



# Parshas Korach

For the week ending 3 Tammuz 5758  
26-27 June 1998

## Overview

**K**orach, Dasan and Aviram, and 250 of the leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed up by the earth. Many people of the nation resent the death of Korach and his followers, holding Moshe responsible. Hashem’s “anger” is manifest by a plague which besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people, instructs Aharon to make atonement for them, and the plague is halted. Hashem then commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of a different tribe, be placed in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. In the morning, the staff of Levi, bearing Aharon’s name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that the Tribe of Levi is selected for the Priesthood, and also verifies Aharon’s position as the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest. The specific duties of the levi’im and kohanim are stated. The kohanim were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week’s Parsha are laws concerning the first fruits, the redemption of the firstborn, and other offerings.

## Insights

TAKE ONE

### “And Korach took” (16:1)

**M**y father, *kayn ayin hara*, is one of the most generous people in the world. He loves to give. Once I mentioned to him that I was interested in buying a camera. He said to me “Which one do you want? You can have any camera you like.” “Any one?” I asked. “Yes,” he said.

During the next couple of weeks I scrutinized camera advertisements, agonizing over my choice. Finally, I made my decision and my father promptly went out and bought it for me. I was overjoyed with it. I used to take it out of the box and just polish it and then put it back again.

At the time a friend said to me “You know, your father is going to get much more than you ever will from that camera, because he’s never going to take a bad picture with it.”

Giving is a spiritual thing. When we give, whatever we give, we are giving a piece of ourselves. Taking, however, always relates to the physical. It centers around the gift itself. How big is it? What make is it? Does it have Dolby®? Surround-Sound®? But there’s another side to taking which is more insidious.

Actions habituate our personality. Actions turn us into who we are. Taking leads to wanting to take. And the desire to take is insatiable.

Unlike a bodily appetite such as hunger which can be satiated, the desire to take is a beast which demands constant feeding. In essence, this is because the nature of taking is always focused on what is outside myself, wanting what I don’t have. The desire to take is to enlarge my borders, to enlarge who I am. As soon as I have taken something, it’s part of me; therefore, I’m not interested in it anymore. It becomes part of the furniture, part of the landscape. Taking focuses on engulfing what’s outside. Thus, as soon as I swallow up what was outside myself, it ceases to interest me — I

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already have it. What I'm really interested in is what's still out there. It's a never ending, self-perpetuating treadmill.

At the beginning of this week's Parsha, the Torah says, "And Korach took..." The sentence has no object. The Torah never tells us what it was that Korach took. Rather, Korach was the archetypal taker, hooked on a drug which requires bigger and bigger doses — the desire to engulf and devour. Seeing as this was his nature, it was inevitable that sooner or later he would want everything. For taking is insatiable.

#### A CHOLENT OF EMBARRASSMENT

#### **"And On ben Peles... (16:1)**

**R**eb Avigdor was known to be a man who ate the bare minimum. Such was his control over his physical desires that his diet consisted of a few dry pieces of coarse black bread dipped in salt and small quantities of water.

Only on Shabbos did he allow himself the gastronomic excess of a single potato from the cholent.

One Shabbos Reb Avigdor was sitting as an honored guest at the table of a wealthy businessman. The cholent was brought to the table and placed in front of the host. As a mark of respect, the businessman took the cholent and placed it in front of Reb Avigdor. Reb Avigdor removed his customary solitary potato from the cholent. He then passed the cholent back to the businessman, and raised the potato to his mouth. He bit into the potato, his eyes narrowing slightly. Suddenly, he grabbed the cholent from the businessman's hands and put it back on the table in front of him. He proceeded to ladle vast amounts of cholent onto his plate. Higher and higher grew the pile until Reb Avigdor could barely be seen behind the mountain of cholent.

Then, with a look of rare relish on his face, he ate his way through the entire cholent. The entire table was aghast. They sat there transfixed, like a picture. Eventually, he finished the cholent.

"That was delicious. Thank you very much."

Afterwards, when they were alone, his wife asked Reb Avigdor what had possessed him at the meal. He replied to her: "As soon as I tasted the potato, I realized that something was

very wrong with the cholent. The potato had an overpowering taste of kerosene. If the businessman had tasted the cholent he would have been very embarrassed that he had fed his guest something that was impossible to eat. So I decided rather than let him be embarrassed, it was better to embarrass myself."

As part of the investiture of the *levi'im*, their entire bodies required shaving. When Korach returned home bald from top to toe, his wife took one look at him and roared with laughter. She told him, in no uncertain terms, that he looked ridiculous. Korach was deeply embarrassed. He reflected on the ceremony: It was Moshe who had commanded the shaving of the *levi'im*. Korach decided that Moshe had invented the entire shaving ceremony just to embarrass him. The fact that there were 21,999 other *levi'im* who had also been shaved, made no difference to him. As far as Korach was concerned, Moshe was prepared to go to any lengths to embarrass him and make him look ridiculous in the eyes of the Jewish People. This embarrassment was the last straw for Korach. He decided to mount an overt rebellion against Moshe.

Contrast the behavior of Korach's wife with another wife in this week's parsha: The wife of On ben Peles. On ben Peles was one of the original conspirators with Korach. However, after the first verse of the Parsha, his name disappears from the story. Our Sages teach us that his wife was a wise woman who dissuaded him from involvement in the rebellion. Not only this, but to ward off the other conspirators she deliberately embarrassed herself by sitting at the opening of their tent with her hair uncovered so that the conspirators would not come close to them.

Some people will do anything to avoid embarrassment. The question is, whose embarrassment are you avoiding — your own, or someone else's?

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FOUNDATION

**“Korach, son of Yitzhar son of Kehas son of Levi...” (16:1)**

**B**uilding skyscrapers is a taxing job. When you cast the foundations of a tower, they have to be true and square. Every step in the initial building of a high-rise block has to be precise. If the building is out of alignment at this point, even by a couple of centimeters, then by the time it reaches the ninety-eighth floor, that discrepancy will have multiplied to meters.

At the beginning of this week's Parsha, the Torah traces Korach's lineage: "Korach, son of Yitzhar son of Kehas son of Levi." Why doesn't it trace Korach back to Yaakov? Why does the Torah stop at Levi?

Rashi tells us that Yaakov pleaded that his name would not be connected with Korach's insurrection, and that is why Yaakov's name is not mentioned here. But essentially, what did this achieve? Doesn't everyone know who Levi's father is? The book of Bereishis is replete with references to Levi being Yaakov's son. You don't have to be a genealogical sleuth to work out that Korach was descended from Yaakov.

So what was Yaakov's plea all about?

Yaakov prayed that the flaw of divisiveness that was manifested in Korach should not stem from him. Yaakov was founding the towering edifice called the Jewish People. He prayed that he should be free of the blemish of divisiveness, so that his progeny would reach their appointed task without deviation; that they would go right to the top of the skyscraper of history.

Sources:

*Take One* - Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Rabbi C.Z. Senter, Reb Simcha Rosen

*A Cholent Of Embarrassment* - heard from Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

*Foundation* - Rabbi C.Z. Senter in the name of Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz

**Haftorah:  
Shmuel 11:14-12:22**

OF KINGS & KINGDOMS

**“Then Samuel said to the people ‘Come, let us go to Gilgal, and let us renew the kingdom there.’ ”**

**R**osh Hashana is a coronation. On Rosh Hashana, we crown Hashem as our King. But isn't it our duty to acknowledge Hashem's kingship every single day of the year? What is special when we "crown" Hashem on Rosh Hashana?

In this week's Haftorah, as Rashi tells us, Shaul had to "renew" the kingdom — revitalize and re-secure it — because people were making claims against it.

Similarly on Rosh Hashana, arraigned against us are the accusing angels which we have created by our own transgressions. They accuse us, as it were, of being disloyal to the King by failing to observe His commands; and as the Sages say, "there is no king without a people." Hashem runs the world whether we acknowledge it or not. But Hashem is only a King to the extent that we make ourselves subjects. When we transgress the orders of the King we "diminish" Hashem's Kingship. By our sins, Hashem's Kingship is, as it were, threatened.

This accusation of our disloyalty forces us to re-new our commitment to Hashem as our King and we re-dedicate ourselves to Him. We loyally accept upon ourselves His dominion, and thereby we renew Hashem's Kingdom.

*Based on Admor MiGur, zatzal, in Mayana shel Torah*

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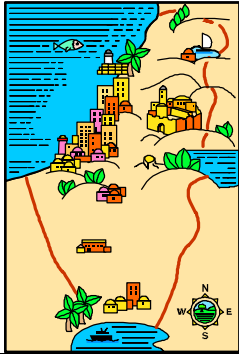
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# LOVE OF THE LAND

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## HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

**“...and My eyes and My heart will be there all of the days.” (Melachim I 9:3)**

This Divine promise in regard to the *Beis Hamikdash* which King Solomon built in Jerusalem is understood by outstanding commentaries as a signal to all Jews to constantly turn their eyes and hearts to *Eretz Yisrael* and to always desire to return there.

*Rabbi Yonasan Eybshutz in “Ya’aros Devash”*

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