

Parshas Korach

This week is Parshas Korach, which primarily focuses on the dissident Korach, who challenged Moshe Rabbeinu and was swallowed by the earth, along with his entourage. This makes me think of the phrase in last week's parsha about Eretz Ochlu Yoshveha, a land that eats its inhabitants. The punishment is fitting for Korach, whose challenges had an underlying idealism that wasn't rooted. That is, Korach's attitude physically resulted in the land swallowing him, as the metaphor raised by the Meraglim paralleled. The Meraglim's perspective, based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, was that they wanted to remain under the cloud of glory and not enter the land, where they would be required to get involved in the mundane, i.e., a land that eats its inhabitants, that is, they would be consumed by their work and their physical existence. Similarly, Korach's Chutzpah and perspective were sanctimonious and lacked the internal reflection and humility that make a refined Jew. Korach's quixotic ideas weren't rooted, and when you try to make society into something it is not, morals are eroded, and many other problems arise, resulting in the land consuming its inhabitants. So, while the punishment was literal, it parallels that which the Meraglim were trying to avoid. But this would suggest that the Meraglim were refraining from being like Korach. We know from the Rebbe's explanation that their method was wrong, though their intentions may have been right. My point, though, is that in a quixotic and sanctimonious world, the land will consume itself, as the people who follow will have no direction on what is right and wrong. Further, in trying to find the truth,

the person may commit to being consumed by the land, that is, the surroundings will consume him in this pursuit, and he will lose focus on the truth, which is Hashem and the Torah. In the case of Korach, he was physically punished this way, and the Meraglim's analysis of the "land" is that if one enters it unprepared, it will consume him (which they wanted to prevent by remaining in the desert under the direct cape of Hashem, and what they were assuming was a lack of preparedness to deal with the real world.)

In our modern Golus, this is also true of our surroundings. Many in free societies, such as the US and Canada, who try to pursue an ideal not rooted in reality, are deluded. Right and wrong become pliable definitions; look at the society around us. There seems to be a shift away from people knowing right from wrong, and the result is unresolved tension and pain in the world, which makes day-to-day living uncomfortable. The Alter Rebbe, in his foundational principles of Tanya (i.e., the early chapters), paints a picture for the Chassid to understand where the light of Hashem and the core of Hashem exist in our lives, and where our divine soul draws its energy. Part of what the Alter Rebbe is helping us understand is that we can train ourselves to open our eyes beyond the Golus lenses, the Sitra Achra attitude, and learn to refine our existence from the Tzad Hakedusha, so that all our acts are for the purpose of serving Hashem, even those that sustain our Nefesh Habihamis. The Alter Rebbe states that the unfortunate problem with Golus is that we are deluded into a Gashmiyus lens, i.e., a lens of Eretz Ochlu Yoshveha. Whereas we must try to train ourselves to see things outside this. That is like what the Rebbe said:

we must open our eyes to see Mashiach (Sefer HaSichot 5752, p. 165). Meaning we don't let the land around us consume us, figuratively and literally. The Gemara in Sanhedrin 110a specifically points out that the division that Korach would have caused would have led to anarchy.

My interpretation is that this environment creates a place where the land consumes its inhabitants; therefore, he was punished by being literally consumed by the land. A critical point about the doubt that Korach was sowing was regarding Emunah and Bitachon in Hashem.

In the allegories of the Meraglim and the punishment of Korach, the common thread is that Torah and faith in Hashem prevent the land from swallowing its inhabitants. For Korach not to influence us, we must recognize that there is work to be done: to be faithful and to trust in Hashem, and to understand that this comes through learning Torah and doing Mitzvos with the right intent. Similarly, to prevent the allegorical "land that consumes its people," we must be prepared and armed with Torah on our minds, as the Alter Rebbe explains, seeing the world in Divine providence. In this way, you can prevent being consumed by your environment, which would make you lose yourself. Rather, you will see the world with Moshiach. Just open your eyes.

Good Shabbos