



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

Korach's Sons Find a Rebbe

On the day that the renowned Rabbi Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam zt"l (1813-1898), the eldest son of the Sanzer Rebbe, was inducted as the newly appointed 'Head of the Rabbinical Court' in Shinev, the entire city came to hear his *drasha*, as was the practice at such ceremonies. The Rebbe asked for a volume of the *chumash*. He turned to one page, then the next, then flipped toward the end. He sat and stared at the words for a few minutes. He then softly said, "*Torat Hashem Temima*", "The Almighty's Torah is perfect"...What can I possibly add?" And that was his entire *drasha*. (*Divrei Yechezkel, Oz Ve'Hadar* Edition, Introduction, Vol. 1, p.27) Apparently this practice was not uncommon for the Rebbe of Shinever.

The Chassidim of the grand Rebbe of Shinever were convinced that when he did share *divrei Torah*, the words and messages emanated from an elevated place on high.

In attempting to identify the sin of Korach some commentators argue that it was the sin of pride, others say it was

the sin of jealousy, or possibly the sin of selfish ambition that underscore his transgression.

On Shabbat parshat Korach the Rebbe of Shinev shared an insight: the crux of Korach's transgression was that he rejected the principle of 'Rebbe and Talmid.' In other words, he believed that submitting to an authority figure is unwarranted and unnecessary - "all of us are holy", we are all equally important. (*Divrei Yechezkel, Parshat Korach*)

Indeed, the notion of accepting the authority of a Tzaddik and loyally following their teachings is an assertion rooted in the Torah. "They had faith in God and in Moshe, His servant" (*Shemot* 14:31). The Sages also famously expressed this notion in *Pirkei Avot*: '*Aseh lecha Rav*', Make for yourself a rabbi." Yet, Chassidism took this notion further. They placed special emphasis on the notion called *Emunat Tzaddikim*, to have faith or trust in a leader.

The Shinever Rebbe, commenting on this *parsha*, suggested that expressing esteem for a Tzaddik is an act of humility which causes one to ascend in their own spirituality. At the end of the Korach episode the leaders of each tribe were summoned to bring a *mateh* (staff) that would be bundled together with the staff

of Aharon. The imagery is suggestive of students surrounding a Tzaddik. Interestingly, the word *mateh* also connotes 'to incline towards' or 'to turn to'. The people of Israel were being taught the lesson that we defer to saintly leaders for guidance and inspiration.

Of all possible signs, why did the Almighty choose to prove Korach wrong by displaying almonds flowering on a staff. The Rebbe provides an answer. He cites Rashi's second explanation quoting the *Targum Onkelos* that it produced a cluster of almonds "knotted together one next to the other" (*Bemidbar, Rashi 17:23*). This is symbolic of an assembly of Jews gathering around the staff, or the leadership of a Tzaddik.

Chassidut taught that without a guide and mentor one is incomplete

The incident of Korach is one of the most disastrous events in the annals of our history. Under Korach's sway, well respected and distinguished leaders chose a track of insurgency, attacking Moshe and Aharon, ultimately losing their lives. However, this is not the end of the story.

The Kabbalists, said the Rebbe, found a silver lining. The AR"Y Hakadosh, Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572) noticed a hint that revealed something of the true legacy of Korach: The concluding letters of the verse "*tzaddik katamar yifrach*" "צדיק כתמר יפרח". A righteous man will

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flourish like a date palm (*Tehillim* 92:13) spell out the name Korach. This hints to the idea that in the future, which is symbolized by the concluding letters, he is righteous. (*Likutei Torah, quoted by the Shinever Rebbe, Parahst Korach*).

There are surely numerous ways to unpack this obscure comment. Let us suggest the following: “Korach will ultimately be righteous” is meant to suggest that this will unfold through his progeny. In other words his own children will repent and become righteous individuals. The Torah teaches that Korach’s sons did not die (*Bemidbar* 26:11). However, this is perplexing. Did not the earth open its mouth and swallow Korach and his family members? Rashi gives us an answer (*ibid*): Initially, Korach’s sons took part in his counsel. However, at the time of the dispute, their hearts and minds opened to thoughts of *teshuvah* and a high place was provided for them in Gehinnom.” The Talmud from which Rashi takes his comment adds that from the place they were perched, they sang *shira*, song (*Sanhedrin* 110a).

Amazingly, Korach’s children had a change of heart and, furthermore, composed songs of soaring praise.

Is there any record of the songs they composed? The answer is yes. Over a dozen psalms in the book of *Tehillim* were composed by the *Bnei Korach*, the sons of Korach. Perhaps the most well known is the chapter that is chanted before the shofar is sounded on Rosh Hashanah, *Tehilim* chapter 47; seven times in most congregations. Their poetry and language

are some of the most exalted in all of our holy literature.

How did the sons of Korach extricate themselves from a movement designed and led by their own father? All the more, Rashi teaches that, along with their father, *they* were the first ones involved in the conspiracy. After mocking and deriding Moshe how did they all of the sudden do *teshuvah*?

Perhaps the answer to our question may be found in one of the songs they authored. The following approach is suggested by Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Salant, who served as a Rav in Jerusalem in his *Be’er Yosef* (*Bemidbar* 26:11)

In the book of *Tehillim*, chapter 45, the sons of Korach praise a leader who possesses the impeccable quality of righteousness. In a moment of clarity, they composed a poem of praise to the character of the truly righteous individual. This leader is likened to *shoshanim*, to roses. By this they meant, says a midrash, that the *talmid chacham* is soft like a rose, pleasant like a rose, and saturated with good deeds. Strikingly, Korach sons now praise Moshe, the consummate *talmid chacham*. With this song they attempt to further endear him to the people.

Although they had initially sought to instill hatred of Moshe into the hearts of the nation by reframing him as a cruel and power-hungry tyrant, somewhere along the way they switched paths. Perhaps they saw the truth of their father’s hypocrisy and arrogance. Even more, perhaps they perceived the truth concerning Moshe.

In spite of the negative propaganda and gossip, Korach's sons soon realized that Moshe was a saintly man, not at all desirous of power. They saw through the falsehood spread by the rebels. They saw Moshe for who he really was: a humble servant and an advocate of the people. In a word, Korach's sons found themselves a Rebbe.

Moshe's humility is legendary. We gain a glimpse of it in our parsha. Moshe never took advantage of his position as a leader, he never asked to be compensated. Even when deserving, he declined remuneration (*Bemidbar, Rashi 16:15*).

When the first Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Rokeach, also known as the '*Sar Shalom*' (1779-1855) was to become the leader of the Chassidic court, he prepared for this awesome task by accepting upon himself to stay up and study Torah for one thousand nights. His wife also prepared with him. Together they set out on this undertaking. His wife stayed up with him and held the candle that illuminated the room. Only after the thousandth night did the Rebbe feel he was ready to assume the yoke of leadership. (*Something To Say*, Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, p.154). Imagine! The Belzer Rebbe who had already attained lofty levels of *tzidkut* felt that he needed preparation to achieve the proper holiness to lead others.

Every Jew needs a teacher and Rebbe for guidance and inspiration. Chassidut taught that without a guide and mentor one is incomplete.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski, a notable American Chassidic rabbi and

well known psychiatrist specializing in substance abuse, witnessed a change in the Jewish world in his lifetime. He wrote that a shift has occurred in the quality of the relationship between teacher and student. The strong bond that used to exist has been eroded. He describes how people would often identify themselves with their teachers, (i.e. "I am a talmid of Rav Dovid"). Instead today, a student generally refers to the institution where they studied rather than the rebbe. This was a grave concern for Rabbi Dr. Twerski, who said, "A personal relationship has a much greater impact upon a person than an institutional relationship." ("Not Just Stories", Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, p.253).

This notion of the Rebbe/Talmid or Rebbe/Chassid reached its zenith in Chassidic thought. The theme of the Shinever Rebbe's drasha on parshat Korach is that when we humbly sit at the feet of the Rebbe we become even more aware of the Tzaddik's own humility and excellence. This awareness, projects us, the students, to strive for even greater heights: to pursue with even greater zeal fulfilling the Divine will.

Often on Shabbos when the chassidim would gather for the *Tisch* to hear the Rebbe in Shinev, they would observe their Master turning the pages of the *Chumash* and then, with his face aglow, would simply say: "The Torah is perfect - I have nothing to add." With these modest words the Tzaddik conveyed the notion of Torah's perfection. But perhaps more significantly, he taught his students to know that inner wholeness and purity is within reach. ■