



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM
KORACH / קרח
THE LEGITIMACY OF THE TORAH

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KORACH / קרח

SERMON TITLE:

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KORACH

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The fighting in the Gaza between Hamas and Fatah, is one of the classic examples in our times of a war between brothers. For a while now Hamas and Fatah have been fighting between themselves, killing each other. Every once in a while, they agree to a ceasefire but then go back to fighting. And all this is because there is no established government. That in essence is what the fighting is about- who will be the leaders.

In this week's Torah portion, we read a story that happened thousands of years ago in the desert. An important Jew named Korach, Moshe's cousin, gathered a group of people and came to Moshe and Aharon with a complaint. "The whole congregation is holy and G-d is in their midst, so why do you raise yourselves above G-d's people?" They felt that all the Jews were important, as Rashi explains "You were not the only ones to hear 'I am the Lord your G-d' at Mount Sinai, the whole congregation heard." We are all the same, so why do you make yourselves to be more than everyone else?

This claim seems legitimate, they are asking for fair equality. But Moshe immediately starts trying to persuade them otherwise. He tells them they, too, were chosen by G-d, as Levites; they, too, have a higher standing among the Jews. They were not equal to the rest of Israel; they had important positions. Moshe also tried



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persuading Dasan and Aviram who were among Korach's men but they would not even agree to speak with him.

Then something happens that had never happened before. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and they descended alive to their graves. An incredible punishment!

When we read this story, a question immediately arises. All previous times that the Jews sinned, whether it was the Golden Calf or the Spies, Moshe always prayed for them. Why didn't Moshe pray for these men to be forgiven? Moshe even told them beforehand that this would be their punishment. Why did Moshe react so harshly?

Looking at this closer, what really was Korach's complaint? When he asked, "Why do you raise yourselves above G-d's nation", he was in essence asking, who made Moshe the leader? And why did he nominate Aharon as High Priest? His claim was that Moshe had appointed himself, not G-d. Korach was basically questioning Moshe's legitimacy; that these appointments were not from G-d but rather Moshe took them for himself.

This is evident from Moshe's answer to him. Moshe responded, "You and your entire company who are assembled are against the Lord, for what is Aaron that you should complain against him?"



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Korach aroused an accusation against Moshe. Who are you? Who made you king and declared that we need to listen to you? We are all the same, all equal; every person should do what is right in his opinion.

This was a very serious thing. Rejecting Moshe's leadership in essence says that there is nobody in charge and everyone can do as he pleases. In any civilization the moment the ruler loses his legitimacy, you have what's happening now in Gaza-chaos.

The Mishna in Avos tells us "Pray for the integrity of the government; for were it not for the fear of its authority, a man would swallow his neighbor alive." When there is no fearsome ruler people devour each other. There is no order or regime, each man does as he sees fit. In these conditions, it is impossible to learn Torah in a relaxed manner for one never knows what will happen the next moment.

On the other hand, when there is a fear of the government then the country is orderly, and even when the ruling party itself behaves in a manner that is less than desirable this is still not a situation where each man does whatever he wants and because of this, there is no fear that 'a person would swallow his fellow alive.'

The Rebbe explains: the one who said these things was Rabbi Chanina who suffered terribly at the hands of the Roman government. He was even one of the Ten Martyrs killed by the Romans, yet despite that he points out the importance of having a ruling government.



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Thus, in essence, Korach's complaint could have caused chaos amongst the Jewish people and therefore there was no room here for leniency or exceptions.

For the brand new Jewish nation the damage of such chaos would be especially bad. If Moshe truly had, G-d forbid, taken these privileges for himself and not by G-d's command, as Korach claimed, then perhaps there are other things that he came up with on his own. Perhaps Moshe made up the mitzvah of tefilin, or the fast of Yom Kippur, or circumcision, etc. If this premise that Moshe acted on his own was G-d forbid, accepted, then all of Judaism loses its foundation, for everything is built on and based on Sinai, where everyone stood and heard G-d speaking to Moshe.

The Rambam explains, "And what did they believe in at Sinai? That our eyes saw and not a stranger's and our ears heard and not another's, the fire and the sounds, and he (Moshe) approached the smoke and the voice spoke to him, and we heard 'Moshe, Moshe, go speak to them such and such.'" Therefore we believe that every word of Moshe's is true and comes from G-d.

If so, when someone casts any kind of doubt on Moshe's trustworthiness, this is a doubt on the whole of Judaism. That is why no leniencies or concessions were made for Korach, for it was necessary to destroy and nullify these doubts at their source and not leave any reminder of them. This is why Moshe says "And with this you will know that G-d has sent me to do all these things and it does not come from my heart."



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It is interesting to note that in all the following generations, even though many movements have arisen within the Jewish nation who raised doubts against the Oral Torah, none of them questioned Moshe's legitimacy. None of them claimed that the Written Torah is not true.

In our generation, too, there are many movements who disagree amongst themselves on all aspects of Judaism. But there is one thing they all agree on and it unites them all- the Torah. In every synagogue, no matter what type or affiliation, here is a Torah, the same exact Torah, and it is read from every week, and every Bar Mitzva boy goes up to the Torah and everyone makes the same blessing of Nosain HaTorah, "...Who gives the Torah." Nobody questions the Torah's legitimacy.

This is not only true about the Jews, but also the other religions, more than a billion Muslims and Christians agree that Tanach is true, therefore, they all agree that Moshe and the Torah which he brought us are both the truth. The Rebbe stressed many times that in every Jewish home should be Jewish books and in Hebrew: Bayis Molai Seforim

So let us ensure that in every Jewish home there is a set of the Five Books of Moshe, for this is the basis of all of Judaism. When a Jew keeps this Book in his home, he is saying to his children that this book is important to him and he believes in it. And every once in while someone might even open it!!