

קֹרַח

KORACH/KORAH Bemidbar/Numbers 16:1-18:32

Our parasha this week is named after **one particular man** in the **Israelite camp**. According to Midrash, **Korah** (a Levite/Kohathite) was a man of **influence** who was among those who were **especially privileged to carry the Ark of the Covenant** whenever the Israelite camp and the **Tabernacle moved**.

The rabbis teach that **Korah's rebellion** was the **most serious** of the many **challenges to Moshe's leadership**. It was a complex problem as there was **not just one rebellion**, but **three**...each with a somewhat different issue. **Korah**, a cousin to Moshe and Aharon, seemed to be **upset** that the **top leadership positions** had gone to the **sons of Amram**, while he, the oldest son of Amram's brother Izhar, had **no equivalent honor**. Then there were **Datan and Aviram**, from the **embittered tribe of Reuben** (1st born of Jacob) apparently carrying a chip on their shoulders **because of Jacob's curse** (causing them to lose first-born status). The **third rebellion** was made up of **250 Israelite men, leaders** who also **wanted more honor** in the **service of the Tabernacle**.

No longer are we hearing the **familiar complaints** about **water, bread and meat**. These leaders are **not concerned** about meeting the **enemy in battle**. This time it is **not the "riffraff"** in their midst, **complaining**. Instead it is an **out-right power struggle by leaders**, under the guise of **equality**:

Bemidbar 16:3 They gathered together against Moshe and Aharon, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and ה' is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of ה'?"

What is the cause of this rebellion? The **entire nation** (with exception of Caleb and Yehoshua) had just been **sentenced to die in the wilderness** – they will **neither return to Egypt nor reach the Promised Land**. **Conditions** were definitely **ripe for rebellion against Moshe's authority**.

Moshe reacts quickly to the rebellion with a **miracle of judgment** to **prove the authenticity** of his **authority**:

Bemidbar 16:28 And Moshe said: "By this you shall know that ה' has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will.²⁹ "If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then ה' has not sent me.³⁰ "But if ה' creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected ה'."

Moshe has used his position of **"power"** to **put down the rebellion**. This seems to be such a **contrast** to the **gentle and humble leader** who has **often interceded** for the people during **times of rebellion**. And as far as **sharing** goes, we read just a couple of weeks ago **how Moshe responded** when **Yehoshua** came to him with what **Yehoshua regarded** as a **potentially dangerous threat to Moshe's leadership**:

Bemidbar 11:29 Then Moshe said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all ה' 's people were prophets and that ה' would put His Spirit upon them!"

Moshe was more than **willing to share his prophetic Spirit**. To understand **why Moshe reacted** with such **harshness** to the **rebellion** in this week's parasha, **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** teaches us the **difference** between "**power**" and "**influence**." **Moshe possessed both**. While there is **some overlap between the two**, they are **also very different**...in fact, **sometimes they are opposites**.

To further explain, **Rabbi Sacks** takes us further into **Bemidbar** to where **יהוה** tells **Moshe** to **take Yehoshua** and **appoint him** as his **successor**:

Bemidbar 27:18 And יהוה said to Moshe: "Take Yehoshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him";¹⁹ "set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight."²⁰ "And you shall give some of your splendor to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.

יהוה tells **Moshe** to **do two things**:

- "**Lay your hand on him**" – according to Midrash Rabbah, this is **like lighting one light from another** (sharing of **influence**)
- "**Give some of your splendor to him**" – this is **like pouring from one vessel to another** (handing over **power**)

Now we can understand the **difference** between "**power**" and "**influence**" as it relates to **leadership**. **Moshe's "power"** is interpreted as "**splendor**." As he is **about to leave this physical earth**, he is told to **hand over his "power" to Yehoshua** (Bemidbar 27:20). **Kings/leaders** have "**power**." With "**power**", **the more you share, the less you have**. If you are a **king with all the power**, you have the **authority to make decisions** for the **people, wage war, and levy taxes**. **Without someone possessing "power"**, there could be **no government**. **Lawlessness would prevail**. As a **prophet, Moshe** also **shared his "influence"** with **Yehoshua** through the "**laying on of hands**" (Bemidbar 27:19). Most **prophets had no "power"** at all. They **spoke יהוה's word**, but **didn't have the authority to enforce His commands**. Here is a quote from **Rabbi Sacks** concerning "**power** and "**influence**" (emphasis mine):

"**All they (prophets) had was influence – but what influence!** To this day, **Elijah's fight against corruption, Amos' call to social justice, and Isaiah's vision of the end of days, are still capable of moving us** by the sheer force of their **inspiration**. **Who, today, is swayed by the lives of Ahab or Yehoshaphat or Yehu?** When a **king dies, his power ends**. When a **prophet dies, his influence begins**. Returning to **Moshe**, he occupied **two leadership roles**, not one. On the one hand, though monarchy was not yet in existence, **he had the power** and was the **functional equivalent of a king**. **He led the Israelites out of Egypt, commanded them in battle, appointed leaders, judges and elders, and directed the conduct of the people**. **He had power**.

But **Moshe** was also a **prophet, the greatest and most authoritative** of all. He was a **man of vision**. He **heard and spoke the word of G-d**. His **influence is incalculable**....

The **mystery of Moshe's double investiture of Yehoshua** is now **solved**. **First**, he was told to give **Yehoshua his authority as a prophet**. The very **phrase** used by the **Torah** – **vesamakta et yadeka** (וְסָמַכְתָּ אֶת יָדְךָ), '**lay your hand**' on him – is **still used today** to describe **rabbinic ordination, semikhah**, meaning, the '**laying on of hands**' by **master to disciple**. **Second**, he was commanded to **give Yehoshua the power of kingship**, which the Torah calls '**splendor**' (perhaps **majesty** would be a **better translation**). The nature of this **role as head of state and commander of the army** is made quite clear in the text. G-d says to Moshe, '**Give him some of your splendor so that the whole Israelite community will obey him...At his command, he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out [to battle], and at his command they will come in.**' This is the **language not of influence but of power**.

The **meaning of the Midrash**, too, is now **clear and elegantly precise**. The **transfer of influence (lay your hand on him)** is '**like lighting one light from another.**' When we take a **candle to light another candle**, the **light of the first is not diminished**. Likewise, when we **share our influence with others**, we do **not have less than before**. Instead, the **sum total of light is increased**. **Power**, however, is **different**. It is like '**pouring from one vessel to another.**' The more we pour into the second, the less is left in the first. **Power is a zero-sum game**. The **more we give away, the less we have**.

This, then, is the **solution to the mystery of why**, when **Yehoshua feared that Eldad and Medad** (who 'prophesied within the camp') were **threatening Moshe's authority**, **Moshe replied**, '**Would that all the Lord's people were prophets.**' **Yehoshua had confused influence with power**. **Eldad and Medad neither sought nor gained power**. Instead, for a while, they were **given a share of the prophetic 'spirit' that was on Moshe**. They **participated in his influence**. This is **never a threat to prophetic authority**. To the **contrary**, the **more widely it is shared, the more there is...**

Moshe's request that Korach and his followers be swallowed up by the ground was neither **anger nor fear**. It was **not motivated by any personal consideration**. It was a simple realization that **whereas prophecy can be shared, kingship cannot**. If there are **two or more competing sources of power** within a single domain, there is **no leadership**. Had **Moshe not taken decisive action against Korach**, he would have **fatally compromised the office** with which he had been **charged.**" (end of quote)

All those **involved in the rebellion** were after "**power**", **status and dominance**. This is what they **each selfishly desired**. But the **Kingdom of Heaven is not like this**. **Devarim** speaks a little of what a **leader** should look like:

Devarim 17:20 "that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

The **Hebrew Scriptures** give an **example of a King who became enamored with "power"** for himself. **After the death of King Solomon**, the people sent a delegation lead by **Jeroboam** to Solomon's son, **Rehoboam**. They asked for **one thing**:

*1 Kings 12:4 "Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, **lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.**"*

In considering his **reply**, **Rehoboam** first went to his **father's counselors**, who gave him this **suggestion**:

*1 Kings 12:7 And they spoke to him, saying, "**If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.**"*

The **counselors understood** the **assignment** of a **king**. A king's "**power**" came from **servicing his people**, not from **imposing burdens** on them. But **Rehoboam** gave in to his **own fleshly desires** for "**power**." He **rejected** the **advice** of the counselors and instead **answered** the people **harshly**:

*1 Kings 12:14 ... "My father made your yoke heavy, but **I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!**"*

We know the **results** of **Rehoboam's bad decision**. Most of the people **followed Jeroboam**, and this **resulted** in the **split of the kingdom**. Israel was **no longer unified** as a **nation of people**. However, the **restoration** of **all of Israel** would **begin** with another **humble leader** like **Moshe**:

*Hebrews 3:5 And **Moshe** indeed was **faithful** in all His house as a **servant**, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward,⁶ but **Messiah as a Son over His own house**, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.*

*Matthew 15:24 But He answered and said, "**I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**"*

Yeshua taught the **link** between **leadership** and **servant hood** when He **responded** to the **mother of Ya'acov** (James) and **Yochanan** (John) when **she sought leadership positions** for her sons in the **kingdom**:

*Matthew 20:25 But Yeshua called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.²⁶ "Yet it shall not be so among you; but **whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.**²⁷ "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave --²⁸ "**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**"*

Messiah often **repeated** the **concept of leadership through servant hood**:

*Mark 9:35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "**If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.**"*

*Luke 14:10 "But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.¹¹ "For **whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**"*

Yeshua became the ultimate servant, and He became our example:

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Messiah Yeshua,⁶ who, being in the form of Yah, did not consider it robbery to be equal with Yah,⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.⁹ Therefore Yah also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

Yeshua has been exalted to Kingship, and we are invited to yoke up with Him in His Kingdom. The conditions are not harsh, as under Jeroboam, but easy and shalom-filled:

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Yeshua is our King, and He is also the prophet like Moshe. As our King and Master, He is not willing to share His “power” with any other:

Matthew 6:24 " No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other....

Matthew 4:10 Then Yeshua said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship Yah your Elohim, and Him only you shall serve.' "

As the prophet like Moshe, Yeshua lights our fire and shares His “influence” with us that we might be a candle, lit from His light. Our “influence” is made evident when we do “good works”:

Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world....¹⁶ "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

And one more thing... “influence” is still passed on through the “*laying on of hands*”:

1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

Acts 6:5 ... And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit...⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Shabbat Shalom!

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