

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 268

Korach | Preserving the Honor of Torah Scholars



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

Dedicated to the hatzlacha of
Chaim Saka and his family

קרח | אנגלית

...❧ PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL ❧...

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Parshat Korach

The Life of Alexander the Great

Benny sat in the waiting room; the person ahead of him at the doctor's office was taking longer than expected. Having already finished his daily Torah study quota, Benny looked over the nearby bookshelf for a book to study. The shelf did not hold many books, and as his hands ran over them, they finally pulled out the book '*Josephus*.'¹ He opened it and began to read...

He later continued reading from the same book he found in a local library, even after he left the doctor's office, until he finished the first volume. That night, at home, he found and began reading the second

volume – which deals with the life story of one of the greatest conquerors of all time: Alexander of Macedon.

And thus the second part concludes (in the thirteenth chapter):

“Alexander continued to seek out the world. He went to the ends of the earth, to deserts and seas, and it entered his mind to ascend to the heights of heaven, and to descend to the abyss of the great seas. He journeyed to the ends of the earth, the deserts and the seas, and set his face to Babylon. He did so by means of tremendous efforts and wondrous magic, as is written

—*Wellsprings of Wisdom*—

1. The *Tur*, as well as the *Shulchan Aruch*, elucidates the laws of Shabbat that pertain to speech (Orach Chayim §307). There, the *Bach* writes as follows: "The Book of *Josephus*, and the *Chronicles* of Rabbi Yosef HaKohen

and the like – from such works one may derive words of moral instruction and fear of Heaven; therefore, even if they have been translated into a foreign tongue, it is permitted to read them.”

in the Chronicles of Alexander and His Deeds that were composed by the magicians and sages of Egypt. Alexander also wrote a letter and informed his teacher Aristotle of all this.

Afterward, Antipater, his general, conceived in his heart to kill him with a potion of deadly poison in Babylon. He brewed the potion from a deadly substance and placed it in a lead vessel; due to its potency, he found no vessel in which to put it that would not break, except a lead vessel. He tried it in vessels of iron and copper and in earthenware and glass; there was no vessel that did not burst from its potency.

He sent that potion with his brother Iollas, who was Alexander's cupbearer. And it came to pass one day that the king grew angry with Iollas the cupbearer, and struck him with a rod upon his head. The man resented the king in his heart and harbored great hatred. After some days, King Alexander made a great banquet for all of

his officers and advisors – a celebratory feast upon returning from ruling over India – and his cupbearer, remembering that the king had struck him on the head, served him the deadly poison in wine. The king drank the wine and was not aware of it, and after about an hour, a great pain seized him in his liver, and suddenly he cried out with a loud cry as if an arrow had struck his heart, and he placed his hand on his heart.

He ordered himself brought to his palace, and there he died in Babylon. He instructed his deputy – whose name was Ptolemy – to embalm him, and he brought him to Egypt and buried him in the city of Alexandria, which he had built in his name.

Alexander's life was thirty-two years. At eighteen years of age, he began to wage war, and by the time he was twenty-five, he had defeated twenty-two kings and subdued them under him, and during his lifetime, he subjugated all of the nations to serve him.

Alexander's birthday was in the month called *Pichot* in the

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Egyptian tongue – that is the month of Iyar – on its fourth day, on a Wednesday at sunrise. And in that same month, on its fourth day, on a Wednesday at sunset, he died...”

Benny closed the book, and his thoughts wandered: “What a marvel! He lived such a very

short life – only 32 years in all – and yet he still managed to conquer so many nations and lands?!” His eyes began to close from exhaustion, but he fought off his tiredness, recited the *Shema* prayer before going to bed, and soon fell asleep...

The Lust for Power

After the morning prayers the following day, Benny washed his hands and sat down to eat breakfast. As he ate, he processed in his mind all of what he had read the day before.

Many questions lingered in his mind: “I don’t understand! What was Alexander the Great missing?! Why did he drag himself across distant lands, wearying himself with wars? Why didn’t he instead establish himself firmly in his own land, and empower those closest around him – thereby making his own people happy and content? What interest did he have in conquering far-off lands?!”

Benny decided to consult his rabbi, who, in response, opened up a Tanach and shared (I Kings, chapter 1):

"King David was near the end of his days. Meanwhile, his son Adonijah ben Haggith declared himself heir, assembling chariots, horsemen, and fifty runners—*‘Adonijah son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, “I will be king.” And he provided himself with chariots and horsemen, and fifty men running before him’* (v. 5). He canvassed for support and won over the powerbrokers—Joab ben Tzeruyah, the army commander, and Abiathar the priest—along with the king’s

sons (except for Solomon) and David's servants. Emboldened, he staged a coronation feast: *'Adonijah then sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fatlings by the Zoheleth stone which is beside Ein-Rogel; and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah, the king's servants'* (v. 9).

"As the revelry raged, Nathan the Prophet came to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother: 'You know that G-d promised that Solomon would reign, and now Adonijah has made himself king. If we don't act, a great conflict will erupt after David's passing. Go to David; I will support you.' Bathsheba entered, received permission to speak, and said: 'My king, you swore that my son Solomon would inherit the throne; but now Adonijah has made himself king...' While she was still speaking, Nathan arrived and asked: 'Has the king decreed that Adonijah shall reign?' David summoned Bathsheba and swore again: 'Solomon your son shall reign

after me.' And so it was: Solomon became king, and Adonijah was put to death."

"You see," the rabbi completed his thought, "in Adonijah's heart surged a craving to rule—*'I will be king.'* That same craving—the lust for power—also animated Alexander of Macedon and inspired and drove everything he did. It overtook his personality, and for it—for the thrill of dominion—he was ready to sacrifice anyone, even his own self. He joined that grim cadre of absolute rulers intoxicated by power, who turned despotic and sank into corruption—men who lost all proportion between themselves and others, for whom ordering beheadings or drowning their rivals became trivial. Their drive to rule was a base compulsion, like an addict's dependence—a lust born of deficiency, not of strength.

So the answer to all your questions is one and the same: the indomitable and insatiable lust for power."

The Purpose – Honor of Heaven

“Rabbi,” Yigal asked, “it is true that G-d created the world with the need for leadership—a ‘head’ for the general populace—but how can one tell when the said leadership is in accordance with G-d’s will, or when it is powered by and stems from mere power-lust?”

The rabbi closed his eyes, pondered, and said: “The G-dly kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, ZY"A, describes in Tomer Devorah (ch. 3) the character traits of a true Jewish leader:

‘Just as the Supreme Father is merciful toward His creatures, so too shall this leader be a father to all of G-d’s creatures – especially to the Jewish people, who are the holy souls that emanated from Him. He must always seek mercy and blessing for the world, just as the Supreme Father is compassionate toward His creations.

He shall always pray over the distress of those in dire straits as if they were truly his own children and as if he himself had formed them – for that is the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, as Moses, the faithful shepherd, said: “Have I conceived this entire people?... that You should say to me, Carry them in your bosom” (Numbers 11:12); and he will bear the entire people of G-d “as a nurse carries an infant” (ibid.).

"He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; he shall gently lead the nursing ewes" (Isaiah 40:11) – he will attend to those who are expiring, seek the one who is missing, heal the broken, sustain the ones in need, and bring back those who are lost. He will have compassion on the people of Israel and bear their burden with a pleasant countenance, like the all-merciful Father above who endures all. He will

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not grow weary, ignore them, or become disgusted, but will

guide each one according to his need.”²

❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧

2. In this connection, Rabbi Mordechai Gerlitz shared the following tale
(*Tzintorot HaZahav*, vol. 3, p. 16):

"One day, the disciples and chassidim in Lizhensk noticed that the Rebbe, Rabbi Elimelech, had ceased putting on Rabbeinu Tam tefillin; a day passed, and two days passed, and Rabbi Elimelech sufficed with donning only Rashi tefillin.

"Yet, as great as the amazement was and as abundant the astonishment, no one, not even the closest of his disciples, dared to ask the Rebbe the reason for the matter and to request an explanation; the disciples understood that were this a change of view and a shift in conduct, the Rebbe would certainly go to the trouble of instructing them to do likewise, and from the fact that he was silent and did not instruct anything, one may conclude that the matter belonged to the hidden counsels of the Al-mighty, and they were not to stick their heads between the high mountains.

"After a few days, Rabbi Elimelech resumed donning Rabbeinu Tam tefillin as at first; and now he revealed to his close disciples his reason and rationale for having refrained from doing so in the preceding days:

"All his life, Rabbi Elimelech was scrupulous to rise at midnight to the

service of the Creator; from that hour the sacred divine service of the coming day began for him, and he would proceed without pause until after the Ma'ariv prayer of the following night; therefore, his holy dwelling was closed and barred every night from after the Evening Prayer until midnight, while the members of the household and all around were especially vigilant then and refrained from disturbing him, so as to allow him to taste the evening bread, to conduct a spiritual self-accounting for all the events of the day gone by, as was his holy practice every single night, and to recite the Bedtime Shema—labors that consumed a very great deal of time—and in the short time remaining, to grant his eyelids a brief slumber and gird strength for the service of G-d on the coming day.

"One night, contrary to his routine, several delays occurred to Rabbi Elimelech after the Evening Prayer, and after the Bedtime Shema, there remained only a very short interval of time to mount his bed before the hour of midnight would arrive. But then, only a few short moments after he closed his eyes, loud knocks were suddenly heard upon the door of the dwelling, and from beyond the door a voice was heard asking to bring before the Rebbe the name of his daughter, who needed an urgent salvation.

Parshat Korach - The Purpose – Honor of Heaven

The rabbi continued, “In a similar vein, Rabbi Yoram

Michael Abargel, ZY" A, taught (Imrei Noam, Vayakhel, Discourse 7):

—*❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧*—

“A soft sigh escaped the lips of Rabbi Elimelech, and while he washed his hands and rose from his bed to open the door for the Jew, a slight thought flitted through his mind: ‘I have no rest, neither by day nor by night!’

“In the blink of an eye, Rabbi Elimelech thrust the thought from his heart, hastened to open the door, asked the man kindly for his daughter’s name, bestowed upon him a blessing and hurried to offer a prayer on behalf of the one in need of salvation; and indeed, by the grace of G-d, before long the man returned and bore tidings that the longed-for salvation had come.

“Yet now Rabbi Elimelech could no longer return to his bed before he would again conduct his spiritual self-accounting – such had been his practice before any sleep whatsoever; and as soon as he began to take personal stock, Rabbi Elimelech recalled the slight thought of discomfort that had flitted through his mind earlier, when the Jew roused him with his knocking...

“Woe to you, Meilech!—Rabbi Elimelech began to chasten himself with a sharp rebuke—‘when you heard from beyond the door that a Jew needed salvation for his daughter, you were aggrieved in your heart at your disturbed rest—if they had awakened you from

your sleep for the sake of your own daughter in need of salvation, would you also then have been aggrieved in your heart?! That means, then, that you feel a difference between the distress of your own daughter and the distress of another Jew’s daughter! If so—Rabbi Elimelech passed judgment upon himself—you are no longer to be reckoned as a chassid – a pious one! That being so, what business have you to don Rabbeinu Tam tefillin?! For it is explicitly ruled in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 34:3) that one should don Rabbeinu Tam tefillin “only if he is established and renowned for piety.”

“Thus, Rabbi Elimelech refrained from donning Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, accepting upon himself to labor anew over his character traits and to repair and improve the love of a fellow Jew that had been ‘lacking’ within him, until he would no longer feel any difference between his own daughter and the daughter of another Jew who needed salvation.

Only after several days of toil and exertion on correcting his traits, until he sensed in his soul that there was no longer any difference for him between his own offspring and the offspring of another Jew, did Rabbi Elimelech permit himself to return to his previous practice and to continue donning Rabbeinu Tam tefillin.

the plain reason why the nesi'im ('princes') were so called was because they were exalted and lifted up.

However, there is a deeper level here. The Torah also calls clouds nesi'im (Proverbs 25:14), and a cloud – the Gemara (Ta'anit 9b) teaches – is created by vapors rising from the salty seas, sweetened in the clouds, and returning as sweet rain. So too the tzaddik, the leader of the

Jewish people, takes bitter souls, sweetens their bitterness with love and compassion, breathes new life into them, and teaches them to accept with love what befalls them and to rejoice in the good that G-d bestows. The tzaddik knows his mission and the weight upon him—to draw near the souls that depend on him—exerting all his powers with pleasantness and wisdom to extend salvation and mercy to those sent to him.”³

❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧

3. On this matter, it is told in *Avihem shel Yisrael* (vol. 2, p. 45), as follows:

“Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, of blessed memory, was exceedingly careful with the honor of every person, and especially with the honor of children; this is the theme of the following story told by the rabbi’s driver:

“Rabbi Eliyahu was invited to the bar mitzvah of an orphaned boy, but the rabbi could not participate in the celebration, for that very evening he had a major lecture at a rabbinic conference that was being held in one of the hotels at the Dead Sea; the rabbi set out for the conference, and meanwhile rains of blessing fell in the center of the country, and a great quantity of rainwater flooded

all of the wadis in the Judean Desert, and the streams overflowed the roads leading to the hotels at the Dead Sea...

"The road to the hotels was blocked, and the rabbi was compelled to return to Jerusalem; on our way back, the rabbi said to me, 'Please drive to the bar mitzvah; all of these torrential waters are the tears of the bar mitzvah boy whose celebration I could not attend.' I did not understand how the rabbi could possibly know that the boy had, in fact, cried; I thought to myself that perhaps the rabbi was exaggerating a bit.

“We arrived at the bar mitzvah, and the rabbi’s arrival surprised everyone, for he had informed the hosts that he would be unable to come to the celebration; and when he arrived, everyone rejoiced,

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“By contrast,” the rabbi said, “leadership that draws its strength from impurity exists only for itself—to seize from others whatever they have.”

Yigal thought for a moment about the deep insight that his rabbi had shared, and said, "From Josephus, it's clear: Alexander the Great's leadership burned with power-lust; his entire rulership was about taking, not giving. However, at the same time, this lust made him perhaps

the greatest conqueror in all of history."

The rabbi's eyes gleamed. “In truth, I know someone far stronger and greater—someone whose conquest truly earned him the title of the greatest conqueror in human history.”

“Who is that?!” Yigal burst out.

The rabbi smiled. “Patience—first let me begin with a bit from this week’s Torah portion, and then I’ll answer your question...”

The Tale of Korach's Downfall

“This Shabbat,” said the rabbi, “we read the 38th portion in the Torah: Parashat Korach – a Torah portion containing 95 verses.

“The great bulk of the parashah is devoted to Korach’s

rebellion together with his followers against Moses, and the horrific punishment that ended the rebellion:

“On the 8th of Av, in the second year after leaving

—*❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧*—

especially as the rabbi remained in the hall longer than planned and longer than was his usual practice.

“As the rabbi left the hall, the bar mitzvah boy escorted us and told me, ‘When the rabbi told me that he would not be able to

come to my bar mitzvah, I cried all night; I am so happy that the rabbi came to bless me’; I felt that the words of the bar mitzvah boy were intended especially for me, for I had lacked faith in the rabbi’s power of foresight...”

Egypt, the spies returned from the land of Israel and terrified the people with frightful tales: *'The land through which we passed to spy it out is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are men of great size. There we saw the Nephilim — sons of Anak, of the Nephilim — and we were in our own eyes like grasshoppers, and so were we in their eyes'* (Numbers 13:32–33)...

“That night – the eve of the 9th of Av – the people of Israel sat on the ground and wept without cause: *'It is out of G-d's hatred for us that He brought us out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the*

hand of the Amorites to destroy us!' (Deuteronomy 1:27).

“That baseless weeping was the third sin that the people of Israel committed. The first sin was the sin of the Golden Calf; the second was the sin of the complainers (in Parshat Beha'alotcha); and the baseless weeping (the sin of the spies) was the third sin.

“Then – only a few days later (after the sin of the spies) – came the fourth sin: the rebellion of Korach and his faction.⁴

“Korach decided that he wanted to be the High Priest. He approached Moses with the claim: *'You have gone too far! For all the community – all of*

—*❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧*—

4. In the words of Rashi (Numbers 16:4):

“‘Moses heard and fell upon his face’—because of the quarrel! For already this was in their hand the fourth offense!

They sinned with the Calf—‘And Moses pleaded’ (Exodus 32:11); with the complainers—‘And Moses prayed’ (Numbers 11:2); with the spies—‘And Moses said to the L-rd: and Egypt will

hear’ (ibid., 14:13); now, at the quarrel of Korach, his hands were weakened.

This is analogous to a king's son who offended his father, and his father's friend appeased him once and twice and thrice; when he offended a fourth time, the hands of the friend slackened; he said, ‘How much must I trouble the king? Perhaps he will no longer accept from me.’”

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them – are holy, and G-d is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the congregation of G-d? (Numbers 16:3). In other words: since the entire congregation of Israel is holy – no one, including yourself – has the right to rule and preside over a lofty role that looms over anyone else.

“Korach – who was a great man – succeeded in sweeping along behind him a large group of Jews, including renowned Torah scholars, public figures, and people of high standing.

“The Israelite camp was thrown into turmoil; the entire atmosphere grew sullied. The uproar and chaos spun completely out of control!

“Moses turned to Korach and his followers and pleaded with them: “Please wait until morning!” *‘Come morning, G-d will make known who is His, and who is holy, and will draw him near to Him; the one He chooses, He will draw near to Himself’* (ibid., v. 5).

“Korach agreed. In his heart, he was surely thinking: ‘A few more hours of activity can only benefit me and my interests,’ and indeed, that whole night, he stood and agitated the people of Israel against Moses.

“Morning arrived. Korach and his company were still holding fast to the dispute – until their swift and ignoble end soon came:

“Two hundred and fifty men were consumed by fire; three family groupings in the Jewish people were swallowed by the earth (Korach, Dathan, and Abiram); and Korach himself was counted among both the burned *and those swallowed!*

“In addition: *‘Those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand, seven hundred – aside from those who died with the camp of Korach’* (ibid., 17:14).

Benny was quite surprised to hear the timeline and sequence of events, and quipped, “I just can’t understand – how did

Parshat Korach - The Power of Mockery

some members of the Jewish people *dare* to join with Korach to rebel against Moses?!”

Korach's rebellion happened in the third year of Moses' leadership, and in those three years, Moses achieved what no leader had ever achieved before:

He redeemed a people from the hand of their oppressors – a people that had been sunk in the darkest layers of the soul. Moses succeeded in redeeming their bodies *and* their souls, and in awakening in them life – to *want*, to *yearn*, to *aspire*, and to perceive the goodness that existed in them, within themselves; Moses succeeded in giving them backing and support – steadiness and encouragement – during the most difficult times: in the

blazing desert, in the freezing nights, and when facing a stormy sea and menacing desert beasts. In just fifty days, he succeeded in raising them from the depths of degradation to the stature of prophets – until they merited at Mount Sinai to perceive the Divine Presence “face to face”; and finally, after they sinned, he risked his life for them, until he succeeded in sweetening the decree and – through erecting the Mishkan (Tabernacle) – once again bringing the Divine Presence down to earth!

Benny concluded passionately, “I just can’t understand: after the people of Israel experienced *in their very souls* all that Moses had done for them – how could they possibly turn against him so insolently?!”

The Power of Mockery

The rabbi listened attentively to Benny's question and replied:

“Our holy Sages revealed⁵ that the previous night, Korach

 *Wellsprings of Wisdom* 

5. The following passage is excerpted from *Otzar Aggadot HaTorah* (vol. III,

p. 156), by Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Klapholtz.

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went around among the tribes of Israel and whispered into their ears malicious rumors that he had fabricated in order to incite them against Moses and draw them over to his side. He said to them: 'Do you think that the whole dispute I stirred up was just so I could take the respected roles for myself? Not so! I seek only that very greatness for *all* of us. Moses took kingship for himself, and the High Priesthood he gave to his own brother!

"Korach went on and shared a 'tale of abuse' that was inflicted upon a poor widow, who was destitute and who lacked everything:

"She had a field from which she supported herself and her two daughters, and barely eked out her livelihood from that field.

"When this wretched widow came to plow, Moses told her: 'You may not plow with an ox and a donkey together' (Deuteronomy 22:10).

"She came to sow – he told her: 'Your field may not be

sown with mixed seeds' (Leviticus 19:19).

"She came to reap and to gather the sheaves – he told her: Leave the gleanings, the forgotten sheaf, and the corner of the field for the poor.

"She came to thresh – he told her: Separate the gifts: the *terumah*, the first tithe, and the second tithe, to give to the priests.

"The poor woman accepted this ruling upon herself and did everything Moses instructed her. After she separated all of the required gifts, she found that nothing was left of all her toil – not even enough to sustain herself and her daughters. So she got up and sold the field, and with the proceeds she bought two sheep so she could clothe herself with their wool, drink their milk, benefit from their offspring, and sustain herself and her daughters.

"When the sheep gave birth, Aaron came and said to her: 'Give me the firstborns, for thus the Holy One, blessed be He,

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told me: *every firstborn that is born, you shall give to the priest.*' The poor woman accepted the decree and gave him the firstborn.

"Then the time for shearing arrived; Aaron came and said to her: 'Give me the first of the fleece, for thus said the Holy One, blessed be He: *"The first shearings of your sheep you shall give him"*' (Deuteronomy 18:4).

"When she heard this, the woman said to herself: I have no strength left to withstand this man. Better I slaughter my sheep and enjoy their meat.

"But even this did not help her at all. After she slaughtered them, Aaron returned and came to her, saying: 'Give me the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach (i.e., the priestly portions).'

"At that point, the poor woman's patience snapped. She began to weep bitterly and cried out: 'Even after I slaughtered them, I haven't escaped this man's clutches! If so, let them be consecrated to Heaven.' She

declared: 'They are *cherem* (devoted property) for the Temple!'

"Aaron said to her: 'In that case, they are all mine. For the Holy One, blessed be He, told me: *"Everything that is cherem in Israel shall be yours"*' (Numbers 18:14). So he took them and went on his way, leaving her crying with her two daughters.

"Korach finished his fabricated story, and turned to the assembled people and said, "Do you really think that the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded such absurd commandments? No – Moses made them up from his own mind and claimed them to be from G-d."

"All the people who had heard these dreadful words of Korach were convinced that he was right, and they too became inflamed against Moses and Aaron, and they lost their reason and wanted to stone Moses and Aaron...

"Our Sages conclude this account and declare (Yalkut Shimoni – Parashat Korach, Remez 953): 'Korach was a scoffer!'

Parshat Korach - The Power of Mockery

“Rabbi Moshe Reis explained (*El HaMekorot*, vol. II, p. 73):

‘Someone who would relate such a tale to the public would be considered today to be a champion of justice, morality, and civil rights. However, our Sages’ attitude to things is entirely higher and purer than ours. Such a point of view they referred to as *mockery*. *Leitzanut* (mockery) means seeing matters through a crooked lens – that is, isolating a particular point, removing it from the context of the larger issue to which it belongs, and presenting it in a distorted and biased manner. With such a presentation, anyone not well-versed in the truth and the essence of the matter will think that this satirical portrayal represents the entire truth of the matter.

‘Korach, as the above anecdote shows, took serious matters that stand at the pinnacle of the Jewish faith and presented them in a superficial and falsified way. With his seemingly "innocent" tale, he emphasized half-truths, which

is generally even worse than an outright, brazen lie.

‘The commandments of gifts to the poor and gifts to the priesthood all serve to distance a person from tendencies toward selfishness; their sole purpose is to cultivate feelings of love and compassion for others. But in Korach’s warped view, these were nothing more than tactics by Moses and Aaron aimed at plundering the underprivileged classes of the Jewish nation. Likewise, the priestly gifts mentioned in Korach’s story were in fact intended to bring a person closer to his Creator, by separating a portion of everything for the sake of G-d and giving it to the priestly tribe who serve in the Sanctuary of G-d (see *Sefer HaChinuch*, mitzvah 507). But this fundamental detail was apparently unknown or overlooked by Korach.

‘Similarly, the rationale behind the laws of *cherem* – which decrees that an item declared "consecrated" becomes wholly sacred and leaves a

Parshat Korach - Intoxicating Words of Mockery

person's possession – has been explained by the commentators as intended to distance a person from the trait of anger and impatience, and to prevent him from uttering vows and oaths in a moment of fury. Korach

however, ignored all of this and instead found these mitzvot to be a cause for heartless persecution of a miserable widow. Indeed, such a person is rightly called a *letz* (scoffer) – because of his scoffing words...”

Intoxicating Words of Mockery

Benny shook his head, still perplexed. "Korach's story sounds tragic, but how could a single sad story completely change their minds?"

"It's not the story itself," the rabbi explained patiently. "It's how the idea was framed. Let me elaborate.

"Every person—no matter who they are—holds their own opinions. The question is, how much inner strength do they have to stand firm behind those opinions?"

"When we look at humanity, people can be grouped into three categories: the strong, the average, and the weak. These labels—'strong,' 'average,' and 'weak'—refer to the degree of

inner strength present in a person's soul.

"For people of average inner strength—and certainly the weak—if their own opinion comes into conflict with their personal comfort, they will usually choose comfort over taking a stand. They prefer to bend to the opposing view—anything to avoid the struggle of fighting for their beliefs. In other words, they shy away from standing firm for what they believe.

"For the average person, any inner strength they possess rarely finds expression. Ultimately, they choose the comfort of their office and status over their principles.

Parshat Korach - Intoxicating Words of Mockery

"Therefore," the rabbi continued, "to sway these people, you don't have to try very hard. All you really need to do is create a 'language of mockery.'

"For example, take all the values you cherish and attach positive, inspiring names to them. Then assign titles of honor and esteem to anyone who upholds those values.

"Conversely, take all the values you want to eliminate and label them with derogatory, dehumanizing terms. In doing so, you effectively assassinate the character of anyone who espouses those values.

"And as a result, you will have conquered all the average people.

"Hardly any average person will sacrifice their social standing—or invite discomfort—for the sake of a principle, no matter what that principle is.

"To summarize: ridicule is a potent method of destroying people and ideas. Laughter is meant to bring joy, but it can be

weaponized to humiliate and oppress. By turning those you dislike into objects of derision, you effectively destroy their character.

"You might even call it 'satire' to make it sound progressive," the rabbi added with a faint shake of his head, "but in reality it's a weapon designed to annihilate genuine progress—quashing independent thought, silencing honest opinions, and even extinguishing true faith.

"In contrast, those in the third group—the strong—are made of entirely different stuff!

"A truly strong person, whose internal convictions shine brightly, cannot be made to change their opinion. No matter how much fire you aim at them, they will not surrender.

"It doesn't matter how much you slander someone like this, how you portray them as a nobody, or how viciously you mock and try to break their spirit—they will not abandon their deeply held view.

Parshat Korach - Intoxicating Words of Mockery

"A person with solid, fortified convictions cannot be changed!"

Benny nodded slowly. "I think I'm starting to understand now."

"Exactly," the rabbi said with a satisfied smile. "That's why I said you were mistaken in calling Alexander of Macedon the greatest conqueror in history. Alexander only conquered territories—he overpowered the people living there.

"And that kind of conquest had only one real result: it bred enemies and hatred. As the historian Josephus recounts in his chronicles, time and again, people attempted to assassinate Alexander and bring about his downfall.

"Korach, by contrast, conquered souls. He inspired people to truly love him, to become utterly devoted to him—even to the point of self-destruction.

"Throughout history, there have been others with similar

powers of persuasion, but they only managed to win over ordinary people. Korach, however, in just 36 hours won over 250 formidable individuals—leaders of the Sanhedrin (the high council of Israel), men of strong and courageous convictions!

"That is why I call Korach 'the greatest conqueror in human history.'

"But that title did him no good in the end. Korach, who dared to challenge Aaron's priesthood, was swallowed up by the earth. The 250 leaders who likewise aspired to the priesthood and offered incense were themselves consumed by a fire from heaven. And before that fire had even died down, a plague swept through the camp and killed another 14,700 people.

"Yet despite all this, the emotional tumult Korach sparked in those 36 hours did not die down, and the people remained unconvinced. The very next day, the entire community

Parshat Korach - Intoxicating Words of Mockery

of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, accusing them: 'You have killed the people of G-d!' (Numbers 17:6).

"So a new, divine sign was necessary. Moses instructed each tribal prince to bring a staff inscribed with his name and lay it in the Tent of Meeting, in front of the Ark. The staff belonging to the man G-d chose would blossom.

"Sure enough, the next day when Moses entered the Tent, he saw that Aaron's staff—representing the house of Levi—had sprouted. It had blossomed, produced buds, and borne ripe almonds—a miraculous sign indeed (Numbers 17:23).

"Thus, the Torah concludes the story of Korach's rebellion against Moses and Aaron.

"Immediately afterward, the Torah sets out the laws of the priestly gifts—commanding the Israelites to give the priests twenty-four special gifts. And as the Mishnah teaches (Pirkei Avot 6:5): 'Great is the Torah more than the priesthood or kingship, for kingship is acquired through thirty virtues, priesthood through twenty-four,⁶ But the Torah is acquired through forty-eight qualities...'

"And tellingly, these gifts were commanded right after Korach's rebellion," the rabbi concluded.

—*❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧*—

6. The Yaavetz explains in *Etz Avot*, chapter "Kinyan Torah" (*Lechem Shamayim*, Mishnah 6):

"The priesthood [was given] twenty-four [gifts]"—ten in the Temple: the sin-offering, the bird sin-offering, the guilt-offering, the provisional guilt-offering, the communal peace-offerings, the log of oil of the leper, the Two Loaves, the Showbread, the remnants of the meal-offerings, and the omer meal-offering.

Four in Jerusalem: the firstborn (an unblemished firstborn animal) and the first fruits, and the portion lifted from the thanksgiving-offering and from the ram of a Nazirite, and the hides of sanctified offerings,

Ten in the provinces: terumah, and the tithe's terumah, challah, the first of the fleece, the priestly portions [of ordinary slaughter]—the foreleg, the jaws, and the innards—redemption of the firstborn son,

The World and Its Purpose

“Rabbi,” Benny asked, “what is the meaning of the Mishnah which you quoted: ‘Kingship is acquired through thirty virtues, priesthood through twenty-four, and Torah is acquired through forty-eight things?’”

“To explain this to you,” said the rabbi, “it would help for us to study what Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, ZY"A, wrote (*Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, vol. III, p. 198):

‘The importance of a tool is measured by its purpose, not by its size. Indeed, if a person were to fashion an extremely large tool for a paltry, trivial purpose, it would be nothing but ridiculous.

The kings of Egypt, for example, built the pyramids. Their enormous stones – each one loaded by hundreds of people – were hoisted up high to the top of the structure. Millions of slaves were tortured in back-breaking labor for this,

and many of them perished in the work. In the end, the structure was completed, and indeed it has stood for thousands of years...

The purpose? – A burial place for a tyrant, so that his memory would not be forgotten. But in the end, his name *was* forgotten. His memory attached to the pyramid is minor! Instead, the wonders of the structure are extolled, and only by the way is it mentioned that some "mummy" named such-and-such is buried here.

It wasn't only the Egyptians who were fools – all human beings are the same.

What is the value of the grand buildings erected in our own generation – buildings constructed by the squandering of the powers of one's soul and body, by the investment of huge sums of money – especially

 *Wellsprings of Wisdom* 

and redemption of a firstborn donkey, an ancestral field [that reverted to the Temple],

and a consecrated field, and stolen property of a convert [who left no heirs].

Parshat Korach - The World and Its Purpose

considering that people take on outlandish loans that turn the borrowers into abject slaves to the lenders for their entire lives...

And all this so that those around will make a fuss and be impressed. But honor is mere illusions; a neighbor may flatter him while inwardly scorning him. All of these worldly accomplishments are nothing but vanities!

This being the case, and since G-d created all 'tools' in accordance and for the fulfillment of their purpose – its size notwithstanding, we must consider why G-d created the mundane world as large and as grand as it is.

In simpler words: what is the ultimate purpose of the creation of the world?

Our Sages reveal that the purpose is the revelation of *Kiddush G-d* (sanctification of G-d's Name) in a person's heart!

The rabbi continued:

"The spark of divine holiness in creation can be revealed in

three primary ways – through the sanctity of priesthood, through the majesty of Kingship, and through the wisdom of the Torah scholar. For example:

If only the holiness revealed by the priest were needed, the world would not have to be so vast – half its current size would suffice (corresponding to twenty-four spiritual qualities of priesthood).

If only the holiness revealed by the king (a righteous monarch from the House of David) were needed, the world could exist at two-thirds of its present size (thirty qualities of royal virtue).

However, since the primary purpose of Creation was for the sake of those who study Torah, it was necessary for the world to be created at its full size – encompassing all forty-eight qualities of spiritual attainment required for Torah.

In other words, it was G-d's will to bestow the holy Torah and to create a complete, orderly world as a fitting arena for the Torah scholar – so that

through Torah study he could succeed in revealing the spark of divine holiness in his heart. Thus, it emerges that the entire purpose of Creation is the Torah scholar!

Rabbi Dessler continues (ibid., p. 201):

“Do we really know the true value of the *yeshivot* (Torah academies) and their students? We tend to be swayed by quantity; we look at reality almost with the same definitions and language as the street. And so, Heaven forbid, we saw ourselves as grasshoppers in our own eyes – because we imagined that’s how we appeared in *their* eyes.

But recognizing the truth is not arrogance – a yeshiva student or a kollel scholar is truly *everything!* They are the purpose of creation in our generation – a generation of orphans.

Every yeshiva student and every kollel scholar is a soldier in the army of G-d. For his sake, and in his merit, everything exists!”

The rabbi continued and shared a final pearl of wisdom with Benny:

“The following is an excerpt from a talk by Rabbi Yoram Abargel, ZY”A (*Betzur Yarum*, vol. VIII, p. 27):

“Our world is very low and shallow. It’s full of harsh things – disappointments, downfalls, an overpowering *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). Extremely difficult tests assail people – in *emunah* (faith), in modesty, in finances – and it can all feel very overwhelming. For indeed this world, as the *Baal HaTanya* writes (in *Likutei Amarim*, ch. 36), is “*the lowest of all levels, and there is none lower than it.*”

Therefore, the way to make it through this world in peace is to simply ignore it. Be like air – don’t collide with difficult people; rather, glide around them. Don’t try to solve every problem; instead, try not to get entangled in problems at all.

Even if people pursue you and hurt you, pay them no

Parshat Korach - The World and Its Purpose

attention – just let it go. In the end, you will see that only you will gain, while the others will lose. Don't try to fix the entire world, because that's not realistic. G-d, blessed be He, is the only One who can fix the world, and He will do so when the time comes.

But the truth is that despite all the lowliness and difficulty of this world, it contains a very great blessing – scattered within it are precious diamonds. Walking in this world are true *Bnei Torah* (Torah scholars) and righteous individuals (*tzaddikim*). Whoever merits to cling to them earns a portion both in this world and in the World to Come.

If you have the privilege to support a Torah scholar, do not think that you're losing out. You cannot even fathom what it means to be in the company of a *Ben Torah* (Torah student) in the next world (after 120 years of life)!

By the merit of you having helped that scholar and given

him the ability to study Torah with peace of mind, you will merit in Heaven to speak directly with G-d. For an opportunity like that, it would be worth giving all the wealth in the world. Can one put a price on a single word of Torah?

Even if we were to sell the entire world – England, the USA, all of Canada, and all of the other countries, including all the property therein – we could not buy even the single letter *bet* of “Bereshit.” All that combined wealth would not even suffice as an opening bid for a single letter of Torah.

Therefore, a true *Ben Torah* deserves for everything to come to him, right into his hands. According to one opinion of our Sages (Shabbat 56a), the sin of the prophet Samuel's sons was that they would *prematurely demand* the portion of the tithes due to them as Levites. A *Ben Torah* should not have to request what is rightfully due to him – and certainly should not go around asking for gifts. The

essence of a *Ben Torah* is to give, not to receive.

And those who have the merit to donate to *Bnei Torah* must remember that they are doing a far greater favor for themselves than for the Torah scholar. Through their support of Torah, they form a bond with the Torah and open a channel of blessing for themselves from Heaven; all that the *Ben Torah* achieves through his learning, they too will receive as the portion due to them.

Know that the ones who truly protect the world – who bring everyone livelihood and health and all good things – are the yeshiva students and kollel scholars who toil in Torah day and night. All other people who think that it is in *their* merit that the Nation of Israel is protected from its enemies are simply mistaken.

What are they comparable to? To a fly that sat on a large plow, which was busy tilling an entire field for many hours. At day's end, the fly met its friend

and boasted, “*Today, the plow and I plowed the whole field for hours.*” The fly – absurdly – mentioned itself first, and only then added that the plow helped a little too.

We must recognize that those who truly illuminate the world are the precious *Bnei Torah* – in their merit, the world stands and continues to exist.

Therefore, one must be extremely careful not to harm *Bnei Torah*; someone who disrespects *Bnei Torah* or hurts them is comparable to a person who has a shifted vertebra – even the slightest shift can leave him paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair for a lifetime (G-d forbid).

This can be learned from the tale told in the Prophets: when Uzzah reached out his hand and *touched the Ark*, immediately “the anger of G-d flared up against Uzzah, and G-d struck him down, and he died there by the Ark of G-d” (II Samuel 6:7).

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If that was the fate of someone who merely touched the Ark that carried the Torah, how much more so for one who lays a hand on the Torah itself – or on those who study it!

The Torah does not teach us merely tales of the past, but rather relevant lessons and morals for our daily lives. Uzzah's fate teaches us just how careful we must be not to so much as touch even slightly, the honor of the Torah and those who study it – and certainly not to harm them, G-d forbid. Never has someone harassed *Bnei Torah* (Torah scholars) and come out of it unscathed.

Similarly, consider what occurred to Korach and his ignoble end – he rose up against Moses and arrogantly belittled his honor. In the end, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed him and all that was his.

Make no mistake: the yeshiva and kollel scholars do not need the State as much as the State needs them.

All of the efforts to protect the people of Israel from the surrounding enemies who thirst for their blood pale in comparison to the Torah studied by the yeshiva students and kollel scholars.

The *Tikkun Chatzot* (midnight lamentations) they conduct, the *Gemara* tractates they learn, the rabbinic responsa and other holy books they author, the prayers they fervently pray – it is they that assist the entire Jewish people in their most difficult hours. They alone cast fear and terror upon all the nations who so much as think to stretch out a hand against us for evil, G-d forbid.

The Megillah says: "All of the ministers of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and those who carried out the king's work exalted the Jews, because the fear of Mordechai had fallen upon them" (Esther 9:3). This is astonishing – Mordechai the Jew was extremely old and frail; why should they have feared him?

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Rather, it was because Mordechai possessed immense holiness and was a truly holy Jew that a terror of death fell upon the enemies of the Jews. Similarly, it says in the Megillah regarding the rest of the Jewish people: "Many of the peoples of the land were converting, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them" (Esther 8:17).

When the Jewish people walk upon the path of holiness

and cleave to *tzaddikim* who engage in Torah and prayer day and night, an immense fear falls upon their enemies, and they are incapacitated from carrying out their plans to harm us, G-d forbid."

At this point, Benny, and certainly we all as well, could see the *picture* that the rabbi had been painting for him all along come into full focus.

Shabbat Shalom!



Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. In His abounding mercy, G-d granted us His holy Torah and informed us: “I have given you a good teaching,” and therefore: “Do not forsake My Torah.” Every Jew must maintain a connection to Torah study – each person according to the time he has, his occupation, and the duties incumbent upon him.

2. Every Jew has a share in the Torah – a portion that is uniquely his. One should pray to the Al-mighty to merit finding one’s own personal portion in the Torah, and through that, one will merit to be elevated and ascend many spiritual levels.

3. Torah study should be pursued out of love for G-d. Through this, one will merit that the Torah becomes etched into one’s heart, absorbed into one’s limbs, and satiates one’s soul – thereby attaining true closeness to G-d, blessed be He.

4. We must recognize that those who illuminate this world are the Bnei Torah – the Torah scholars, and in their merit the world stands and endures. Therefore, one must be extremely careful not to harm Bnei Torah.

A person who dishonors Bnei Torah or discredits them is comparable to

someone whose vertebra has shifted in his spinal column – even the slightest shift is enough to leave him paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair, G-d forbid, for many years. One must be extremely careful not to harm Torah scholars in any way.

5. The Torah of the yeshiva students and kollel scholars is what protects the people of Israel who dwell in the holy land from the surrounding nations who seek their harm. The *Tikkun Chatzot* prayers they conduct, the *Gemara* tractates they study, the rabbinic responsa and the other sacred books they author, the prayers that they heartily pray – it is these, and only these, that serve for the entirety of the Jewish people in the times of hardship, and it is they who cast dread and fear upon all of the nations who contemplate harming us, G-d forbid.

6. When the Jewish people walk upon the path of holiness and cleave to the true tzaddikim who toil in the Torah and prayer day and night, an immense fear falls upon all of the nations, and they are incapable of carrying out their evil schemes to harm us, G-d forbid.

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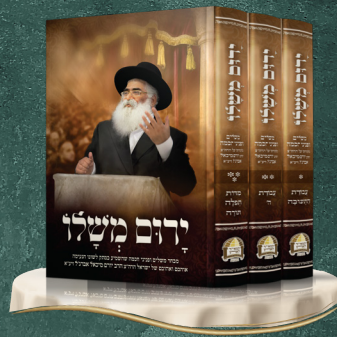


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5th of Tammuz, 5786

City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	8:12 pm	9:21 pm	9:42 pm
Miami	7:57 pm	8:54 pm	9:27 pm
Los Angeles	7:50 pm	8:52 pm	9:20 pm
Montreal	8:28 pm	9:45 pm	9:59 pm
Toronto	8:44 pm	9:57 pm	10:14 pm
London	9:03 pm	10:36 pm	10:33 pm
Jerusalem	7:30 pm	8:21 pm	9:17 pm
Tel Aviv	7:27 pm	8:18 pm	9:14 pm
Haifa	7:28 pm	8:23 pm	9:18 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:25 pm	8:19 pm	9:14 pm

Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of
HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

On the one hand, joy is essential for success in the service of G-d, and one must hold on to it rather than fall into sadness, for sadness does not stem from holiness at all. Yet at the same time, one must regularly take stock of one's deeds and see what needs to be corrected.



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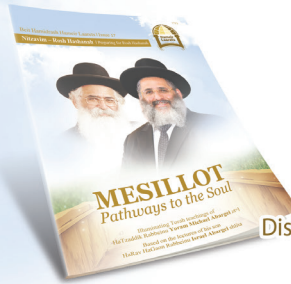
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