



Korach – I am I

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)

Korach came with a simple claim, *“Kulam Kedoshim (we are all holy).”* As Rashi explains “we all heard God at Mount Sinai, we are all of equal stature and standing.” Ostensibly, Korach was trying to create unity through equality. Why should Moshe and Aharon occupy positions of power and authority? They are no better or holier than the rest of us; we are all the same. There is Godliness in every Jew, there is holiness in every person. While these statements are absolutely true, Korach could not have be more wrong.

Moshe responds to Korach’s attack:

“He spoke to Korach and to all his company, saying, ‘In the morning, the Lord will make known who is His, and who is holy, and He will draw [them] near to Him, and the one He chooses, He will draw near to Him.’” (Bamidbar 16:5)

Rashi comments:

“Moses said to [Korach], The Holy One, blessed is He, assigned boundaries to His world. Are you able to transform morning into evening? That is how possible it is for you to undo this, as it says, “It was evening and it was morning... and He separated” (Gen. 1:5, 7); similarly, “Aaron was set apart to sanctify him...” (Midrash Tanchuma Korach 3, Num. Rabbah 4)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe provides a poignant insight. There is day and there is night. If day decided it wanted to be night, and if night pined to be day, the world as we know it would cease to exist. There are different groups within the Jewish people. The creation of *Kohanim*, *Leviim* and *Yisraelim* was not intended to create a caste system. Each soul is sent here to accomplish a specific mission. God gives us the circumstances and life-framework necessary to accomplish that mission. The different families, tribes and groups provide the unique platform for individual self-actualization. The soul of the *Kohen* has a different mission than the soul of the *Levi*. Those missions are actualized only through their specific tribal and familial frameworks and responsibilities. The *Yisrael* who cannot work or serve in the *Beis Hamikdash* (holy Temple) is no less important than the *Kohanim* and *Leviim* who can. His soul needs a different set of circumstances to reach its potential. Korach thought the way to create unity was to make everyone the same. **Trying to make everyone the same doesn’t create unity, it creates anonymity.** No two people are the same. We have different souls and therefore, different missions. God gave each of us the identity and circumstances we need to become the best version of ourselves and accomplish our individual missions here on this Earth. If we strive to be like the other, it’s day striving to become night and night yearning to shine like the day. Whenever we try to be someone or something else, rather than becoming the best version of ourselves, we undermine universal equilibrium.

Kohanim are different than *Yisraelim*, men are different than women, Jews are different than Gentiles and the list goes on and on. These differences are not something for us to fix or correct. These differences are to be embraced. For it is these very differences which make us who we are and allow for our unique and individual soul to accomplish its God-given mission. Korach was correct, *Kulam Kedoshim*, each and every one of us is incredibly holy. May we find the courage to stop trying to be the other and start developing the beautiful individual identity we each possess.