

Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Korach 5770

D'ei Chochmah L'nafshechah

“Let your soul know wisdom”

Parshas Korach

From the discourses of Moreinu v'Rabeinu
the Gaon and Tzaddik Shlit'a

- not for general circulation -



Published by the Yam Hachochmah Institute

Under the auspices of "Yeshivas Toras Chochochom"

for the study of the
revealed and hidden Torah

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Shalosh Seudos of Parshas Korach 5768

”וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן-יִצְחָר בֶּן-קֵהָת בֶּן לֵוִי, וְדָתָן וְאַבִּיָּהוּ בְנֵי אֶלְיָאָב, וְאוֹן בֶּן פֹּלֵת, בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן...
וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרֵת, וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶל אֱהֱלֵ הָעֵדוּת, וְהִנֵּה פֶרֶחַ מִטֵּה אֶהֱרֹן לְבַיִת לֵוִי, וַיֵּצֵא פֶרֶחַ וַיִּצָּץ
צִיץ וַיִּגְמַל שְׂקָדִים.”

“And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi; with Dasan and Aviram the sons of Eliav; and On, the son of Peles, sons of Reuven; took men... And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moshe went into the tent of the testimony and, behold, the rod of Aharon for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.”¹

Rashi explains: “**And Korach took**’—He took himself to one side to be divided from the rest of the community in order to agitate about the *kehunah*. This is what Onkelos meant when he translated ‘took’ as אֶתְפַּלֵּג—he divided off—from the rest of the community so that he could instigate controversy.”

The Avodah of the Levi'im

It is well known that each and every Jew is a spiritual amalgam of all of the qualities of all of the twelve tribes and the twenty-two letters that form the Torah. In his every limb and aspect shines a unique light that enables the individual to serve as a vehicle for the *Shechinah*. In our *parshah* we find that Hashem especially chose the tribe of Levi, and the outward sign of this choosing was in the flowing, blossoming, and fruiting of Aharon's staff.

¹ *Bamidbar* 16:1, 17:23

Within the soul, the aspect of Levi is that of *dveikus*, which we see from the name Levi, which means to accompany and be joined to another. Hashem's choosing of Aharon's staff is a recognition of the great and hidden light of Levi, which is that of *Yesod* within *Malchus* and which is hidden from the eyes of all. This quality can only be apprehended through the uniting of souls in absolute peace, just as Aharon HaKohein was, "a lover of peace and pursuer of peace."² This peace has to be so total that the souls do not feel as though they are separate entities at all, but rather that they are completely encompassed within one another in love. This is the aspect of Moshe and Aharon; sometimes the verse speaks of them as "Moshe and Aharon," and sometimes as, "Aharon and Moshe." This was because they were completely bound together as one.

This dynamic is also manifest in the pathway of the "light of the primordial seven days," the holy Baal Shem Tov and his students, who revealed the way of *avodas Hashem* through binding oneself to the *tzaddikim*. This is the *avodah* of Levi, the *avodah* of *dveikus* and joining together, that the disciple is encompassed within and united with his Rebbe until they are as one. It is not only that the lower aspect of the *talmid* is joined with the upper aspect of Rebbe, but that the Rebbe is also bound up with *talmid* from above to below, and they become like a single soul.

There are numerous great *avdei Hashem* in the world who are also ascetics and who fast a great deal, and who may even occupy themselves with the Torah's secrets and lofty Kabbalah. Nevertheless, if they are lacking a connection with—and self-nullification before—the *tzaddik*, then it is as though their staff has not budded, or blossomed, or borne fruit.

The Rectification of Korach

To come to the path of true completion, one must first rectify his negative character traits. The main way to do this is through nullifying oneself before others, as the sages said: "When one is judged on high, he is asked, 'Did you allow your friend to

² *Avos* 1:12

rule over you?”³ Just as there is a value in a student nullifying himself before his master, so too is there a value in one Jew achieving *bitul* before his friend. In fact, there is even a value in the *bitul* of the “higher” element before the “lower”—of master before student. And even though refinement of the *middos* is very difficult, nevertheless it is the root of the entire Torah and all potential holiness. This is true to such an extent that even though Do’eg HaEdomi was a very great scholar who knew the entire Torah, nevertheless he does not have a portion in the world to come.⁴

This is likewise true of Korach. Onkelos explains that he “diverged” and it was this separation of himself from the *tzaddik* that caused him to fall into the abyss. The deeper works explain that Korach will eventually be rectified, yet not in the way we might assume. The final letters of the phrase, “The *tzaddik* will flower like the palm”—“צדיק כתמר יפרח”—spell out the name Korach.⁵ The Komarna Rebbe explains that the rectification of Korach will be in that all of his *yichudim* and *avodah* will be transferred to Aharon HaKohein—they will be called by Aharon’s name, rather than Korach’s. Anyone who foments controversy upon Moshe Rabbeinu, or any other Jew for that matter, receives his just deserts and *tikkun* by having all of his own *avodah* accrued to the “account” of the object of his ill will. So too, when Aharon HaKohein comes to serve as *kohein gadol* in the ultimate future, all of the holiness and all of the levels that belonged to the soul of Korach will be encompassed within the soul of Aharon. This is how the *tzaddik* rectifies him.⁶ [Now we understand why the hint to Korach in the “flowering” of the *tzaddik* are the end letters—he becomes part and parcel of the *tzaddik*, and this is his *tikkun*.]

This eventual rectification of Korach is based on a fundamental spiritual principle: whenever a person does any holy act, there is a revelation of eternity in it. If, afterward, he slanders the *tzaddikim*, that point of eternity does not disappear. It instead

³ *Maseches Chibut HaKever*, Chapter 4

⁴ *Sanhedrin* 106b

⁵ *Tehillim* 92:13; *Pri Eitz Chaim, Hanhagas Halimud* #1

⁶ *Likutei Halachos, Hilchos Umnin* 4:35

becomes incorporated into the name of the *tzaddik* forever and is lost to the person who generated the *machlokes*. This is a terrible punishment, yet it is also a rectification for the soul of the perpetrator, because it makes him, “ashes beneath the feet of the righteous.” Since the main element of *avodah* is *bitul*—that one should never agitate against one’s teaches or friend or even one’s students—one must also examine himself to see if he is really “making his friend king over himself.”

The Element of Earth

All of what we have said is the aspect of Levi, the aspect of the *Yesod* of *Malchus*, and this is why *bitul* is not important to people—its holiness is hard to fathom because the entire matter is very deeply hidden.

We can understand this more clearly in light of the spiritual aspects of the four elements. Each of the elements—earth, air, fire, and water—have a relationship with *avodas Hashem*. The elements of fire, water, and air are the “renown” *avodos*: the fervor of passionate *avodah* of the angels and *tzaddikim* (*Binah*); the spirit of vitality and life-force of the angels and *tzaddikim* (*Ze’ir Anpin*); the letting go of the ego when immersing in the waters of Torah wisdom (*Chochmah*). However, the element of earth is described merely as a vessel to hold the others⁷—the aspect of *Malchus* is very much hidden. We even find [in the *Sefer Yetzirah*] that the formation of man only involved the three letters *alef*, *mem*, and *shin*—אש, מים, אור— which allude to the three “known” *avodos*, without mention of the element of earth at all.

This is why Rebbe Nachman of Breslov did not want to complete the telling of the story of the Seven Beggars, the tale of the beggar without feet, because it parallels the aspect of Dovid HaMelech and the element of earth [on which we walk], the hidden point of *Malchus* which is also called *Ateres HaYesod*, the “crown of *Yesod*.” All of the other three elements have a breadth and expansion or articulation to them—we can know of them and understand them broadly because there is so much to be

⁷ *Tikkunei Zohar* 104b

accomplished in them—but there is only the slightest hint to the element of earth in the length of the “crown of *Yesod*.” This is because the element of earth is not contingent on “doing” at all, yet even so, it is the “vessel that contains them all.”

The Purpose of Every Mitzvah

The inner purpose of every mitzvah is achieving *dveikus* with Hashem’s simple and absolute essence which is the source of all revelation. This is the power of *פלא*—the supernal wonder and mystery—and is the light of *Kesser* that transcends all knowledge and comprehension. Every holy revelation—or mitzvah—has its components that are known, in which the “broad” forms of *avodah* can be developed. Yet the inner purpose of the mitzvah is associated with *Malchus* whose root is very high above, far beyond human comprehension.

To reveal this higher source, this ultimate wonder, one must act with self-sacrifice. Although there is *yichud* at the level of articulated thought of *Chochmah*, nevertheless the true nature of Hashem’s oneness is only reached at the higher point of *Reisha D’lo Isyadah*, the “head that is not known.” This highest point cannot be discussed or explained, only experienced, and only when there is absolute *bitul* and the self is thrown aside. Then the higher light of the truth of Hashem’s unity can be revealed within the garments of *Chochmah* and *Binah* which are also known as the [thirteen rectifications of] the “beard.” [Just as the ultimate truth of Torah is only understood through the thirteen methods of the sages’ interpretation.] This parallels the ways in which the *tzaddikim* explain the higher aspect of *yichud* through many garments of parable and interpretation. The truth of *yichud* cannot be taught, but its outer garments can be described through the vessels of *Chochmah* and *Binah*.

The Arizal teaches in his *kavanos* that the main juncture for drawing down the fullness of the *mochin*—conscious awareness of the Divine—into *Malchus* is during the recitation of the words *שִׁים שְׁלוֹם*, the final blessing of *Shemonah Esrei*. This is when the light of *Yesod* shines fully. As we explained earlier, the apex of *Yesod*, which is *Malchus*—the “crown of *Yesod*”—is when there is absolute peace and oneness.

Being a Peacemaker

The sages taught that Korach's flaw was that he instigated *machlokes* against the Shabbos itself.⁸ This symbolizes his denial of the ultimate point of פלא—his worldview would not admit of the absolute unity of Hashem's existence, which is a great wonder. [Even though there is all this apparent distinction within creation, nevertheless אין עוד מלבדו—there is nothing but Hashem, nothing to detract from His absolute oneness.] The awareness of this פלא is the hallmark of the *avodah* of the *tzaddikim*—"I am for my Beloved, and His desire is upon me."⁹ Yet this is also meant to be the goal for all of us—to constantly contemplate Hashem's oneness, as well as our absolute unity with Him.

The outward sign of a person's focus on this is seen in the degree to which he fosters peace among his fellow Jews. He honors everyone he meets because he knows that they are all literally a "piece of Hashem." This is the revelation of the *avodah* of *Yesod*—and it is from this point that holiness expands outward, illuminated by the light of Hashem's unity.

Unfortunately, the *sitra achra* works against this constantly, and makes people neglect the importance of this *avodah*. It cheapens the *avodah* of עפר so that people ignore the goal of becoming a "vessel to hold them all," in the sense of, "and my soul should be as dust before all," as we say in the prayer that closes *Shemonah Esrei*. Rather than nullifying ourselves before one another, the *sitra achra* goads us into actual "mudslinging"—seeking out the "dirt" of other's weaknesses, thereby lowering them "down to the ground." This is the exact opposite of the *avodah* of the element of earth.

The element of earth has its holy and unholy manifestations. We have already learned the nature of its holy manifestation, but Korach embodied its unholy application. This is also known as the "*tallis* made completely of *techeiles*," and the, "house that is full of holy works"—the image of self-contained sanctity, that does not need to nullify itself before anyone else.

⁸ *Zohar, Korach* 176b

⁹ *Shir HaShirim* 7:11

The Nature of the Dispute

The Arizal revealed the inner meaning of the dispute Korach's group instigated against Moshe Rabbeinu:

“And they congregated against Moshe and against Aharon...” [They claimed:] The generation of the desert who have already died were all branches off of the main soul of Moshe, and it is only fitting that he rule over them and be their leader. However, their children who are living now, who remain after them, are of the aspect of *Da'as* of *Rachel* which is also called ‘the community [קהל] of Hashem.’ The word קהל the same as the word קלה, as in the ‘*Da'as* of women is light [קלה].’ This aspect is embodied by the ע"ב and ס"ג permutations of the Divine Name [which parallel the spellings associated with both *Chochmah* and *Binah* and have a total value of 135, the same as קלה]. Moshe, however, is sourced in the first permutation alone, that of ע"ב in the “squared” *achoraim* form of the *Shem HaVaYaH* [יהו"ה יהו"י יהו"ו יהו"ה = 72], considered together with מ"ה when it is articulated by *alefs*. [י"ד, י"ד, י"ד ה"א, י"ד ה"א ו"א, י"ד ה"א ו"א ו"א = 130] Together, both add up to the value of the word רב [202]. This is why Korach accused Moshe with the words, ‘It is too much for you [רב לכם]...’ ‘You personify the combined awareness of ר"ב, while the Jewish people personify that of קהל—why then should you raise yourselves above them? Behold, this generation has Hashem among them, not you. They are not like the generation of the desert about whom you said, “The people in whose midst I am,” for you were the soul of all those who had left Egypt. Yet these who were born afterward, “have Hashem among them,” not you. Therefore, why should you raise yourselves above them?’ Moshe answered that this was not so, that the aspect of רב that he embodied—the combination of ע"ב ק"ל—was not ‘for him,’ but rather, ‘for them.’ This is why he said, ‘...רב לכם—‘It is too much for you, sons of Levi...’”

To explain: Korach argued that Moshe Rabbeinu's aspect was that of pure *Chochmah*, symbolized by the ע"ב permutation, without any enclotting within the

aspect of *Binah*, symbolized by the $\gamma\iota\upsilon$ permutation. Why then should you exalt yourselves over the “community of Hashem,” since they contained the *Binah* aspect? Moshe Rabbeinu answered, “It is too much for you, sons of Levi...” The aspect of $\gamma\iota\upsilon$ is really theirs, and not his. Because Moshe Rabbeinu was the ultimate source, he was sourced in the highest levels of all because his soul had never tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Yet the conspirators had, and so they were unable to comprehend his level at all.

Moshe Rabbeinu was rooted in the uppermost level of “the head that is not known”—the highest wonder that transcends all forms of self-sacrifice in *avodah*, it is pure *dveikus* and oneness with Hashem’s essence. And so it is the task of every single Jew to connect with the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu; when one does, not only does the *tzaddik* subdue all negative forces, but even those who are bound to him can do so as well.

[Someone once asked Rebbe Nachman why he taught such deep Torah. Why not just tell people what to do? Rebbe Nachman was very upset by this question. The following paragraphs explain why.]

The arguments of Korach and his band reappear throughout every generation. They are the complaints of those who accuse the *tzaddikim* of speaking too much about *yichud*—the realm of $\gamma\iota\upsilon$ and *Chochmah*—without devoting enough attention to enclothing *yichudim* in the self-sacrifice of the *avodah* of *Binah* and $\gamma\iota\upsilon$. Yet the *tzaddik* answers just as Moshe Rabbeinu did: “It only appears as though you are more to the point; in fact, you are only making use of the outer garments of *Abba* and *Imma*—of $\gamma\iota\upsilon$ and $\gamma\iota\upsilon$. Of what value is the garment if it isn’t filled with genuine awareness of Hashem’s essence in the state of absolute *dveikus*, which is my true preoccupation?” The inner nature of *Malchus*, of the element of earth, is only revealed at the actual point of *yichud*, and so it is completely hidden and is only perceived when complete peace and unity prevail. At this uppermost point, all aspect of *avodah* and *mesirus nefesh* are bound together as one, because complete *dveikus* is the root of everything.

This is the inner meaning of the *techeiles*, which represents the self-sacrifice that is the ultimate purpose of existence. As the sages taught, “If you studied a great deal of Torah, do not think highly of yourself for it. For it was for this [לכך] you were created.”¹⁰ What is the “this” for which you were created? For self-sacrifice, as we find in the description of the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva: “So [כך] did it arise in My thoughts.”¹¹ The future vision of the *dveikus* and *mesirus nefesh* of Rabbi Akiva was part of Hashem’s original plan.

Yet the self-sacrifice is not as Korach imagines it; he only grasps the external view of *mesirus nefesh*, the “*tallis* that is all *techeiles*,” but fails to understand that the *techeiles* is a means through which the higher light of *yichud* is revealed. But this higher light of *yichud* can only be apprehended through complete unity and peace. One must throw himself aside and only seek Hashem’s oneness, and in simple terms one must be willing to crown all other Jews as kings over himself so that all souls are bound together in true unity. Then the light of Hashem’s oneness is revealed.

The Sudden Tikkun

The Kabbalists explain that the flow of *mochin* that descends during the recitation of שים שלום comes in an instant, as we find in the *kavanos* of the closing of the blessing, “Blessed are You, Hashem, who blessed His people Yisrael with peace.” The flow of *mochin* descend then from the highest down to the lowest levels. In the *Toras Chochom* we find this described as שקידה, which means both swift diligence as well as the quick fruiting of the almond in our *parshah*. The שקידה symbolizes not the gradual descent that is the norm, but rather the instantaneous burst of transformation sparked by the sudden revelation of absolute truth. This sudden transformation rectifies everything at every level, and it is symbolized by the sudden fruiting of Aharon’s staff. This is the hidden *avodah* of Levi, and even the simple person can pursue it when he focuses exclusively on revealing the light of Hashem’s unity through all of his actions.

¹⁰ *Avos* 2:9

¹¹ *Menachos* 29b

There are varying degrees of *yichud*; even though a person might know intellectually that there is nothing but Hashem, nevertheless to really feel it in every fiber of his being at the highest and most indescribable levels he has to act with *mesirus nefesh*. The *tzaddikim* maintain this state of awareness all the time, and it is not one that is passive or calm because it requires a great deal of effort to maintain. And the awareness, in turn, empowers the *tzaddikim* to expend ever greater efforts in their *avodah*, because it is the root and source of all holiness and *mesirus nefesh*. And as we find in *Eitz Chaim*, the “head that is not known” spreads and vitalizes the inner nature of all places and levels, to repair all aspects of breakage there. This parallels the “*kav*”—“line” of Infinite Light that illuminates the lower worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah*. Even though we find that the “line” does not extend past the world of *Atzilus*, nevertheless its light is felt through all the worlds, just as Hashem’s *Malchus* extends everywhere. This highest form of *avodah* has the power to bring about the rectification of every person, in every place, in an instant.¹² All by virtue of the true *tzaddik* who devotes himself to reveal the truth of Hashem’s absolute unity.

We see, then, that we begin by binding ourselves to the light of *yichud* in the aspect of Shabbos which is, “holy to you.” This is the enclothing of the higher light within the garments of *Chochmah* and *Binah* [the teachings of the *tzaddikim* that help us feel the light of *yichud* even if we have not achieved it ourselves through *mesirus nefesh*], and it imparts a holy calmness like the peace of Shabbos. Afterward, we must draw down even more of this light from the higher aspect of, “Is something beyond [היפלא] Hashem’s ability?” [This rhetorical question by the angel preceded the conception of Yitzchak.] This is the higher point of פלא that Korach failed to grasp, the path of *mesirus nefesh* purely to experience Hashem’s absolute oneness and existence. This is the *tachlis*, and its light shines through the *techeiles* of mitzvah so that all of the breakage in the lower worlds can be repaired.

¹² *Eitz Chaim, Sha’ar Hamelachim*

“I am for My Beloved, and His Desire is upon Me”

This is what Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai revealed on the day of his death. “I am for My Beloved, and His Desire is upon Me.” The soul does not only praise Hashem in its martyrdom, but in every single breath of life. The redemption will not arrive in the merit of the *mesirus nefesh* of martyrdom, but rather when the souls of the Jewish people seek out Hashem’s absolute *yichud* with *mesirus nefesh* in everyday life. This self-sacrifice binds them to the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu, and they will as a matter of course have the power to repair all of the breakage of the lower worlds.

The Central Avodah

All of these rectifications can only come about, however, when a person also bears the outward sign of Hashem’s unity, which is absolute harmony with his fellow Jews. One cannot be occupied with all kinds of *avodos* and neglect this, because this is not something peripheral. One must make a full inventory every day regarding his relationships with other Jews, because if he is ignoring this aspect of *avodah* he is really steeped in falsehood and far from Hashem. Even though any lapses in this area are surely only superficial since deep inside we all know how precious every single Jew is, nevertheless the superficial work must also be done. If not, the *sitra achra* is able to catch a person and drag him away from Hashem through this particular failing.

No matter what happens, all the while that a person is still divided from others he is “outside” and distant from Hashem. This is the hardest challenge, because nullifying oneself before others means absolutely everyone—those we see only rarely, as well as those with whom we live day in and day out. We must respect one another completely. We should never insult or embarrass anyone G-d forbid. And if another embarrasses us, we must learn to keep silent and accept it. When we do, we instantaneously draw down all of the *mochin* of שים שלום and receive the highest lights of “the head that is not known” and the true *tzaddikim*. In a single instant, one can receive an influx of *ruach hakodesh*.

May Hashem help us to take advantage of all the opportunities remaining to us, during this last stage of the exile, when the *sitra achra* works so hard to accuse and confuse us. For Hashem truly desires to grace every single Jew with all of the levels and all of the worlds, but our foolishness gets the better of us and we forget all that we could achieve the minute we are challenged. One must hold firm and refuse—refuse to part from Hashem, refuse to be like Korach—and only seek to rise higher and higher and refine his *middos* further. One must begin by crowning his fellow Jews as kings over himself, and then all of the good will follow.

“Let Your Soul Know Wisdom”

This is the meaning of: *”דעה חכמה לנפשך והיא כתר לראשך”*—“Let your soul (*nefesh*) know (*d’ei*) wisdom (*Chochmah*) and it will be a crown (*Kesser*) for your head.”¹³ One must enter the level of *Chochmah*—the contemplation of Hashem’s unity through *mesirus nefesh*—and then he will reach the heights of *Kesser*, the ultimate “wonder” of Hashem’s absolute existence and oneness.

May Hashem have mercy on His people, that the truth of His unity be revealed. We do not have to understand how the revelation of His unity will achieve all repairs that need to be made, we only have to devote ourselves to it completely, with self-sacrifice that transcends all reason and understanding. This will, in itself, draw down complete peace, with the arrival of our righteous redeemer in mercy. Speedily and in our days, amen.

Translated and Adapted by Rav Micha Golshevsky.

¹³ From the *Shabbos zemer* “*D’ror Yikrah*,” based on *Mishlei* 24:14.