

# Vayoel Moshe

## Parashat Korach

A collection of talks and lessons, on the weekly Parasha and Holidays, from the scion of the holy lineage, Rabbi Yoel Pinto, son of our holy and esteemed Admor, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, Chief Rabbi of Morocco. Torah thoughts, novelties and explanations, precious teachings to illuminate the Parasha and Holidays, rich with novelties in all realms of the Torah, esoteric reflections, from throughout the weekly portions and Holidays. • Issue no. 6 • Parashat Korach, 5784



**The earth instilled in man the inclination to stray from the word of God “for the sake of Heaven”. Korach followed the way of this inclination, and was thus swallowed by the ground**

In this week's Parasha the Torah discusses the rebellion that Korach and his cohorts started against Moshe Rabbenu and Aharon. Jealousy was burning in the heart of Korach. Korach was from the family of Moshe Rabbenu. Many of the other family members were leaders in Am Yisrael (the Jewish people), such as Moshe Rabbenu and Aharon (who was given the Kehuna, the priesthood). Yet, Korach did not obtain any leadership role. Korach was most upset, however, at the fact that his younger brother's son, Elitzafan was elected leader of the tribe of Levi. Korach, being that he was very knowledgeable and wealthy, was dissatisfied that he wasn't given any leadership role. He began to persuade members of

Am Yisrael to rebel against Moshe Rabbenu. He successfully gathered two hundred and fifty distinguished members of Am Yisrael to revolt against Moshe Rabbenu and Aharon. This group spoke disparagingly to Moshe Rabbenu and Aharon, and demanded they abandon their role.

This controversy caused God to be very angry. He decided to destroy Korach and his assembly using a unique method that was never used before. This was done to ensure that their punishment would be remembered forever. This was done to ensure that in the future nobody would come to protest the leaders of Am Yisrael, or object to the fact that the decednedts of Aharon

possessed the Kehuna. God thus used a new process of punishment; He opened the ground, and it swallowed Korach and his assembly.

**Why was Korach punished through being swallowed by the ground?**

The question arises: Why out of all methods of punishment did God choose to use the ground swallowing them?

This can be answered through one of the glowing lessons that is taught by our master and teacher, the holy Admor in his wonderful teachings. In the book of Bereshit, we learn that when Adam ate from the tree of knowledge that he was not the only one to do so. We

see that Chava ate from it, as well. Additionally, the snake was guilty of persuading Chava to eat from the tree. We find that the ground was cursed, as well as the verse states (Bereshit 3:17)

אַרְצָה הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבְיָךְ

which translates to “cursed be the ground for your sake”. This is rather perplexing, for why did God punish the ground for the sin done by others? The answer to this question lies in the Midrash (Rabba 5:9) that says that after Adam sinned we find that God cursed the ground. This was because the ground sinned previously. When did the ground sin? On the third day of creation, when God sectioned off the sea to specific areas, He commanded the ground to produce trees and plants. More specifically, God commanded the ground to produce trees that would taste like the fruit they would bear. This is written in the verse (Bereshit 1:11)

עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשָׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֵוֹ

which translates “fruit trees producing fruit according to its kind”. Rashi comments “the taste of the tree should be like the taste of the fruit”. The Midrash continues and relays that the ground did not obey

the word of God; rather, it produced trees that were tasteless. The ground is thus remembered as the first creation to disobey the word of God. The Midrash concludes that only after Adam sinned did God curse the ground. Even though the ground defied the word of God three days prior.

**The ground was the first creation to disobey the word of God, and it did so in order to lessen the punishment of Adam.**

The holy Admor, quotes the Ohev Yisrael (Parashat Bereshit) who asks the following question. Why did the ground defy the word of God? Moreover, the ground had seemingly no benefit from disobeying this order. On the contrary, the ground would be more desirable if the trees it produces would have had a fruity taste. The Ohev Yisrael answers that the ground knew that God would use its dust to create man, and man would be the pinnacle of creation. The ground also knew, however, that man was destined to sin and eat from the tree of knowledge. The ground felt compassion for man, who would be created from its dust, and wanted to minimize the punish-

ment for man’s sin. Therefore, the ground devised a plan. For if man, the pinnacle of creation were to sin against God, it would be disastrous and unforgivable. The ground disobeyed the word of God, thus exhibiting that it was not man’s desire to do so; rather, it was part of his nature (as he was created from dust of the ground).

It is clear from the words of the Ohev Yisrael that the ground intended to do good. However, it should not have disobeyed the word of God. For no creation knows what’s right better than its creator.

**By the virtue of the ground disobeying the word of God, it instilled in man the nature to defy God’s word and stray to places God did not intend for.**

Through the ground disobeying the word of God, the nature to defy God’s word was instilled in man. For even when God places man in a certain place to dwell, and arranges a role for him, man always desires wishes he were somewhere else. He says “if I were in this place, I would have more time to study Torah...If I had a different profession, I would have more time to devote to God.” These thoughts,

however, are sourced from the evil inclination. For nobody knows what's better for man, than God. And when God places someone in a certain situation, that place is the best place for his service of God. If one thinks that his service of God will be better in another place, he is essentially disagreeing with God. Rabbi Aharon of Karlin in his work Bet Aharon (Parashat Vayetze) quoting Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin teaches the following lesson. The verse states

וְאַהַבְתָּ אֶת הַשָּׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ

which translates to “And you shall love Hashem, your God, with all your heart”. The sages relay that this verse is teachings that one’s heart should not disagree with God. The word that the sage use for God in this context is המקום, the Omnipresent. The word המקום translates literally to “the place”. Thus, Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin explains – that when the sages say not to disagree with “the place”, they mean do disagree with the place one is placed in. One should not think that if he were in a different place he would be more successful in his service of God. Rather, exactly where he is is where he can strive and reach great heights in service of God.

Adam ate from the tree

of knowledge due to the evil inclination that he received from the ground. This inclination urged him to reach higher levels of spirituality with this deed.

If we look deeply into the matter we will see that the thoughts stemmed from the nature that the ground’s sin implanted in him. Adam began to think that by violating the word of God he could in effect reach higher levels of spirituality. The urge that he had to eat from the tree of knowledge was not a physical urge; rather, it was spiritual. Adam wanted to reach greater heights in his understanding of God than what was allotted for him. The commentaries on the Torah point this out, as well. Notably, Rabbi Yonatan Eibushutz (Yearot Devash 2:9) writes extensively and eloquently to explain this idea. He says that Adam wanted to reach the fiftieth level of understanding. However, God decreed that no living man could reach that level. Thus, if one would eat from the tree of knowledge he would subsequently perish. Only then would he be able to reach the fiftieth level of knowledge.

**Man was punished in two separate ways due to his sin. “With the sweat of your face you**

**shall eat bread” and “for dust you are, and to dust you will return”.**

We find that after Adam sinned God set forth two punishments for his sin. However, originally the punishment for the sin was only death (Bereshit 3:3). After Adam sinned God set forth the following punishment: “With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread”, which entails man having to exert himself in this world. Then God related the second punishment which was that man would eventually die, and his remains would rot in the ground. The Chatam Sofer asks, why did God impart an additional punishment that He did not warn about in the outset?

**Through “With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” one is saved from death, and is happy with his lot.**

The answer to the question of the Chatam Sofer may be as follows. “With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” is not a curse; rather, it is a blessing that if used properly will keep death away from man. Moreover, it will keep his corpse from rotting. What led to Adam’s sin was his desire to become more sophisticated in his service and knowledge of God was his nat-

ural longing for changing environments. This desire stems from the ground, from which he was created. Man is destined to return to dust, as he sinned through its influence. The repentance for this is to be happy with his lot, and to avoid any jealousy of his peers. The way one will reach this level of being "happy with his lot" is by toiling for what is destined for him. If one is to receive all he needs without having to toil for it, he will not appreciate it. Moreover, he will desire what isn't meant for him. If one exerts himself to earn his livelihood, or exert himself in Torah study he binds himself to his work. Additionally, he won't be jealous of his peers. By virtue of this, his corpse will not rot. Our sage said (Pirke Avot 4:21) "Envy, lust and honor drive a man from the world". This means that jealousy essentially leads to death. We find in Mishle (14:30), as well "but jealousy is the rot of the bones". Jealousy leads to the rotting of one's remains.

**Korach did not fulfill the verse "With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" and he was thus jealous**

Now that we see that the ground was it who imparted jealousy and the

desire to stray from the ways of God, we can now understand why Korach was punished by being swallowed by the ground. This punishment stands as a testimonial for the punishment for jealousy and straying from the way of God. Additionally, we find that Korach did not fulfill "With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread", and thus he followed these ways. The Midrash Rabba (Bamidbar 18:15) relays that Korach received his wealth effortlessly and dishonestly. Before Am Yisrael left Egypt, Korach collected all of Paroh's treasures. However, our sages teach that he was not entitled to these treasures, for only those who were enslaved in Egypt were eligible for them. Korach, however, was from the tribe of Levi, and the tribe of Levi were not enslaved in Egypt.

Moreover, Korach did not reach spiritual heights through exertion. The Midrash Rabba teaches (Bamidbar 18:16) that Korach did not receive his position and post through exerting in Torah study or performing good deeds; rather, only due to his heritage. Additionally, he obtained his post due to the merit of his future descendant, Shmuel.

**Korach followed the**

**way of the ground for "the sake of Heaven", and was thus swallowed by the ground**

Since Korach did not fulfill the verse "With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" his inclinations prompted him to be jealous of the spirituality of others. He was jealous of Moshe Rabbenu receiving prophecies from God, and of Aharon being granted the merit to visit the Kodesh Hakodashim (Holy of Holies). Moreover, he was jealous of Elitzafan who merited to be a tribe leader in Am Yisrael, and thus his prayer was surely powerful. Korach thought to himself "if I were in their place, I would surely be closer to God". He did not follow the proper path of accepting the plan that was routed for him, ultimately following the way of the ground. Therefore, his punishment was to be followed by the ground, who was the source for this evil inclination.

Therefore, Korach being swallowed by the ground stands as a testimony for others who try to change their destiny, and attempt to partake in things that were not meant for them. Korach stands as the reminder to not follow the way of the ground, even if one thinks it will be advantageous to his spirituality.