



Korach – Never Finished

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“Korach the son of Izhar, the son of Kehath, the son of Levi took [himself to one side] along with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, descendants of Reuben. They confronted Moses together with two hundred and fifty men from the children of Israel, chieftains of the congregation, representatives of the assembly, men of repute. They assembled against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?’” (Bamidbar 16:1-3)

It was a no holds barred rebellion. Korach accused Moshe of nepotism, power grabbing and self-promotion. Moshe tried as hard as he could to make peace and achieve reconciliation, but it was not to be. Korach’s core argument was encapsulated in one phrase, *“Ki kol ha’eyda kulam kedoshim* (the entire assembly is holy).” Korach was saying to Moshe, we are all equals. You are no holier than the rest of us and as such have no right to take and assign leadership positions to whomever you chose; we are all on equal footing.

But how could Korach say such a thing? Moshe regularly communicated with God, Moshe spent forty days and nights on Mount Sinai with no food or drink. Aharon the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) could enter the Holy of Holies, offer sacrifices and reside within the Mishkan. How could Korach say there was no difference between these great men and the rest of the populace?

The great Chassidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov offers an incredible insight. The Talmud explains that when the Jewish nation experienced Sinaitic revelation and actively experienced God, *“paska zuhamasan* (the impurity ceased).” The moment that Adam and Chava ate from the forbidden fruit, they ingested spiritual impurity. That impurity remained embedded within our nation until we received the Torah. When we made the incredible declaration of *“Naaseh V’nishma* (we will do and we will listen),” when we heard the voice of God give us the first commandments, the impurity of the first sin was purged and we regained our complete, innate holiness. Korach therefore felt that we were all equal. Each of us has been restored to the state of Adam and Chava before the sin. We are a nation of holy and righteous people. Moshe, was greater before the revelation, but now, Korach felt, we were all equals.

What was Korach’s mistake? Just because we achieved a certain level of holiness doesn’t mean we automatically retain it. The retention of holiness is achieved only through consistent and ongoing active dynamic growth coupled with vigilance against sin and harmful forces. Korach felt that he “made it.” He crossed the spiritual finish line and there was nothing else he needed to do. Once one becomes a card-carrying member of the holiness club, he can sit back, relax and enjoy the show. But Korach was wrong. Even after the Jewish people achieved this saintly level, we had to actively work to maintain it. Unfortunately, we didn’t. Immediately after we received the Torah, we built the Golden Calf. Shortly thereafter, we complained about the manna from heaven. Just a bit later, we experienced the debacle of the spies. We lost our footing. We lost our spiritual standing. But Moshe didn’t. Moshe retained his holiness, built upon it and continued forward in a trajectory of growth.

We all have moments of incredible accomplishment. We experience moments of spiritual elation and holiness. There are times when we accomplish great things, cross our finish lines and engage of acts of spiritual heroism (big and small). But in the world of spirituality, there is never a point when one can say, “I have arrived and I am now finished.” We take the time to recognize and celebrate our accomplishments but immediately consider how to move forward. If we don’t build on the spiritual accomplishments of our past and present, we will lose the spiritual ground we have covered. If we don’t actively work to maintain, retain and increase our individual holiness, it will unfortunately dissipate.