

Tell a story
Parshah Korach
by Julie Zhuk on 2022-07-02

Comments

Last week's parsha focused on the Jews who went to see the land of Israel. There were twelve spies, but not all of them came back believing wholeheartedly that G-d would keep them safe in the land of Israel. Only two of those spies truly believed that G-d would keep the Jews safe from the so-called Giants that roamed around the land of Israel. Since they didn't believe in G-d so much, it underscored the importance of them fulfilling the commandment G-d had given out in the physical world. This is all going back to the parsha about the spies checking out the land of Israel. Last week's parsha prepares us for the one we have this week. This week's parsha has seven different readings in it. I will write a bit about each one.

This Torah portion maybe a bit long, but as I was reading it I found it to be rather interesting. Please bear with me, maybe you the reader will also find it as interesting as me. This week's parsha is about Korach, who was the cousin of Moses and Aaron. Moses was appointed to be the leader of the Jewish people, by the one and only G-d Himself. Korach didn't understand this, he believed that Moses picked himself out to be in charge of all the people. Korach spoke about this openly to the other Jews around him and Moses himself, he said that everyone heard G-d speak at Mount Sinai.

Korach felt all of the Jewish people were holy, not just Moses. Korach is really bothered that Moses gets the attention and is doing everything. Korach's whole argument throughout this week's parsha is that there shouldn't be some people who lead more than others. Korach felt Moses was doing most of the leading of the Jews. From Korach's perspective, he believed the leadership should have been spread out by other Jews as well. Maybe not everyone wanted to lead the Jews, and they were okay with Moses and Aaron leading them. Korach on the other hand, wanted the leadership to be shared and this meant he too would be involved.

Even without taking the job of Moses, Korach was still bothered that men like him were not allowed to be kohanim. Korach was the great grandson of Levi. Levi was the third son of the twelve boys Jacob had. Korach was a first cousin to Moses and Aaron. Korach was born in Egypt at the time when the Jews had been slaves to the Egyptians. The parsha tells us that Korach did experience the leaving of Egypt that the Jews went through. It was a miraculous experience because G-d had all the works in motion. Korach and other Jews saw for themselves that the Red Sea split and then it turned to dry land that they could walk on. Korach was also among the other Jews who heard G-d give the Torah at Mount Sinai. Korach grew to be very wealthy and was a very smart man and had the ability to access many situations. He was part of the Levite tribe and it allowed him to be in the services of the Mishkan. This included the portable sanctuary the Jews carried with them everywhere throughout their journey while traveling until they reached the land of Israel, where they finally settled.

Korach felt pretty powerful compared to the other Jews around him. There was a strong feeling of jealousy that roused through him. He was jealous of Moses more than Aaron. He was angry with Moses for giving some of the leadership power to his brother Aaron, instead of splitting it with other Jews. Korach felt strongly that everyone could perform G-d's commandments equally

and he came to the conclusion that there was no justification for an elite class of leaders. This was why he staged a rebellion against Moses, he was the one who started it. The rebellion was successful at first, about two hundred and fifty other Jewish men followed in his footsteps. This was a rebellion against Moses' authority and the fact that Aaron had been appointed as a high priest. Korach had another family member mentioned in this parsha, Elitzafan, who was his cousin.

This cousin had been chosen to be the head of the Levite family of Kehot. Korach belonged to the family of Kehot and he felt this position was rightfully his, but he didn't get to play the role of it. Those were his reasons for starting the rebellion, which was no small thing. Two other Jewish men mentioned in this parsha were Dassan and Abiram who joined in the rebellion. Those two were also from Egypt and they were troublemakers back in Egypt before the Jews managed to get out. It was due to Dassan and Abiram that the other two hundred and fifty Jewish men joined in on this rebellion. Korach, Dassan, and Abiram confronted Moses and Aaron about them leading the Jews and not the others having an opportunity to do so.

Korach and these other men demanded to serve as high priests just as Aaron was. Again these Jewish people in the rebellion forgot that it was truly G-d who appointed Aaron to be a high priest. The next excerpt from the Torah speaks about how there is a power of women. Korach was a member of one of the most distinguished Jewish families. He was also a learned, wise, and wealthy Jew. He was among the inner circle of Moses' and Aaron's closest confidants. The part in the Torah that will speak about the power of women has to do with a co-conspirator Korach had. This co-conspirator named On son of Pelet. This man didn't actually follow through with the rebellion that Korach was leading. On son Pelet was known to be very ordinary and this spoke about his intellectual capabilities and his lineage, where he came from. He was a married man, we don't know his wife's name. Her name isn't significant in the parsha or the story, but what she did for her husband is crucial. He confided in her what was going on and how the rebellion was going to be played out. On son Pelet's wife turned to her husband and said along the words that he was always going to be subservient to someone else. There are some sources that say she let her hair be exposed so she made herself look immodest.

She did it knowingly that way Korach and his followers wouldn't dare to stop by. They never came by and On son Pelet skipped the whole rebellion thing. He was not part of the wrath that G-d had planned for Korach and his followers who rebelled against Moses and Aaraon. Due to this rebellion, Korach's end came tragically. It was really an unfortunate situation, he dragged hundreds of others down with him, but there was one Jewish man who didn't receive the awful punishment of being dragged down along with Korach and the others. This man was On son Pelet, he was the only one who completely was untouched by G-d giving these other followers the experience of having the earth swallow them up.

Before being swallowed up by the earth, Korach and his followers had assembled a crowd of people to rebel against Moses and Aaron. The earth swallowed Korach and his followers because it was part of G-d's plan. It started though because Moses did in fact pray about it to G-d. He asked G-d to have the earth open up as if it was in the form of a mouth and swallow up all the people opposing Moses and Aaron. G-d is invisible to us humans whether we are Jewish we follow any other belief system, but He sees us. He sees the actions and words we exchange. He heard the prayer that Moses said and He followed through. The Torah tells us that the

reason Korach got the punishment G-d gave and On son Pelet wasn't touched in the least bit, was because of the wives of these women. The wives of these two women were completely different. We don't know from the Torah if they knew each other, but we can assume from the reading that they probably were not friends. They were so different, one was honest and looked beyond the past and into the future. The other one we don't know if she perhaps lied about anything, but she was involved in her husband's rebellion. Before actually rebelling, he opened up to his wife. He shared with her, made her be his confidant as well as his followers. She was encouraging him to go through with the rebellion. She was part of the mutiny along with the other two hundred and fifty followers. It was because of this, she too was swallowed up by the earth and so were their family. We will learn later in the parsha how Korach's sons didn't get swallowed up because they came before G-d feeling bad for their father's part in the rebellion. What G-d was looking for from Korach's sons who were even slightly involved in the rebellion was the fact they did teshuva.

The other wife, being On set Pelet she was known for preventing her husband from being involved in this awful rebellion. The Torah teaches us that what she did demonstrates the great responsibility women have. Especially the women who happen to be married, it's up to these women who are not just married, but some are actual mothers. Women should never underestimate the ability they have in influencing their own destinies as well as those of those in influencing their own destinies as well as those of those in their community. This includes their husbands and their families as well. This is coming from the source Likutei Sichot volume 2.

Before Korach died, he did manage to assemble a lot of people in his congregation against Moses and Aaron. The Torah portion this week speaks about having two different kinds of holy conflict, positive and negative. Holy conflict is known as the spirited and sincere debate over the proper interpretation of the Torah. Everyone is trying to seek the truth on their own, their conflicts lead to them having a greater friendship and finding mutual love. When people have unholy conflict it stems from them having selfish concerns.. They are also searching to have personal gratification. Everyone has their own concerns and some of these can be selfish and different from each other. The Torah states that any confederation based on one's selfishness will be harmful.

They will also have conflicting interests. Korach and his followers were a prime example of having unholy conflict and hardship as well. Moses, Aaron, and anyone who supported them didn't fight. The Torah only tells us now many years later, how some of the Jews (who didn't fight Moses or Aaron) still opposed both of them. Korach on the other hand, his controversy raged between himself and those who were his followers. From this week's parsha we can tell that Korach had an unholy conflict that was coming from his own self-interest. We learn that it is in our best interest to avoid this kind of unholy conflict. We should work on having a respectful and healthy kind of conflict, one that will motivate us to be more sincere and humble as we search for the truth.

If we are going to continue to look for the truth. The third reading of the Torah in this week's parsha talks about G-d telling Moses to hold a test for the Jews. This test was going to explain the error that Korach and his followers made. Giving a sacrifice of incense was part of the service the Tabernacle provided. It was only priests who were allowed to do this. This all was going to take place prior to the rebellion actually happening. Korach and his followers were still

alive. G-d told Moses to instruct both Aaron and his company of the two hundred and fifty princes and those who were judges to offer up incense. The key to the test was that if someone's incense was not going to be accepted by G-d, it would perish. It wasn't just these leaders, there was a large group of people who Korach had convinced to be on his side. Moses tried what he could do to persuade these people who wanted to rebel against him to leave Korach. These people didn't want to listen to Moses and refused to back down. Again as I mentioned before, G-d is always watching us. He saw what was happening. He saw the efforts Moses put in and since the people who wanted to follow in Korach's footsteps didn't want to listen to Moses or back down from the rebellion. G-d decided to punish these folks. His punishment was sending a fire that consumed two hundred and fifty people who gave an offering of incense. The rest of those who were part of the rebellion were swallowed up by the earth. The earth was in the form of a mouth and it opened up in the ground.

By reading this we would think that they had been punished, but the earth beneath them split open. We learn from the Torah that G-d didn't punish Korach and his supporters right away, it was only after they had acted out on their beliefs. At first Korach had convinced so many people to be on his side. G-d didn't punish them until they actually committed their crime. Before they did so it's important to note that they were warned. G-d did warn them to not go through with the horrible rebellion they were part of. They didn't listen and that's why in the end they were punished severely. We are always able to pick some lessons up from the weekly Torah sections.

From this Torah portion, we learn that by having examples from G-d as was mentioned before, anyone who offends us or disobeys the word of G-d or His laws, we need to give them the benefit of the doubt. Meaning we need to be as patient and show that we love them. We need to be encouraging as well. That is the way we can better ourselves. That way, they too can better themselves. At this point in the Torah portion, not all those who were rebelling against Moses and Aaron had lost their lives.

A good portion had, it was that fire G-d sent over that killed two hundred and fifty people. The others who were waiting for Korach to signal the right time to rebel, came forward to Moses and complained about many Jews being killed. These people were oblivious to the wrong those who died had done. These people still alive continued having the idea they were right to rebel against Moses and Aaron. G-d told Moses that His plan, His intention was to kill off the rest of the people. Many Jews started to die from an epidemic. Moses tried to warn many Jews, he suggested that they remove themselves from Korach.

This was going to create different divisions between the Jews. Moses was doing this so people could spread themselves out and not everyone would be caught up in the wrongdoing that Korach was going through. Korach heard what Moses wanted to do and he called for an abolishing of these different divisions of the Jews. The Torah tells us that it was Korach who became the classic example of argument and division. We know that it is dangerous to create arbitrary or artificial divisions, but ignoring what G-d had called for was also wrong.

There was a division that G-d was establishing in nature or one that was legislated within the Torah. There was reasoning behind why Moses wanted to create different divisions

among among these Jews. True unity is only possible if every component of the group is fulfilling its actual role. It's only at that point, all of the components can combine to constitute what is known as a well-functioning unit. Getting rid of boundaries doesn't always create a whole group. Sometimes it can have the opposite effect and it can get fire and water to come together. This can happen by heating the water with the fire, but it will only happen if both are separated by a pot. That is why respecting the Torah's different sections between different groups of people can allow for there to be the truest expression of a whole group and one that has harmony in it too. That was the purpose of divisions among the Jewish people. G-d was trying to demonstrate to the Jews like Korach, that it was Him who separated the tribe of Levites, meaning the priests and the Levites. He separated them from the rest of the Jewish people so everyone could do the job that was asked of them. G-d told Moses to take the staffs belonging to the princes of each of the twelve tribes. Moses was asked to place these staffs next to the Ark located in the Holy of Holies. It was a chamber, the inner chamber of the Tabernacle. When Moses did this, the staff belonging to Aaron had somehow sprouted almonds overnight. It was a miracle from G-d.

As we read that part about the staffs from the twelve different tribes, it was nice that Aaron's sprouted almonds overnight. The other remaining staffs were left untouched, nothing happened to them. There is a belief in Judaism that we have all been given a staff from the Tabernacle. All of these staffs had originally belonged to G-d. One of the reasons the Jews were given a staff to begin with was they studied Torah. Moses gave the Jews the Torah and by studying it they were following in the ways of Moses' teachings. There was a reason for Aaron's staff to have grown some almonds. It explains how G-d assists humans in making everything in the world bloom into among these Jews. True unity is only possible if every component of the group is fulfilling its actual role. It's only at that point, all of the components can combine to constitute what is known as a well-functioning unit. Getting rid of boundaries doesn't always create a whole group. Sometimes it can have the opposite effect and it can get fire and water to come together. This can happen by heating the water with the fire, but it will only happen if both are separated by a pot. That is why respecting the Torah's different sections between different groups of people can allow for there to be the truest expression of a whole group and one that has harmony in it too. That was the purpose of divisions among the Jewish people. G-d was trying to demonstrate to the Jews like Korach, that it was Him who separated the tribe of Levites, meaning the priests and the Levites. He separated them from the rest of the Jewish people so everyone could do the job that was asked of them. G-d told Moses to take the staffs belonging to the princes of each of the twelve tribes. Moses was asked to place these staffs next to the Ark located in the Holy of Holies. It was a chamber, the inner chamber of the Tabernacle. When Moses did this, the staff belonging to Aaron had somehow sprouted almonds overnight. It was a miracle from G-d.

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seven readings in this week's Torah portion. It is a hard parsha to read through, because a lot of the content can make any Jew sad.

Now that we read this parsha thousands of years later after the fact of these events happening, we have to keep in mind to not judge any of those Jews starting with Korach himself. It's easy to be jealous of what someone else has even if one of the ten commandments is to not want what someone else has. Korach knew this, but he still wanted what he didn't have. The other Jews who followed in his footsteps grew to be jealous too and by the seventh reading in the parsha, we learn that the Jews were finally ready to accept the Divinely ordained difference between the tribe of Levi and what were known as the lay people. This included the division of the tribe of Levi itself into priests and Levites. The people had accepted what G-d had planned. There were specific areas in the tabernacle that were meant only for those serving as priests or Levites.

This area of the compound was considered a capital offense for those not serving as priests or Levites. The other people who would enter it were afraid that they stood very close to death. G-d made it so that the Priests or Levites would be responsible for making sure no one came to that area of the compound.

The parsha teaches us what the name Levi means. It means to accompany or a better term for that is to be attached. One explanation of this could mean that those serving as Levites enjoyed having such a close connection to G-d. The role for the Levites within the tabernacle and later in their lives when they served in the Holy Temple, was to assist the priests in their G-dly service. We learn that the entire tribe of Levi was denied a portion in the land of Israel. G-d was appeasing the priests. G-d stated that they didn't need to have a portion in the land of Israel. The reason for this was He was their portion. Their connection with Him was closer than what any other Jew had. Not only this, but He was also their inheritance. G-d may have been happy to share this news with them, but those considered "Regular Levites didn't find this news comforting. They were left out of both the physical inheritance of the land of Israel and having that spiritual inheritance that was promised specifically to the priests. They did feel as if they were less important than the priests and those who did get a portion in the land of Israel. This was why the Levites were expected to be at a high spiritual level. The Torah says that the secondary role they had, kept them humble. Unfortunately it left them feeling unimpressed with their own station in their lives. Specifically, having this humility is what brought them to be so close to G-d. There were many Jews to pick from to find out which would serve as priests.

We are almost at the end of the parsha of Korach. It was G-d who picked out the entitlements that the priests would get from the rest of the Jewish people. These entitlements consisted of things such as: specific portions of their sacrifices, their crops growing in their fields, and from their herds and flocks of animals. The last reading in this week's parsha focuses on how G-d told Moses had to perform something called the service of the Tent of Meeting. In the beginning of the parsha, Korach's whole argument was that all Jewish people are holy. Furthermore, he said that there was no need to recognize any kind of differences that separated these people from each other. He didn't believe doing this would bring any kind of good into the world, it would just cause problems between the Jews. Meaning they would find fault with each other thinking one is better than another. Korach wanted the Jews to see each other as complete equals. This kind of way of living leads to a mistaken notion that there is no need to encourage others to grow in their spirituality. Another thing it leads people to do is not focus on how they

can grow their connection to G-d. Not growing in one's spirituality and trying to find a way to connect to G-d is an insult to the person's intrinsic holiness. This is what Korach believed himself.

The Torah says differently than this first train of thought. The Torah teaches us that when we love others around us, it helps us want to make ourselves better. All that love we have for someone else helps us want to be better than that person. Not only do we help ourselves grow spiritually, but the other people who we love too. The parsha concludes with the thought that everyone has a Korach inside of them. That Korach is the desire to ignore Moses' call to care for the spiritual needs of others. By doing this, we ourselves can focus on our own spiritual self-fulfillment. We, Jews should not listen to our inner Korach. No, we should respond to our inner Moses wholeheartedly. When we work on our own spiritual well-being, G-d promises us that He will help. The way He plans to do this is, if we can devote ourselves to the other people around us, He will treat us as if we are spiritual Levites. He will draw us close to Him and provide for all of our needs, that includes spiritual needs and material ones as well.