

And Korach ben Yitzhar ben Kehas ben Levi took. (16:1)

Rashi observes that the name of the family Patriarch, Yaakov *Avinu*, is not mentioned. He quotes the *Midrash Tanchuma* that explains that Yaakov pleaded that his name not be associated with Korach's controversy. While this may be laudable, it is not as if his name is never associated with Korach. Indeed, in *Sefer Divrei Hayamim* (I: 6:23), where the service in the *Bais Hamikdash* is detailed, the entire *yichus*, pedigree, is detailed, and the Patriarch's name is mentioned. The question is obvious: The fact that Yaakov's name is not mentioned does not detract from reality that he was Korach's ancestor; so, why not mention it?

Veritably, questions abound concerning the entire Korach debacle. Each one has merit, with the explanations that are derived, thereby imparting critical lessons concerning interpersonal relationships and the tragic consequences of controversy. For our purpose, I will focus on a difficult lesson to be gleaned from the *parsha* of Korach, a tragic encounter between Jewish leadership which seems to plague us throughout the generations. Sadly, when people with deficient character traits are involved, there will be *machlokes*, controversy, and it will take its toll on the Jewish community. The only way to prevent it from occurring is to ignore the rabble rousers. It takes two to maintain a dispute. When the wicked one initiates the controversy, our function is to ignore him. If he has no one with whom to contend, he will go away. If we respond to him, we become partners in a *machlokes*.

When Moshe *Rabbeinu* was confronted with the tragedy of a rift within *Klal Yisrael*, he understood that this was a transgression that would not go away. The people must learn the egregious nature of controversy and acknowledge the seriousness of its consequences. While Moshe was not going to respond to the rabble rousers, he could not allow this infraction to go unabated. The punishment sustained by the would-be usurpers of *Klal Yisrael's* Heaven-picked leadership must be one that would be remembered throughout the generations. Moshe prayed to Hashem, "If these (men) die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem who sent me..." As soon as Moshe concluded this prayer, the ground opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households and all the people who were with Korach and all their possessions. They and all that was theirs descended alive to the realm of the dead.

For all appearances, Moshe wanted an "earth-shattering" punishment that would send a reverberating message concerning the evil of *machlokes*. If this is the case, what prompted him to choose this particular punishment? Why did the earth have to open its "mouth"? What "mouth" does the earth have? It does not speak, and, if it had, what words would have emerged from the earth's mouth as it consumed Korach and his followers?

Horav Pinchas Freidman, Shlita, quotes the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 11a, which teaches that from the very depths of the earth, Korach and his assembly actually do justify and acknowledge Hashem's verdict, by their declaration, *Moshe v'Toraso emes*, "Moshe and his Torah are true." The *Talmud* relates that *Rabbah bar bar Chanah* met an Arab merchant who indicated to him the exact spot at

which Korach and his assembly were swallowed up. He pointed to two cracks in the ground which were emitting smoke. The Arab then instructed him to bend his ear to the ground in order to listen to the sounds/voices emanating from deep within the earth's recesses. This is where he heard, *Moshe v'Toraso emes*. Apparently, every thirty days Korach and his assembly are returned to that exact place where they make this declaration.

Rav Friedman now introduces us to a novel idea, presented by the **R'ma m'Panu** in his *Asarah Maamaros*. He quotes the **Arizal** who observes that the last letters of the words, *Tzaddik katamar yifrach – kuf, raish, ches* - (the righteous) [person] will bloom like a date palm) (*Tehillim* 92:13), is, indeed, a reference to Korach who, from the moment that he entered the bowels of *Gehinom*, began justifying the Heavenly decree issued against him and his assembly. Thus, they chant *Moshe emes v'Toraso emes*. Thus, when the world as a whole will achieve its *tikkun*, spiritual rectification, so, too, will they.

The **Shlah HaKadosh** reiterates this thought, but adds that this is possible only because Moshe *Rabbeinu* prayed that Korach and his followers be swallowed alive. Since they entered *Gehinom* alive, they were able to repent, and one day will achieve their ultimate repair. Had Korach actually died, he could not repent, since there is no *teshuvah*, repentance, after death. The efficacy of *teshuvah* is only as long as one is in control of his faculties. Therefore, although Korach was taken down to the realm of the dead, he will one day be allowed to rise and flourish like a date palm.

Having said this, we conclude that Moshe's decree that Korach be swallowed up alive served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it provided the nation with living proof of the glory of G-d. When one witnesses a terrifying punishment being meted out to one who rebels against Hashem, the Almighty is glorified. The horrible sounds/screams and the devastating sight which they witnessed encouraged the people to run far and fast from a dispute and also to believe that everything Moshe did was in accordance with the will of Hashem.

On the other hand, Korach benefitted exponentially from Moshe's decree, since he now was availed the opportunity to repent. It allowed him/them to achieve their *tikkun*, through their confession that "Moshe is true and his Torah is true (and we are liars)."

Having explained Moshe's actions, we gain a new perspective concerning our quintessential leader's inordinate and atypical prayer that such a horrible punishment be administered to Korach. Moshe had always demonstrated incredible forbearance and compassion, begging forgiveness on behalf of the Jews a number of times. Yet, this time, he seems to have been acting in a manner totally out of character. We now realize that Moshe actually did Korach an everlasting favor by allowing him the opportunity to be spared from eternal ostracism.

We turn to our Patriarch's prayer that his name not be associated with Korach's dispute. We know that he was Korach's ancestor; how does deleting his name from Korach's lineage make such a difference? The **Or HaChaim HaKadosh** explains that Yaakov did not want his name associated

with Korach, because he did not want the element of “Yaakov,” the origin of *Klal Yisrael’s neshamos*, souls, to become tainted. He explains this esoterically: When Hashem created mankind, He created a tree that contained all of the branches of *kedushah*, holiness. When Adam *HaRishon* sinned and became personally blemished, all the souls associated with him also became affected by this spiritual taint. When Avraham successfully passed the *Asarah Nisyonos*, Ten Trials, the spiritual stigma was expunged, leaving the contamination on the branch of Yishmael. When Yitzchak *Avinu* withstood the trial at the *Akeidah*, Binding of Yitzchak, his *neshamah* was cleansed, leaving the taint on Eisav, thus allowing for Yaakov’s *neshamah* to emerge unsullied of any spiritual contaminant.

Yaakov was similar to Adam prior to his sin, allowing him to become the tree, which now had twelve branches. One of these branches was Levi, which was divided into three: Gershon, Kehas, Merari. Kehas’ branch divided into four: Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron and Uziel, with Korach branching off from Yitzhar.

When Korach sought to alter the branches of *Kehunah*, Priesthood, he blemished the branches of *kedushah* from which he descended. Until now, all of these branches had been holy at their roots, which were connected to the tree. Korach negatively affected the branch of Yitzhar and Kehas, since they comprised his roots. Indeed, this spiritual defilement went all the way back to Levi’s branch. By not mentioning Yaakov’s name, the original source, the basic essence of the “tree” was left unimpaired. This was the essence of Yaakov’s prayer: Do not allow the spiritual disease to reach the original source/Yaakov, of the tree. Thus, the tree could one day rejuvenate itself, since the scourge that affected the rest of it had not affected its origin.

The **Sfas Emes** takes this idea a bit further, claiming that Yaakov *Avinu* symbolized the *middah*, attribute, of *emes*, truth. When Yaakov prayed to Hashem that his name not be included *b’adas Korach*, in Korach’s mutinous assembly, he was asking that his attribute of *emes* not become tainted. This *nekudah*, internal point, this Divine spark of *emes*, is the source of the *neshamah* within us. Despite the various transgressions committed by a person, he will not become sullied. It is connected to the source of all purity, the tree of Yaakov. Only because of Yaakov’s prayer the Korach dispute not blemish the “tree’s” root of *emes*. When Korach and his followers recite *vidui*, confession, in *Gehinom*, they declare, *Moshe emes v’Toraso emes*; they are granted *Tikkun*, spiritual emendation, since the internal spot of *emes* within them, their *neshamos*, did not become affected. Yaakov did not merely pray for his dignity. His prayer saved not only Korach and his followers; it also spared us from having our *nekudas ha’emes* sullied. Thus, once a person confesses his transgressions, he becomes worthy of achieving his *tikkun*.