership and threatened to undermine the foundations of the nation.

It is important to consider the psychological and spiritual aspects of the man who spearheaded the rebellion. What was the motivation for Korah's attack?

Korah took issue with the establishment of Aharon and his line as Kohanim. Hiding behind his care for the people he insists that Kohanim as an institution is an aberration and that 'the entire community are holy and G-d is in their midst'. Yet, as Rashi indicates, he was not all too concerned with the people in his fight for equal status because when Moshe offers to attend a 'divine selection process' the next morning,<sup>1</sup> Korah willingly accepts knowing that if he is chosen then all others who came forth would perish.

*'It shall be that the one who G-d chooses he is the holy one'. (16:5)*

*Do I not know that the one who G-d chooses is the holy one? Rather Moshe said: 'I am hereby saying be aware! The one who is chosen will come out alive and all the others will perish.'* (Rashi, *ibid.*)

Korah and his group were not genuinely interested in social reform, refined leadership or freedom for the people. Their rebellion was fueled by neediness and a sense of personal deficiency.

*When Korah saw his head (after having been shaved as part of the consecration as a Levi) and then saw Aharon being adorned in regal clothing, he felt degraded and became jealous of Aharon....<sup>2</sup>*

The irony is all too familiar. Korah's fight for power by expressing an empty care for the people was fueled by his own feelings of inadequacy. These feelings arise in us at times when we question or doubt our purpose. We all, for whatever reason, feel that we are not smart enough, successful enough or powerful enough at times. The automatic response to these feelings usually involves jealousy, sadness, guilt or shame. By holding on to, and believing in, these feelings we stunt our own capacity for growth and achievement.

There is danger in allowing ourselves to feel this way rather than attempting to heal it by actively finding ways to build our self-esteem and self-respect. When ignored feelings of inadequacy might fester and beyond diminishing their own capacity for growth we might look to fill the internal void by using and taking advantage of other people in various ways.

<sup>1</sup> 16:5-7

<sup>2</sup> Zohar III 49a. Cf. Sanhedrin, 110a



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Korah and his people had given themselves over to doing this causing havoc to the people; and even worse, destroying themselves in the process.

Korah had engaged in behaviour that was more than just immoral; it was evil. While Korah had readily put Moshe and Aharon on trial he had not done so for himself. And it was in that failure that the darker aspects of his personality were given opportunity to rise and gain strength. He consistently sought to destroy not only his own life but the lives of many other people in order to fulfil his own selfishness.

Naturally, since evil is designed to hide its opposite, its pretense is commonly that of care. The message Korah sought to convey was: 'Because my friends and I are good people we are deeply concerned about the community and their welfare'. Deception is subtle by nature and those who practice it tend to believe it themselves.

Korah may have convinced himself that his protest was one of great virtue. But the Torah exposes his intentions in the first two words: *Korah took*. It does not then say what he took, only *that* he took. Taking was his definitive act. He had no interest in giving. Korah sought to take the personal glory of those around him in order to fill the void of his own, an act that our hakhamim identify as a cardinal sin.

*One who gains honour by making light of his fellow has no portion in the World to Come. (Rambam<sup>3</sup>)*

Perashat Korah highlights for us the great perils of preying on others for the sake of one's own fulfilment. We learn how important it is for us to build our own self-worth and self-respect so that we may stand tall and draw from our own G-d-given strength and authority that comes with our very being.

## V Korach

- 60a Coup: Korach and associates make a leadership challenge (16:1-19)
- 60b God threatens destruction (16:20-22)
- 60c Korach and associates are destroyed. Camp goes into panic (16:23-35)
- 60d Censers are moulded into plates to cover the altar (17:1-5)
- 61a People accuse Moshe and Aharon of being killers (17:6-8)
- 61b God punishes with plague: 14,700 die, Aharon saves the rest (17:9-15)
- 62 Test of the twelve rods (17:16-24)
- 63 Aharon's rod is placed as a warning (17:25-26)
- 64a People fear for their lives (17:27-28)
- 64b Only Levi'im can approach the Mishkan (18:1-7)
- 65a Offerings due to the Kohanim from the people, a salty covenant (18:8-20)
- 65b Offerings due to the Levi'im from the people (18:21-24)
- 66 The dues for Kohanim from the Levi'im (18:25-32)

*Taken from, 'Torah for Everyone' by Rabbi Dr Raphael Zarum, Dean of LSJS*

<sup>3</sup> Hilkhhot De'ot, 6:3