

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Korach

2 Tammuz, 5781 – June 12, 2021

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': וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן־יִצְחָר בֶּן־קֵהוֹס בֶּן־לֵוִי וַיִּתֵּן וְאֶבְיָרִים בְּנֵי אֶלְיָאָב וְאִזֹּן בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן:

רש"י ד"ה ויקח קרח: פרשה זו יפה נדרשת במדרש רבי תנחומא: ויקח קרח: לקח את עצמו לצד אחד להיות נחלק מתוך העדה לעורר על הכהונה, וזהו שתרגם אונקלוס ואתפג, נחלק משאר העדה להחזיק במחלוקת. וכן (איוב ט"ו, י"ב) מה יקח לך, לוקח אותך להפליגך משאר בני אדם. דבר אחר ויקח קרח, משך ראשי סנהדראות שבהם בדברים, כמו שנאמר (במדבר כ', כ"ה) קח את אהרן, (הושע י"ד, 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 to contest the Kehunah. This is what Onkelos means when he translates it, "and he separated himself." He separated himself from the community 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. This Parshah tells us of the 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 exact words once again, this time telling us the Midrash's beautiful explanation. Rashi

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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explains that he removed himself from the congregation. He then goes on to offer a second explanation which is according to Peshat 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 detail the explanation in Peshat!

We know that although 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 of Korach is unfortunate; 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 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. Korach championed this revolution. He persuaded 250 people in leadership positions to join 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 Dason 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 tells us the Midrashic explanation to which he alluded. "He took himself to one side to exclude himself from the congregation to contest the Kehunah.

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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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 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 commenting, he announces that it is beautifully expounded in a Midrash.

We have often stated that Rashi's primary purpose is to explain Peshat, the simple meaning of each verse in the Torah. We know this because he says as much on many occasions⁷. There are also deep mysteries of the Torah, which are alluded to in Rashi's words. These are 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 exact words. Generally, it is because there is a problem understanding the first explanation. The second explanation does not have that particular difficulty. However, he teaches it first because it is closer to Peshat. However, his first comments are not Peshat at all; instead, 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? King Solomon, the wisest of all men, teaches us that⁹ "...the name of the wicked shall rot." This is undoubtedly so considering that we call the entire portion, with all that it entails, by his name. This is a question that 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

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.

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as well¹⁰. Indeed, this fact does not answer our question; it merely expands it. Additionally, even a child 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!

We can understand this based on hidden, more profound aspects of the Torah. From this perspective, Korach wanted to achieve something positive. He wanted to be a Kohen. We see this from Moshe saying to Korach's band,¹¹ "... 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 wished to attain the status of a High Priest. The Torah teaches us that the Kohen Gadol was¹³ "... separated ... to be most holy." Korach wanted to be separate from all worldly matters.

The desire to reach a higher level was undoubtedly 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 the Alter Rebbe writes in this week's Parshah in Likkutei Torah⁵. He notes that "the root of Korach's rebellion ... is that in the time of the ultimate redemption, the Levites will be Kohanim. Korach wanted to institute this conduct in the present. His mistake was that such a thing is only possible once the world has reached complete perfection." This means 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 the *Midrash* expounds this. The Midrash brings out the inner meaning of what took place. It demonstrates that it was all indeed 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 exceptional.

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.

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

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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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 to "separate himself from the congregation." His wish was to elevate himself *above* everyone else. He wanted to be uplifted 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 is 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 commentaries,¹⁷ 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)

I hope that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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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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