



Parashat Korach

In this week's Parasha, the Torah says:

“Korach the son of Yitzhar, son of Kehat, son of Levi, took...” (Bamidbar 16:1).

The Levites were given the responsibility of assisting the Kohanim (the children of Aaron) in the Mishkan. Korach, along with 250 of his followers, started a rebellion, contesting the hierarchical system of Kohanim, exclaiming:

“All of the nation, everyone is holy” (Bamidbar 16:3).

What was the reason for this rebellion, being as how Korach was himself a Levite from the family of Kehat? If Korach had a very admirable position, why would he refute an entire system of hierarchy that he was part of?

Furthermore, the punishment for Korach and his followers was that they were “swallowed by the earth.” How was this a fitting punishment, “measure for measure” for the crime?

To answer this question of why this rebellion started, we can start from the specifics of what the exact role of the children of Kehat actually was.

The children of Kehat had the privilege of carrying the sacred vessels of the Mishkan through the desert, an elite role in comparison to the other tribes. However, in comparison to the children of Aaron, who were in charge of dismantling the sacred vessels and wrapping them in a covering of *Techelet* (sky blue-dyed fabric), the children of Kehat were on an inferior level. They could not touch or even gaze upon the vessels of the Mishkan, or they would die.

It is interesting to note that the word used for “cover” is the Hebrew root כ-ל-ע which literally means to “swallow.” More on this shortly.

Now we can explain the mystery of Korach's rebellion. It was not an inspired egalitarian ideal Korach was advocating on behalf of the entire nation, but rather a selfish attempt to escape his own inferiority complex. What might seem like a virtuous cause was in reality a corrupt ploy for Korach to *dismantle* his superiors' authority.

Finally, there is a midrash that says that Korach and his accomplices were adorned in garments of “Techelet” sky-blue fabric. This seems like a strange detail, but it reflects their fundamental argument perfectly. If it's true that Korach believed all of Bnei Yisrael to be equally holy, as if up to par with the holy vessels themselves, it is appropriate for them to be wrapped in the same fabric. However, just like the holy vessels were “swallowed” in a covering of Techelet, so too it is fitting for Korach and his followers to be “swallowed” as well.

May we all be content with our share in this world, and the specific roles we are meant to play as we serve Hashem, regardless of how important or successful our fellow man may be.

Shabbat shalom,

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