

Parshas Korach

This week's Parshas Korach, also marks the 28th year marking the memory of Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Parshas Korach begins with "Vayikach Korach"- translated as Korach separated himself. Rashi is not satisfied with this- as the terms "vayikach" means and he took. Rashi explains that Korach took himself outside of the camp of the Jews- a distinct term to describe that he made Machlokes in the community. Unkelos translates "vayikach" to "v'ispaleg" – although Targum is explaining through the word "v'ispaleg" that Korach separated himself from the community, not that he argued, as the root of the word 'v'ispaleg' is "pey lamed gimmel" (peleg) which means to argue in Aramaic. The curious connection though is that to take away-separate- and argue all are connected. And Rashi explains, that through his (Korach's) words- he took heads of the community and persuaded them to follow him.

When providing the lineage of Korach- its stops before adding Ben Yakov- as explained in Rashi- Yakov prayed that his name not to be mentioned due to the dispute- although it was unusual for adding Ben Yakov to the lineage- when describing the lineage of Korach elsewhere in the Torah (for example in Divrei Hayamim)- Ben Yakov is added for Korach's descendents. Rashi explains from Bereishis 49:6- that "b'khalam al techad k'vodi" (their congregation do not join my honor), in which Rashi references Bamidbar 16:19, that Korach gathered an assembly against the Jews.

Rashi explains that the method of Korach's convincing was to say, "do you think I am doing this for myself-I only care for all of you". He was 'sweet talking' them and sounding so selfless. But it would seem, this type of talking, and convincing is shrouded in mockery, chutzpah, and ego driven.

His punishment was to be swallowed up. This punishment was a novel creation- as stated in the posuk 16:30- "But if Hashem will create a creation and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up and they will descend into the pit alive, and you shall know these men provoked Hashem". Rashi explains here that creating a new creation is on putting them to death this way (as we know one of the creations from Friday afternoon at genesis- and stated in Pirkei Avos- was that the mouth that swallowed Korach up was created then. Which means this hole- had already been created- the novelty Rashi explains is the way of death. Meaning this wasn't an earthquake where there could be a remnant of the civilization (as explained by Rambam), and that the phenomenon was novel- (as explained by Rambam). The nuance in the language is that Hashem created to swallow them, not he created the hole which will then swallow them-it is far more active, novel, and purposeful. Rashi explains, if Korach and his assembly died "normally" but prematurely, it is possible people wouldn't recognize the error in their ways.

These explanations help answer the question of, was Korach's destiny pre-determined if the mouth of the earth that swallowed Korach was created at genesis. If his destiny and punishment was predetermined, how do we blame Korach for what he did? Explains Rashi- that the language of the new creation was that the

mouth of the earth will swallow Korach- and that was its purpose. Rashi explains this on “U’vla’ah” (swallows)- using the word “v’tvlo’eim” that the purpose of the mouth was to swallow, not that it will swallow because it is a mouth that opens. Meaning it is deliberate- and because Hashem willed it (and again why Rashi concludes by referencing genesis). This would imply that up until Korach started his rabble rousing, the hole maybe wouldn’t have been used- implying that Korach could have chosen not to pursue this avenue of mockery- telling us that only once the hole was shown- only then its purpose had to be fulfilled- the unnatural swallowing of Korach and his followers.

One may think that Korach was right for trying to “go against the grain”. His entire tribe- Levi- didn’t follow the crowd when the Jews were sinning at the Golden Calf. Meaning it was in his nature to be different. I think the “how” Korach did it explains what he did wrong and the punishment which was exacted on him. One may see a parallel between Korach’s punishment, and how we treat the Rasha in the Hagaddah- we punch him in the teeth/lambast him with words- whatever the explanation it involves the mouth. As it is words that are the provocateur.

The Rasha- who shows up to the seder- uses exclusionary language- that is he separates himself from the events of the Hagadah-and this condescending, mockery is punished in this unique way. Similarly- Korach- who

used words against his people, was punished by the mouth of the Earth which swallowed him up- with no remnant of that crowd.

Korach’s questions- taken out of context- and perhaps a positive spin on his actions¹- were that he was trying to create a utopian version of existence that was not appropriate for the time. We had just been given the Torah- and the ways to follow halacha- he tried spinning the world to a place where hierarchies, and order were not ready to be introduced. There was still a lot of work to instill the world with Torah and its values- which to me explains why Yakov prayed that his name be removed from Korach’s lineage. Yakov spent his entire life ensuring the continuity of the Jews, and the path to bringing Mashiach- which Korach was possibly trying to alter. As such- he was removed in a supernatural way from the equation- (even though optically his claims seem legitimate- and from a punishment created at genesis). His offspring remained as part of the tribe of Levi and for the service of Hashem- so all was not lost on him.

This week’s Haftora from Shmuel 1 11:14-12:22 is about Shmuel- a descendant of Korach- who assembled the Jews to coronate Shaul as king. The cross reference to the Parsha is about consensus and crowds-which may have a differing opinion. Consensus is very tricky, that is to ensure that the consensus is correct- which Shmuel

¹ Benjamin Miller who attended my shiur quoted from Rabbi Gemara- that the techeiles- blue strand claim shows the tension between Mashiach Ben Yosef and Mashiach Ben David. The blue represents one party- the white of the strands the other. By Korach asking about making the entire garment blue- he was negating the role that both Yosef and

Yehuda have for Mashiach. More than this, the tension of Yosef and Yehuda- is a balance created for the preparation of Mashiach- which Korach was seemingly trying to accelerate by referencing an “all blue garment” which removed the idea of the preparation of the white garment- and the balance needed.

shows had to be performed by requesting a miracle- a thunderstorm. Whereas Korach was creating doubtful consensus- for which he and part of his encampment was extinguished (like Ahron's son's for their interpretation of how to serve Hashem- who were also removed from earth without a trace).

To be a leader of the Jews- the leader must be steadfast and unwavering in their commitment to Torah. The Rebbe- was exactly this. (I like to reference that when Yitzchak Shamir came to NYC to speak at the UN- he told his chief of staff that he wanted to visit the Rebbe- for which the COS responded, you're the president of Israel- the Rebbe should come to you. Shamir- who had humility unlike the COS- stated, the opposite, that Rebbe doesn't go anywhere for anyone- even the president of Israel- as Shamir recognized the pillar that the Rebbe was and is- and unwavering foundation- where you go to him, and not vice versa.)

Because the Rebbe was true to the ways of the Torah- and removed of ego- the success of the Rebbe is clearly evident- more than this- his view was not to create an "us and them" mentality. It was always a message of positivity- and this is the way of the Torah. He didn't create machlokes- he created unity and cohesion. This difference can be seen between how Chabad views the world- because of the Rebbe's influence- that is to spread the message of positivity and that every Jew and person matters.

In this way- may we merit to be united with the Rebbe physically with Mashiach- Good Shabbos...