

The World's Greatest Mutiny

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Korach

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

An Added Mitzva Component To Compensate for Deficiency

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Korach's Wager Gone Awry

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What Appears Iniquitous Is In Fact Just

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1. Moshe attempted to defuse the opposition by approaching Dasan & Aviram to address the issues.
2. They rejected his overtures of concern.
3. Moshe realized there was no hope for reconciliation.
4. He supplicated G-d that their share in the communal offering that will be brought should be rejected.
5. He was concerned that the merit of the sacrifice would protect them from G-d's wrath, which they deserved.
6. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: If a person is truly evil, the devoutly righteous can decree that the small degree of merit that is on record should be revoked & annulled.
7. Moshe's evaluation of Korach and his community

was truly evil therefore whatever good deeds they may have should be revoked.

8. King David's greatest antagonist was Doeg, whose envy of Dovid was all consuming.
9. His actions and ill speech brought havoc and great tragedy upon Dovid personally, King Saul and his family, and Nov the city of Kohanim.
10. He asked of G-d that the Torah of Doeg shouldn't be studied by Jews after he passes away so no merit should accrue to him.
11. He shouldn't merit descendants who are Torah scholars.
12. Dovid's assessment of Doeg was that he epitomized evil therefore he can deny him all opportunities of mitzvah.

Rejecting The Irrefutable When Ego Calls

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1. Korach attempted to usurp Moshe's authority.
2. Amrom, Moshe's father, was the eldest of Kahas' 4 sons.
3. Korach's father was the 2nd to the eldest.
4. Laws of Inheritance: The first born receives a double portion.
5. Moshe assumed the position of king and Aharon as High Priest.
6. Korach felt he should receive the 3rd appointment.
7. Moshe, by Divine dictate, appointed Elitzaphon as Prince (family of Kahas).
8. Korach's claim: If appointment is based on inheritance he should be Prince; if on qualification—he should be High Priest.
9. Rambam: The authenticity of Moshe's prophecy is that every Jew at Sinai witnessed G-d speaking to Moshe.
10. After Sinai, Moshe's prophecy will not be questioned.
11. Korach and his cohorts were at Sinai, yet questioned his word.
12. Because of one's conflict of interest, one may reject something that is irrefutable.

The Wealthy Strata Incites A Mutiny

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1. Dasan and Aviram were key players in the mutiny against Moshe.
2. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: Korach attempted to usurp Moshe's authority; Dasan & Aviram instigated the rebellion.
3. 4/5 of the Jews died in the plague of darkness in Egypt; they were classified as evil.
4. Dason and Aviram continued their evil until they were destroyed with Korach.
5. They were the ones who informed that Moshe killed the Egyptian.
6. Their wealth enabled them to do so.
7. Moshe could return to Egypt as redeemer when they lost their wealth and no longer had relationships within government circles.
8. The Jews who perished during the days of darkness were the ones who had no interest in leaving.
9. Dasan and Aviram wanted to leave to go to a land flowing with milk & honey and the unlimited wealth they'd take out of Egypt.
10. As a result of the sin of the spies, it was decreed that they perish in the desert.
11. Dasan and Aviram's dream of renewed wealth & power was realized.
12. The intensity of hate for Moshe drove the mutiny and attempt to discredit him.

A Flash of Clarity Secures A Dynasty

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1. Chazal: How did Korach, renowned as wise, act so foolishly?
2. Moshe told Korach & his assembly of 250 to take firepans with incense to burn.
3. The one chosen to be High Priest would live, the others would die.
4. Korach's holy vision: Shmuel HaNavi, equal to Moshe, Aharon & 24 groups of Leviim, would descend from him.
5. This made it evidently clear he'd be the one to survive.
6. Actually, his sons would repent, thus being spared from destruction.
7. Midrash: Before the destruction of Korach and community, Moshe entered the tent of Dasan and Aviram; his sons sat alongside him.
8. His sons' quandary: If they stand for Moshe they'd disgrace their father; if not, they'd be violating the commandment to acknowledge a Torah Sage.
9. They chose to stand.
10. Because they stood for Moshe they had stirrings of repentance and repented.
11. In the merit of acknowledging Moshe they extricated themselves from evil.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Korach

A photograph of a rocky, mountainous landscape under a cloudy sky. The text 'The World's Greatest Mutiny' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

The World's Greatest Mutiny

The Orchestration of Events for the Sake of Truth

Midrash: The wealthiest Jewish commoner to ever live was *Korach* and the wealthiest gentile commoner, was *Haman*, the evil one. *Korach's* wealth was so great that he required hundreds of donkeys just to carry the keys needed to access his wealth. How did he come upon such exceptional wealth?

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: During the seven years of famine that came upon Egypt and the entire region, *Yosef* the Viceroy of Egypt had collected all the wealth of the world in exchange for the grain that was sold. *Yosef*, being the dedicated Viceroy who was above reproach, displayed his dedication to Pharaoh by taking this wealth and hiding it in three locations so that so that if one were to discover one of them, the other two would remain concealed, thus protecting the wealth of Egypt.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, G-d instructed them to borrow the gold and silver from their masters, it was not the wealth that *Yosef* had hidden away. When the remains of the Egyptian army along with the chariots were cast upon the sea shore, the wealth at the sea was greater than what was taken out of Egypt. This wealth was that was in the coffers of the king but not the wealth that was hidden away by *Yosef*. However, this too was not the source of *Korach's* unique wealth.

Midrash: As the Jewish people were leaving Egypt, the "mouth of the earth" had opened up in a particular location allowing *Korach* to come upon one of these three storage locations where *Yosef* had hidden the wealth of Egypt. As a result of this finding, he acquired a third of the wealth that was hidden away. The Roman Emperor Antoninus, who was an intimate contemporary of Judah the Prince and who according to *Tosfos* (in the Jerusalem *Talmud*) later converted to Judaism, had come upon the second location where

Yosef had hidden the wealth. The third location of wealth will remain hidden until the coming of *Moshiach* so that the righteous at the end of time shall benefit from it. Why did G-d allow *Korach* to be the beneficiary of such an special find?

Chazal: *Korach* was exceptionally wise and had a special pedigree among the Levites. He was from the family that carried the Holy Ark. He became corrupted as a result of envy. *Korach's* envy was rooted in his sense of self. A person of such unusual pedigree, intelligence, could not understand why he was denied being the Prince of the Levites. This honor had been given to a younger cousin of his, *Elizafon Ben Uzeal*. Had it not been for *Korach's* exceptional wealth, he may not have felt entitled to such status. There thus would not have been a basis for envy. In addition, without the wealth he would not have been in a position to be able to usurp *Moshe's* authority. Without his great wealth, any mutiny that he would have tried would have been ignored. However, because of his status and wealth he did attempt to usurp *Moshe's* authority and failed.

Torah: "The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them (*Korach* and his assembly) and their households, and all the people who were with *Korach*, and the entire wealth." Only the two sons of *Korach* remained alive because they had repented at the last moment.

Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers: The mouth of the earth that swallowed *Korach* and his entire community was one of the ten things that were created during the twilight period at the end of the Sixth Day of Creation. It was created specifically to bring Divine retribution upon *Korach* and his entire community to confirm and communicate for all eternity, "*Moshe* is truth and his *Torah* his truth, and we (the community of *Korach*) are liars."

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra*: *Korach* and his followers in the depths of *geheim* proclaim this on a continuous basis.

The incident of *Korach* was one of the most serious moments in the history of the Jewish people. *Korach's* attempt to usurp the authority of *Moshe* was in essence questioning the authenticity of the *Torah* itself. His claim was that the *Torah* was not the Word of G-d but rather the word of *Moshe*.

By allowing *Korach* to come upon such unusual wealth, G-d put into motion a chain of events that

would establish and secure the authenticity of *Torah* until the end of time. Although *Korach* had free choice, his failing, succumbing to his envy, was a means through which to establish the authenticity and eternity of *Torah*.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in the Portion of *Shemos*: "After *Moshe* received the *Torah* at Sinai directly from G-d, was it possible for him to become a heretic?" He answers, "It was impossible." After the *Torah* was transmitted to the Jewish people through *Moshe*, he no longer had choice in this particular area. *Reb Meir Simcha* explains that if *Moshe* would have the choice to deny G-d's existence, it would render the *Torah* meaningless. The basis for the divinity of *Torah* is *Moshe's* credibility as G-d's spokesman. If he were to become a heretic, then the entire *Torah* would be in jeopardy. It was worthwhile to give *Korach* the material means which placed him in a difficult setting of choice, in order to establish *Moshe* as G-d's spokesman, thus confirming the immutability of *Torah*.

Sforno: The Jewish people were not worthy of prophesizing in a wake state nevertheless, G-d allowed them to do so in order to appreciate and understand that it is possible to prophesize in a wake state without dying. If they would not have personally experienced this level of prophecy, they would not have believed that *Moshe* was able to prophesize in a wake state. Therefore, G-d allowed them to be able to do so, although they were not worthy. It was only in order to establish *Moshe* as His Prophet.

The Subtleness of Influence

Torah: *Dasan* and *Aviram* openly defied *Moshe* and incited the Jewish people to mutiny against him. They together with *Korach* attempted to usurp his authority.

Midrash: "Our Rabbis of blessed memory said, 'Woe to the evil person (*rasha*) and woe to his neighbor. It is good for the devoutly righteous and it is good for his neighbor.' Where do we see this? *Dasan* and *Aviram* were destroyed because of the dissention of *Korach*. They were his neighbors and thus influenced by him. His location was in the south...The location of the camp of *Reuvain* was juxtaposed to the family *Korach*...It is because of their proximity to him that they joined with him in the mutiny against *Moshe*. In contrast, the camp of *Yehudah* which included *Yissachar* and *Zevulun* was

on the east....They were neighbors of *Moshe*, *Aaron* and his children...Because they were in close proximity to *Torah*, they merited to become *Torah* Sages. As it states in Psalms, 'Yehudah the legislator of law..' The children of *Yissachar* were 'yodei binah' (those who possessed special insight and clarity)... Although the tribe of *Zevulun* was not preoccupied with the study of *Torah* on a fulltime basis, they were also endowed with a special level of *Torah* knowledge."

Mishna in *Pirkei Avos*: "You should distance yourself from a bad neighbor..." Based on the *Midrash*, *Dasan* and *Aviram* only became actively involved in the mutiny against *Moshe* because they were his neighbors. We can draw from this, that one should protect himself by distancing himself from a bad neighbor. "Woe to the evil person (*rasha*) and woe to his neighbor..." This principle also applies in the positive regarding a neighbor who is devoutly righteous- "It is good for the devoutly righteous and it is good for his neighbor." We see this regarding those who were in close proximity to *Moshe* and his family. Just by being in the sphere of the *tzaddik* could have a profound positive influences, just as being in the proximity of one who is evil could lead to disaster. The influences that are being discussed are subtle and affect one's being on a subliminal level.

It is interesting to note that *Dasan* and *Aviram* had a long history of being the antagonists of *Moshe*. In Egypt, they had initially informed Pharaoh that *Moshe* had killed the Egyptian, thus causing *Moshe* to flee to *Midian*. They incited the people to complain against *Moshe* in the desert. They went out into the field to gather the *Manna* on *Shabbos*, when it was forbidden to do so. Regardless of their history of defiance, *Chazal* attribute the basis for their joining the mutiny against *Moshe* to the fact that they were exposed to the evil of *Korach* as his neighbors. Meaning, had it not been for the fact that they were in his sphere of influence they would not have considered usurping *Moshe's* authority and undermining the authenticity of *Torah*.

Man is an impressionable being. He is easily influenced and impressed by what he sees and to what he is exposed. If one sees another individual in a positive light, he is open to be influenced by him. Ultimately, he will be drawn to emulate that individual's values and behavior.

Rambam in *Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah*: If one were to gaze upon and contemplate the majesty of

creation found in nature, one will be overwhelmed by G-d's Wisdom. Through this reflection and contemplation it will evoke an overwhelming love for G-d. King David states in Psalms, "Taste and see the goodness of G-d" From this we see that it is possible for the Jew to experience *Torah* at a palatable level and not just as something that is abstract.

Torah: One must count seven weeks and 49 days starting from the second day of Passover until *Shavuos*, the day that the *Torah* was given at Sinai. *Chinuch* explains that counting the days of the *omer* (*sefiras ha'omer*) from *Pesach* to *Shavuos* is significant because it is a counting towards the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai. Just as a slave yearns for the moment that he is able to seek refuge from the sun in the shade, so too the counting of the *omer* toward the day of the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai is an expression of the yearning of the Jew for that special moment. It is a demonstration of his aspiration.

We pray in the blessing of the *Torah* "...G-d, sweeten the words of Your *Torah* in our mouths and in the mouths of Your people..." In order to experience the sweetness of *Torah* one needs to be inspired by being in the proper environment. *Chazal* tell us that one should distance himself from a bad neighbor. It does not state, "from an evil person." This is because a bad neighbor causes subtle negative influences that one is unaware of that will ultimately destroy one's spirituality. If one were truly evil, because his evil is blatant, one will distance himself.

Repentance is Something that One Must Merit

Torah: "*Moshe* said to *Korach*... Let each man take his fire-pan and you shall place incense on them... two hundred and fifty fire-pans; and you (*Korach*) and *Aaron*..." In order to refute *Korach's* claim, *Moshe* presented him and the 250 members of his assembly, with a test that would determine the one who is chosen by G-d to be the High Priest. Only the one who was truly chosen by G-d to be the High Priest would survive the test of the burning of the incense and the others would die. Although, *Korach* should have understood that his chance of survival was nearly impossible, he nevertheless proceeded.

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: “*Korach* was a wise person. How did he allow himself to enter into such foolishness? It was because his eye had misled him. He saw that *Shmuel* the Prophet, who was the equivalent of *Moshe* and *Aaron* was to descend from him. He also saw that twenty- four families of Levites will descend from his children that will have prophetic abilities. *Korach* had said, ‘Is it possible that all of this greatness will emanate from me and I should be destroyed?’ However, *Korach’s* eye misled him. He did not see accurately. In fact, *Shmuel* the Prophet and all of the great families that will descend from his progeny were only a result of *Korach’s* sons repenting at the very last moment.” Because of *Korach’s* sense of self and egotism he would never consider the possibility that the reason he was not chosen to be the Prince of the family of *Kahas* was because he was not worthy.

Torah: *Moshe* was willing, for the sake of peace, to forego his honor and approach *Korach* in a final effort to reason with him to understand that his appointment was by Divine Decree.

Midrash: “Because *Moshe* had gone to the entrance of the tent, he saved four *tzaddikim* from the judgment of *geheimom*. These four *tzaddikim* were the three sons of *Korach* and the son of *Peles*. What merit did the sons of *Korach* have that they should be saved? When *Moshe* entered into the tent of *Korach*, his sons were seated next to him. When his sons had seen *Moshe* they covered their faces with the ground (they were embarrassed to face him). They were in a quandary.

If they were to stand for *Moshe* (as the law dictates that they should) they would disgrace their father because it would be a dishonor to him to acknowledge their father’s adversary. However if they were to remain seated, they would be in violation of the *Torah* law which dictates that one must acknowledge the presence of a Torah sage by standing. They decided to stand for *Moshe* and acknowledge his presence despite the disgrace to their father. At that moment, they had stirrings of repentance in their heart.” In the merit of standing for *Moshe* they had merit the Divine Assistance to have the capacity to repent and thus were able to extricate themselves from the congregation of *Korach*.

In order for one to repent, especially when one is deeply entrenched sin, one must have special merit. One must very often take the initiative regardless of

how difficult it may be to do what G-d dictates. Had it not been for their decision to stand for *Moshe*, the sons of *Korach* would not have merited to repent. By fulfilling the *mitzvah* of acknowledging the presence of a *Torah* Sage, they were saved from the judgment of *geheimom*.

Chazal: *Korach* and his assembly have no share in the world to come. However, because the sons of *Korach* were able to extricate themselves, they are part of the eternity of the Jewish people. It is because of their momentary decision to stand for *Moshe* that *Shmuel* the Prophet, who is the equivalent of *Moshe* and *Aaron*, came to being and twenty-four special families of Levites. We can now appreciate the *Mishna* in Ethics of our Fathers that tells us, one should never underestimate the value of performing even the most minor *mitzvah* because one cannot fathom its true value.

A Time to Take Action

Based on the laws of inheritance, *Korach* should have received the next official appointment as the leader of the family of *Kahas*; however, that position was given to *Elitzafon Ben Uziel* (the son of the youngest brother) rather than *Korach* the son of *Yitzhar* (who was the second brother). As a result of his not being chosen, *Korach* understood that he was denied something that was rightfully his. He had decided to undermine and usurp *Moshe’s* authority. However, *Korach* did not attempt to incite the mutiny against *Moshe* immediately after the appointment of *Elitzafon Ben Uziel*. *Ramban* explains the reason *Korach* chose to launch his mutiny at a later time.

Ramban: If *Korach* had attempted to usurp *Moshe’s* authority at that time, people would have risen up against him because of their special love and reverence for *Moshe*. They Jewish people understood that after they had sinned with the Golden Calf, they deserved to be destroyed by G-d. It was only *Moshe’s* beseeching G-d that the decree was annulled and they were spared from destruction.

However, after the incident of the quail during which many Jewish people had died by the wrath of G-d and the decree upon the generation of the spies (who were between the ages of 20 and 60) that they should die in the desert over a forty year period; the Jewish people had become embittered with *Moshe*. They had said,

“When we had sinned with the Golden Calf *Moshe* prayed on our behalf and we were spared; however, after the incident of the spies, he did not pray for us. Perhaps he is no longer the leader that he once had been.” *Korach* understanding the vulnerability of *Moshe* at that moment, saw it as an opportunity to usurp his authority. Seemingly, the Jewish people had a reasonable question regarding *Moshe*’s leadership. Why did *Moshe* not pray for the after the incident of the spies as he had done after the sin of the Golden Calf?

Torah: When the Jewish people were caught between the Sea and the Egyptian army, some of them along with *Moshe* began to pray for G-d to save them. G-d, however said to *Moshe*, “Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and let them journey forth!”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: If one is in a situation in which he can take the initiative in order to be saved, he should do so rather than remaining passive and beseeching G-d for Assistance. However, if one’s predicament is of such a nature that it is clear that only G-d can help, it is not the time to take initiative, but rather it is time to pray. Seemingly, this was the situation of the Jewish people at the Sea. It was time to pray and not take an initiative. Why did G-d say to *Moshe* that it is not a time to pray but rather a time to travel into the Sea.

When the Jewish people found themselves at the Sea, they said to *Moshe*, “Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: At the moment the Jewish people had made this statement, it aroused intense prosecution upon them. It was seen as a lack of trust in G-d after what they had witnessed in Egypt. It was because of this intense prosecution that their prayers would not arouse G-d’s Mercy. G-d said to *Moshe* that the only thing that could quell the prosecution against them is for them to demonstrate their trust in Him by traveling into the Sea.

The sin of the spies was considered to be a public desecration of G-d’s Name. As G-d had said to *Moshe*, “After all the miracles that they had witnessed how could the Jewish people believe the slanderous reports of the spies? How is it possible to have such a level of distrust in Me?” Because of this serious breach of faith, an intense level of prosecution came upon them. *Moshe*’s supplications would have been rejected. They could not evoke G-d’s Mercy. The sin of the Golden Calf was not as a result of a lack of faith but rather because

of their miscalculation of *Moshe*’s return, they believed that *Moshe* had died. They felt abandoned by *Moshe* and stranded in the desert with out a leader. They thus returned to their idolatrous ways from Egypt. This is the reason *Moshe* was able to pray on behalf of the Jewish people after the sin of the Golden Calf to annul the decree. *Korach* saw that the Jewish people did not make any distinction between the failing of the spies and the sin of the Golden Calf. All they understood was that *Moshe* did not pray on their behalf as he had done earlier. Thus causing an embitterment towards *Moshe*, which *Korach* took advantage of.

We learn from this that there are times that when prayer will be meaningful and effective; however, there are times when one needs to take the initiative to demonstrate one’s unwavering faith in G-d to quell the prosecution. One must take the initiative despite the seeming ineffectiveness of that initiative. We live in time that there is great prosecution upon the world and the Jewish people because G-d’s Name is being continuously desecrated. The Jew must take the initiative to do His Will at all costs, despite the position of humanity and remain steadfast in his commitment to Torah to bring about the ultimate Redemption.

The Magnitude of G-d’s Glory Coming into Focus is Determined by the Void (from Shelach)

Midrash citing a verse from Psalms: “‘Those with strong hearts have become unstable. It is as if they have gone to sleep. Those who are strong soldiers were not able to correct the situation.’ This is similar to the actions of *Moshe* and *Aaron*. The spies had returned with their slanderous reports about the Land and *Moshe* and *Aaron* did not know how to respond. They were weakened. However, *Calev* stood up and silenced the masses despite their murmurings. He stood on a bench and silenced them saying, ‘Remain silent! The Land is very very good.’ G-d said to *Moshe*, ‘I have a great debt of gratitude to *Calev*.’ As it states, ‘If it not were for *Calev*...’ Meaning, he is more valuable to G-d than the 600,000 Jewish people. Even *Moshe* and *Aaron* were not able to respond properly when they were confronted with the reports of the spies. Only *Calev ben Yefuna* responded and restored the Honor of G-d.”

When the spies returned with their slanderous reports, they had desecrated G-d's Name on a most profound level. This was especially the case because *Moshe* and *Aaron* remained silent because they did not know how to respond. *Calev*, through his interjection and statement performed a sanctification of G-d's Name. It is similar to the act of zealotry done by *Pinchas* when he had seen *Zimri* desecrating the Name of G-d in a public context when he had cohabited with *Cosbi* the Midianite princess. *Pinchas* took the initiative and killed *Zimri*, despite the risk to his own life. G-d said, "Because you made My Wrath your own wrath (demonstrated through his zealousness), I will not destroy the Jewish people." While the entire Jewish people remained silent, including *Moshe* and *Aaron*, *Pinchas'* act of sanctification of G-d's Name saved the Jewish people. His act of zealotry was paramount and the ultimate sanctification of G-d's Name.

Rambam in Laws of Repentance: Only through death is one fully atoned for the desecration of G-d's Name.

Just as the consequence of the desecration of G-d's Name brings about the most profound level of spiritual deficiency, sanctifying G-d's Name, which is multiple times greater, advances spirituality to the ultimate

level. Because *Calev* sanctified G-d's Name at a moment that there was an extreme level of desecration of G-d's Name, his action of sanctification was magnified to a greater level. Because the void of spirituality was so great the value of his contribution was unprecedented.

The Prophet: "For My Glory I have created it." G-d created existence only for His Glory. Thus, when *Calev* silenced the Jewish people and sanctified His Name by saying that the Land was "very very good" he fulfilled the objective of creation. His momentary statement, although it did not impact upon the Jewish people, it was nevertheless valued as the ultimate accomplishment.

The world continuously exists within the context of G-d's Name being desecrated. When the Jew is committed to the observance of *mitzvos* and the study of the *Torah*, despite the world's purview of spirituality, it is a sanctification of His Name. It is a statement by those who are observant and committed to G-d's Will and Ideals that it is irrelevant what the world values and understands. All that matters is the Will of G-d. This presence of sanctification of G-d's Name will bring unlimited Divine Assistance and protection upon the Jewish people.



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