



THE NEW OLD PATH

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Look Who's Talking

Whether it's criticism of the person they are or the position they hold, everyone has seen an attack on others in some way, shape or form. *Korach*, the bearer of the name of this week's *parsha*, was the child of Kehat's second son, Yitzhar and felt that he was entitled to a more significant leadership role. In an attempt to acquire the position of High Priest, he attacked the leader of the Jewish people who he thought could grant it to him – Moshe.

Korach and his followers challenged Moshe and Aharon: 'It is much for you (*rav lachem*)! For the entire assembly, all of them are holy and why should you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem' (*Num.* 16:3). Rashi explained that this attack was aimed at their abuse of power, in that they assumed too much prominence for themselves (Rashi on *Num.* 16:3). This is a rather strange accusation to make, 'for the man Moshe was very humble, more than any other person on the face of the earth' (*Ex.* 6:12; 6:30).

When someone wants to bring down a leader, their weaknesses are scrutinised

and exploited. According to Moshe himself, he had objective leadership faults in that he was by no means an eloquent orator. Korach could have picked on this overt weak point, or alternatively borrowed Moshe's sibling's slander (*Num.* 12:1-3). No man is perfect, and Moshe was no exception, but why did Korach pick on that character trait, which Moshe excelled in above all other men? Furthermore, why is Korach having the *parsha* named after him when he is the clear villain?

Sometimes, before we look at who is being talked about, we need to look at who is talking. In a discussion of declaring deficiencies in others, the Talmud stated: 'he who invalidates [others]... does so with his own blemish' (Tractate *Kiddushin* 70a). In psychology, this is termed projection bias; a defence mechanism where one denies personal attributes and ascribes them to others.

Of all the potential flaws at his disposal,

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perhaps the reason that Korach accused Moshe of a superiority complex was that he possessed an inferiority complex – he projected his pursuit for honour onto Moshe. Moshe responded subtly with the identical syntax that Korach used to accuse him, reversing Korach's terms and insinuating that perhaps his accusation represents his own flaws: 'It is much for you (*rav lachem*) sons of Levi!' (Num. 16:9).

In a society where often the greatest way to the top is on the back of others, we must be critical thinkers and consider the slanderer, not just the slander. When we ourselves perceive flaws in other people, whether true or not, we must be very careful to analyse if we are the true possessors of these flaws. Ultimately, Korach's pivotal position as a sage and

Levite was not enough and he wanted more. Whilst Moshe did possess certain flaws, honour seeking was not one of them. The key to the Torah's juxtaposition of the two primary protagonists was that whilst Korach needed to have what he wanted, Moshe wanted what he had and the difference of these two positions is the key to contentment.

Perhaps the reason why the *parsha* is named after Korach is to teach us that we should all be wary of the bit of Korach that we contain within us. If we focus on ourselves and are happy with who we are, then we can aim to perfect our own flaws rather than projecting them on others. ■

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