

בס"ה

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Korach

3 Tammuz, 5779 – July 6, 2019

Compiled from the works of
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn
North Miami Beach, FL

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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Korach

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר ט"ז, א': וַיֹּקֶח קָרָח בֶּן־יְצָהָר בֶּן־קָנָעָת בֶּן־לְגִיאָה וְדָמָן וְאַכְיָרָם בֶּןִי אַלְיָאָב וְאַזְוֹן בֶּן־פְּלִתָּה בֶּןִי רַאוּבוֹן:

רש"י ד"ה ויקח קרח: פרשה זו יפה נדרשת במדרש רבי תנומה. ויקח קרח:לקח את עצמו לצד אחד להיות נחלה מתוך העדה לעורר על הכהונה, וזה שתרגם אונקלוס ואתפיג, נחלה משאר העדה להחזיק במחולקת. וכן (איוב ט"ו, י"ב) מה יקח לך, לוקח אותה להפליג משאר בני אדם. דבר אחר ויקח קרח, משך ראשי סנהדראות שביהם בדברים, כמו שנאמר (במדבר כ', כ"ה) קח את אהרן, (הושע י"ז, ג') קחו עמכם דברים:

Bamidbar 16:1: Korach the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehos, the son of Levi took (himself to one side) together with Doson and Avirom the sons of Eliov, and On the son of Peles, who were descendants of Reuvain.

Rashi Heading: Korach... took: This portion is beautifully expounded on in the Midrash of Rabbi Tanchumah.

Korach... took: He took himself to one side to exclude himself from the congregation in order to contest the Kehunah. This is what Onkelos means when he translates it “and he separated himself.” He separated himself from the congregation to continue in a dispute. Similarly,¹ “Why does your heart take you away?” meaning that it removes you, to isolate you from others. Another explanation is that he attracted the heads of the Sanhedrin among them with his words. Similarly,² “Take Aharon (with words);” “Take words with you³.”

Synopsis

This week we read the Torah portion of Korach. We are told of a rebellion against Aharon holding the position of Kohen Gadol. This rebellion was led by Korach, who had somehow managed to gather 250 leaders of the Jews on his side. In Rashi’s comments on the opening verse he cites the words from the verse “Korach ... took.” All that he says is that “this portion is beautifully explained in the Midrash of Rabbi Tanchumah. However, he does not tell us what the beautiful explanations are. He then cites the same exact words once again, this time telling us the beautiful explanation. Rashi explains that he removed himself from the congregation. He then goes on to offer a second explanation which is according to Peshat

1. Iyov 15:12.

2. Parshas Chukas, Bamidbar 20:25. See Rashi’s comments there. He says that Moshe was to “take” Aharon with words of solace.

3. Hoshea 14:3.

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rather than Midrash. He says that Korach managed to attract the heads of the Sanhedrin and win them over to his side.

Rashi always explains Peshat. Why does he begin by just telling us how beautifully this is expounded in the Midrash? He waits until later in a different set of comments to tell us the explanation according to Peshat!

We know that despite the fact that Rashi's main point is to explain Peshat to a beginning student, his comments also contain the "wine of Torah," meaning the mysteries of Torah⁴. According to Peshat, the story Torah of Korach is very sad, it involves a mutiny against Moshe Rabbeinu! However, if we look at it from the perspective of the mysteries of the Torah Korach was on an extremely high level; it is indeed a lofty story⁵! Korach wanted to be a Kohen Gadol!

This is what Rashi is alluding to with his explanation. Even before explaining Peshat, he tells us that this is expounded (not just well, but) *beautifully* in the *Midrash*. The Midrash brings out the inner meaning of what took place. Rashi writes that "he took *himself*." He revealed the essence of his being, his soul. Rashi goes further and says that "he took himself *to one side*." Rashi says that he did this in order to "separate himself from the congregation." He elevated himself *above* everyone else in the same manner that the Kohen Gadol is elevated above the rest of the Jews.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Korach, tells of a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon's leadership. The revolt was championed by Korach who, managed to persuade 250 people in leadership positions to join with him. The Parshah begins by telling us that⁶ "Korach the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehos, the son of Levi took (himself to one side), together with Doson and Avirom the sons of Eliov, and On the son of Peles, who were descendants of Reuvain." Rashi first cites the words "Korach ... took" and makes an introductory statement. He says that "This portion is beautifully expounded on in the Midrash of Rabbi Tanchumah." This alone is most unusual for Rashi.

He then cites the identical words from the verse, and begins telling us the Midrashic explanation to which he alluded. "He took himself to one side to exclude himself from the congregation in order to contest the Kehunah. This is what Onkelos means when he translates it 'and he separated himself.' He separated himself from the congregation to continue in a dispute. Similarly¹ 'Why does your heart take

4. See Hayom Yom for Shevat 29.

5. See how this story is explained in Likkutei Torah to Bamidbar, beginning with Page 54, Side b.

6. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 16:1.

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you away?” meaning that your heart removes you, to isolate you from others.” He then offers a second explanation which is according to Peshat. “Another explanation is that he attracted the heads of the Sanhedrin among them with his words. Similarly² ‘Take Aharon (with words);’ ‘Take words with you³.’”

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

As we wrote earlier, it is very uncommon for Rashi to write an introduction to his comments. In our case, before offering any comments, he announces that it is beautifully expounded in a Midrash.

We have stated many times that Rashi’s main purpose is to explain Peshat, the simple meaning of each verse in the Torah. We know this because he himself says as much on many occasions⁷. The fact is that hidden within Rashi’s words there are also included deep mysteries of the Torah, known as the “wine of Torah⁴. ” However, Rashi’s is first and foremost a guide to the beginning student. Why would he present as his first explanation something which comes from a Midrash? Not just that, but he makes a point of emphasizing that it is beautifully expounded there.

There is usually a reason for Rashi offering two explanations of the same words. Generally, it is because there is a difficulty in understanding the first explanation. The second explanation does not have that particular difficulty. However, he teaches it first because it is closer to Peshat. Here however, his first comments are not Peshat at all; rather they are a Midrash.

A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

We will understand this by first answering a different question. Korach was a rebel. He was a sinner who never did Teshuvah⁸. How can we call a portion of the Torah by his name? This is contrary to what we are taught that⁹ “...the name of the wicked shall rot.” This is certainly so considering that the entire portion, with all that it entails is called by his name. This is a question which would also bother a beginning student.

Granted, the same is true regarding the Torah portion of Balak. Balak was the king of Midian; an evil person who wanted to curse the Jewish people. Nevertheless, a Torah portion is called by his name as well¹⁰. It is true that this fact does not answer our question; it merely expands it. Additionally, even a

7. See for example Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 3:8, “I have come only to teach the simple meaning of the Scripture and such Aggadah that clarifies the words of the verses, each word in its proper way.” See also Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 3:24, “There are Midrashim, but I have come only to interpret its simple meaning.” These are just two examples of many.

8. His children *did* do Teshuvah. This is found in the Talmud Sanhedrin Page 110, Side a. It is also found in Rashi’s comments to our Parshah 16:7, and to Parshas Pinchos, Bamidbar 26:11.

9. Mishlei 10:7.

10. To see the answer to this question, see Likkutei Sichos Volume 23, beginning with Page 166.

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child who is just beginning to study Chumash understands that a Jew who becomes wicked is even worse than a gentile who becomes wicked. Hence in our case the question certainly applies!

This will be understood based on the fact that from the perspective of the hidden, deeper aspects of Torah, Korach actually wanted to achieve something positive. He wanted to be a Kohen, as Moshe said to Korach's band¹¹ "... and now you seek the Kehunah as well!" Not only did he seek Kehunah, but he wanted to become a Kohen Gadol¹²! In other words, he wanted to be on a higher, more exalted level than he was. He actually wanted to attain the level of a High Priest. Regarding the Kohen Gadol we are taught that he was¹³ "... separated ... to be most holy." Korach actually wanted to be separate from all worldly matters.

The desire to reach a higher level was certainly a great thing. Moshe Rabbeinu himself said that he also wanted to be a Kohen Gadol¹⁴. Indeed, that is what he wanted. But in actuality there can only be one High Priest¹⁴.

This can be more clearly understood based on what is written in this week's Parshah in Likkutei Torah⁵. The Alter Rebbe writes that "the root of Korach's rebellion ... is that in the time of the ultimate redemption the Levites will be Kohanim. Korach wanted this conduct to be instituted in the present. His mistake was that such a thing is only possible once the world has reached complete perfection." This means to say that Korach wished to accomplish that our world now should be on the same level that it will be with the coming of Moshiach.

This is all alluded to in Rashi's comments here. Even before explaining Peshat, he tells us that this is expounded in the *Midrash*. The Midrash brings out the inner meaning of what took place. It demonstrates that it was all actually good. Rashi does not merely say that the Midrash explains it well, but rather *beautifully*. Granted, this story does not seem to be at all positive. However, the Midrash expounds upon it and reveals that it is truly beautiful. Furthermore, Rashi tells us that this Midrash is that of Rabbi Tanchumah. The name Tanchumah is related to the Hebrew word "Nechomoh," meaning consolation. The story seems negative, but the Midrash consoles us by bringing out its positive aspects.

Rashi says that Korach "took himself." He revealed the essence of his being, his soul. Rashi goes further and says that "he took himself *to one side*." Rashi says that he did this in order to "separate himself from the congregation." His wish was to elevate himself *above* everyone else. He wanted to be elevated

11. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 16:10.

12. See Rashi's comments to our Parshah, Bamidbar 16:6.

13. I Divrei Hayomim 23:13.

14. See Rashi's comments to our Parshah, Bamidbar 16:6.

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in the same manner as a Kohen Gadol. Rashi quotes the Aramaic word used by Targum Onkelus, that “he separated himself.” His entire desire was to rise above the rest of the nation by reaching the level of a High Priest. He wanted to be¹³ “... separated ... to be most holy.”

Korach went even further, saying that¹⁵ “the entire congregation are all holy.” Rashi comments there that “...All of them heard Hashem’s words at Sinai from His mouth (as so to speak) ... Not only did he hear at Sinai, ‘I am the Lord, your G-d,’ rather, the entire congregation heard it.” He claimed that we all received the Torah together from Hashem. At that time all Jews became¹⁶ “a nation of Kohanim.” As explained by the commentaries¹⁷ we all became fit to become High Priests. This was Korach’s claim when seen through the prism of the “wine of Torah.”

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Korach, 3 Tammuz 5748)

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15. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 16:3.

16. Parshas Yisro, Shemos 19:6.

17. See the commentary of the Baal Haturim ibid.

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Mr. **Sholom Moshe** ben Reb **Shlomo Meir Hacohen** ה"ע Cohen

Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

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**מוקדש לזכות
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