

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Korach	16 June 2018	3 Tammuz 5778	Num. 16:1-18:32	1Sam. 11:14-12:22	John 19:1-17

The Torah as we know is not a history book. It is a book of manual, a guide to conduct successful life in marriage, business, health, and interpersonal skills. Therefore, in this week's Torah portion, we are going to learn about jealousy. This jealousy is a disease that affects our soul (*nefesh*).

When Hashem created this world, there are always two sides of everything, good or bad, and positive or negative. Water in small amount to drink is good for our body, but too much water in our body can even cause death. Even a fire can be used for warmth, whereas a large fire can lead to destruction of a forest. So is jealousy and anger, even hate has two sides.

We say the word 'hate' and in our mind it connotes negative action. But is it negative when we 'hate' *lashon hara* (slander) or *yetzer hara* (evil inclination)? Rather this is good that we 'hate' such things. And we get closer to Hashem by 'hating' things that are repulsive to Hashem.

Even love can be dangerous if it is not controlled. Today's portion, Korach contains jealousy toward Moshe and Aharon. Even Moshe admits in the Talmud for his jealousy toward Yahushua (Joshua), his disciple. We can see both side of jealous in the Book of Genesis, one in chapter 3 when the serpent entices Chava, Kayne kills his brother Havel in chapter 4, and Rachel who begs her sister for mandrakes in chapter 30.

Let's discuss about the tempter (snake) and Chava. The Midrash explains¹ the snake saw Adam and Chava engaged "in the way of the world" before the sin entered them, and it desired her. Kayne killed his brother, Havel for jealousy as Hashem accepted Havel's offering, but not of his. The jealousy of the snake and Kayne brought tragic results. Therefore, this type of jealousy is negative and we should be far from it.

Rachel, on the other hand, is a positive jealousy. She was jealous of her sister who already had many sons. She saw that her sister was using a mandrake to get pregnant. Thus, she asked her sister for it. Asking someone how to do better is a good jealousy that should be encouraged at all times for ourselves and to our children.

In 16:1 says, "Now Korach, the son of Izhar, the son of Qehath, the son of Lewi, and Dathan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and On, the son Peleth, sons of Reuven took men." The Hebrew word נָקַח (*yi•kach*) was translated into English as "took", but the actual meaning is "separate." Rashi explains Korach split off the community in order to protest Aharon's priesthood. Ramban goes further saying that something "took Korach", that is his heart, "which moved him to split himself off from the community."²

In Numbers 14:35 says, "I will surely do it to this entire evil congregation that have gathered together against Me: in this wilderness they shall be consume, and there they shall die." Hizkuni says that we are now learning how the Israelites die: some here, some in the plague, some at Shittim (ch. 25), until not a one of them was left.

¹ Midrash Rabbah, Beresheet, 18:6

² The Commentators' Bible, Bamidbar, p. 115

Ibn Ezra says that this incident took place at the time when the Levites replaced the first-born. The Israelites were upset that the Levites had taken their position, while the Levites themselves were upset that the priesthood was reserved for Aharon and his sons.³

Who is Korach and why did he challenge Moshe and Aharon? He was a cousin to Moshe and Aharon. He was very rich and had a great influence. The Talmud⁴ states that he found one of the treasures hidden by Yosef and used it to influence people around him. He was jealous of Elizaphan son of Uzziel, whom Moshe appointed as chieftain of the Kohathites. (Num. 3:30) Thus Korach and his followers are now disputing their appointment, that they (Moshe and Aharon) did not act at Hashem's instruction and fabricated the appointment.

Why now? The deaths of ten spies and Hashem's proclamation that the people who left Mitzrayim (Egypt) would die in the desert had shaken them. They said, "See, we die, we perish, we all perish." (Num. 17:12) Ibn Ezra says that this incident occurred in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh-barnea as Korach was jealous of Aharon's priesthood as the Scripture says, "and now you seek the priesthood also?" (Num. 16:10)

When the Israelites were at Sinai, even though 3,000 people died for the sins of the Golden Calf, they loved Moshe because he prayed for them 40 days and nights. If someone rebelled against Moshe, they could have stoned that person to death. For this reason, Korach did not say anything against Aharon. But once they arrived at Paran, the people were dying by the fire at Taberah (11:1-3), and at Kibroth-hattaavah (11:33-34), and now Moshe failed to pray for the sins of the spies and decreed that they will all perish in the wilderness. They have become so desperate that all these deaths occurred to them was Moshe's plan.

This week's *parasha* are divided into three sections: (1) establishing Aharon as a high priest (16:1-35), (2) Korach's rebellion (16:36-50); and (3) Aharon stopping a plague (17:1-13). As always, each Torah portion is connected with previous Torah portion as each *neviim* (prophets) are connected with its respective Torah portion. During the Roman occupancy in Jerusalem, the Jews read from the *neviim* parallel to the Torah portion as they were forbidden to read the Torah in the synagogue. This was one of the reasons that Yeshua read from the *neviim*. (Luke 4:16-19; Matt. 12:18) which is from Isaiah 61:1-2. Today Isaiah 61:1-2 is not part of the haftorah readings. Some believe the original reading started from Isaiah 61:1, but it was changed to Isaiah 61:10 to deflect pagan religion. Nevertheless, this haftorah reading is intended to remind us of the Torah reading known as *Nitzavim* (standing).⁵

The sages are unclear when Korach's rebellion started. It is a possibility that this event took place immediately after Aharon was appointed as a High Priest and Moshe reciting *tzitzit*. Another possibility is that it happened after the sins of the spies. However, it is certain that Korach's rebellion is connected with *tzitzit*. In Numbers 15:38-40, Hashem commanded the Israelites to make "tzitzit on the corners of their garments." The wearing of *tzitzit* remind them that they were called to be holy (15:40), that they belonged to 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. (Exo. 19:6)

Thus Korach is challenging Aharon's high priesthood. He reminded that all Israelites were holy as it is a priestly nation. Rashi says that Korach put prayer shawls on 250 leaders that were completely blue and said, "Must a prayer shawl that is completely blue still have a *tzitzit* added to it with a cord of blue?" Moshe replied, "It must." They mocked Moshe saying, "A different kind of garment needs only a single thread of

³ ibid

⁴ BT, Pesachim 119a

⁵ Deuteronomy 29:9 (10)-30:20

blue. Can it be possible that this one which is completely blue still needs more blue?" Thus they claimed that Moshe made up the whole story of adding a cord of blue. Therefore Korach said, "You have gone too far."

Moshe proposed that all who claim such a holy status should demonstrate it by undertaking a priestly task, the offering of incense. This will show who is holy and whom Hashem has chosen. Thus Moshe said, "You have gone too far, you sons of Levi." He then reminded them of their elevated status of being near the Tabernacle and had the task of carrying the most sacred objects such as the Ark (4:1-20).

The Kabbalah says that Korach was the reincarnation of Kayin. Korach was swallowed up by the land to rectify the misdeeds he had done in his past life when Kayin killed his brother Hevel and the land opened up to receive his blood. Kayin had to be reincarnated as Korach in order to rectify his sin.

When Moshe heard Korach and his cohorts, "he fell upon his face." Meaning, he felt his hands were tied as this is their (Israelites) fourth defiance. First was the sin of the Golden Calf, and "Moshe besought YHVH" (Exo. 32:11). Second, "when the people complained" (Num. 11:1), Moshe prayed for them. (Num. 11:2) Third, when the spies sinned, "Moshe said to YHVH, Then the Mitzrim shall hear it." (Num. 14:13)

If a prince defies his father's wish, perhaps the king's friends can pacify the king once, twice or three times. But if the prince continues to defy the king, they would say, "The king would not listen to me anymore." Thus their hands would be tied just as Moshe did.

Moshe said, "Even tomorrow YHVH will show who are His, and who is *kadosh*." (16:5) "Who are His" means Hashem would make known whether the first-born (3:13) or the Levites (8:14) were not "His." Being "*kadosh*" refers to the priesthood which Aharon had been set apart. This was one of Korach's challenge. But the fire (16:35) made clear that the first-born had not been chosen, and the acceptance of Aharon's incense made clear that he had. (Rashi) "Even tomorrow" means Moshe was giving Korach and his men a chance to back down from their allegation. We can assume that they came to Moshe in the evening based on these words.

Now, Moshe then calls upon Dathan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav who refused to come to him. Rashi says that Moshe pursued every opportunity to end the dispute. Therefore, he sent for them. Since they were protesting, they should also take their incense. But they refused and said, "you have not brought us into a land that flows with milk and honey." (16:14) Meaning, you took us out of Egypt, but you have not brought us into "a land flowing with milk and honey." Instead, you have decreed that we die here "in this wilderness." (14:29)

"Will you now put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up." (16:14) Meaning, we are not so blind that we cannot see how you have perverted justice against us, and we will not come to be tested by the fire pan, because we don't believe that is a legitimate test. The test is pointless as we know that we are not going to be allowed to enter Canaan.⁶

Moshe knew that Korach and his band believed that Moshe had picked Aharon as a priest on his own, and that is the reason they agreed to the fire pan test. But as for Dathan and Aviram, they will continue to protest against Moshe even after the result of the fire pan test. For this reason, Moshe said, "Respect not their

⁶ The Commentators' Bible, Numbers, p. 120-121

offering.” (16:15) “I have not taken one donkey from them,” as their lord I can take it from them any time, but I did not, says Moshe. “Neither have I hurt one of them,” even though they are the one who informed the Pharaoh that I killed an Egyptian.

Now, “On, the son of Peleth” (16:1) is mentioned but his name does not appear again. The sages explain that when his wife heard of his intentions, she said to him, “Why are you getting involved in this quarrel? Don’t you realize that regardless of who the leader is, you will remain the same person? Moshe is a holy man, and it is foolish of you to join an attempt to overthrow him.”

On said, “But I have already promised them that I will join the rebellion. How can I let them down?” His wife gave him wine to drink, caused him to be drunk. She then sat at the entrance to their tent with her hair uncovered which was considered a behavior of immodest. Korach and his men came to collect On. However, when they saw her “immodesty” and they left without a word. “Every wise woman builds her *bayit* (house); but the foolish breaks it down with her hands.” (Prov. 14:1) Thus, the wife of On who prevented her husband to partake in the rebellion that saved his life, “built her house” – meaning, kept her family safe.

The Gemara⁷ asks, “why did she uncover her hair and act immodest?” The answer is when the Israelites arrived at Sinai to receive the Torah, Hashem said to them, “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.” (Exo. 19:6) At that moment, they reached a level where all the effects of Adam’s sins on the world could have been nullified. If the Israelites did not sin with the Golden Calf, they would have remained even at higher level. (Yavamot 103a)

Korach argued that the entire people were holy. Therefore, they should all be high priest and not just Aharon since the sin of Adam was forgiven or at least the red heifer would rectify that sin. Therefore, there was no reason for her as a married woman to uncover her head whereas Chava covered her head in mourning for sin which brought death to all the living. To prove Korach’s hypocrisy, she uncovered her hair. If Korach would avoid approaching her in her immodesty, it would prove that he considered it (uncovered hair) immodest and the people reverted back to their old status after worshipping the Golden Calf. Therefore, they were not in fact all a kingdom of priests.⁸

“On” means “sat in mourning”, and “Peleth” means “miracles”. The wisdom of On’s wife saved his life. Therefore, why does On “sat in mourning” and why does he need “miracles”? The answers is two-fold: When a person plans a transgression, he is not held liable unless he actually performs it⁹ This does not apply to intending idolatry.

The Gemara¹⁰ says one who challenges, quarrels with, or thinks ill about his Torah teacher is same as challenging Hashem. Therefore, their (Korach and 250 men) acts were tantamount to idolatry and were punished their action since Moshe was their Torah teacher, and their leader. On “mourned” his plan to rise against Moshe through *tsuvah* (repentance) and received “miracles” of *tsuvah*.

⁷ BT, Sanhedrin 110a

⁸ ibid, Eruvin 100b

⁹ ibid, Kiddushin 40a

¹⁰ ibid, Sanhedrin 110a