

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XXXVIII: Korach (Num. 16:1–18:32)

### Essay 1. Korach challenges Moses regarding *tzitzit* and *mezuzah*

”[יִקַּח קֹרַח], אֵיתָא בְּמִדְרַשׁ וּבְפֶרוּשׁ רַשׁ”י שֶׁקֹּרַח חָלַק עַל צִיצִית וּמְזוּזָה, טְלִית שֶׁל שָׂאֵר מִיָּנִים חוּט אֶחָד פּוֹטְרָה זֶה שֶׁבִּלָּה תִּכְלֵת לֹא תִפְטֹר אֶת עֲצָמָה, וְכֵן בְּמְזוּזָה שְׁתֵּי פְרָשִׁיּוֹת [פּוֹטְרוֹת] אוֹתָהּ בֵּית מְלֵא סְפָרִים וְכוּ'. קָשָׁה דְהָא עֵיקַר מַחְלֹקְתוֹ הִיָּה בְשִׁבִיל קִנְאָתוֹ עַל נְשִׂאוֹת אֱלִיָּצֶפֶן בְּן־עֲזִיָּאֵל כְּמוֹ שֶׁפֶרַשׁ רַשׁ”י שָׁם, וּמָה עֲנִין נְשִׂאוֹתוֹ שֶׁל אֱלִיָּצֶפֶן לְשְׁתֵּי מִצְוֹת אֵלוֹ.

“**Now Korach**, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, **took** [himself] and Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, descendants of Reuben.”<sup>1</sup> **It is brought in the Midrash,<sup>2</sup> and Rashi explained, that Korach disagreed** with the laws of *tzitzit*, the requirement for fringes on garments, including a blue string, **and** the laws of *mezuzah*.

Korach attired men in prayer shawls of blue wool. They then came and stood before Moses and said to him, “Is a garment that is entirely blue subject to the law of *tzitzit* or is it exempt?” He replied to them: “It is subject to that law”. Whereupon they began to laugh at him: “Is this possible? For a **prayer shawl of any different colored material, one string** of blue [attached to it] **exempts it** [from violating the law], **but this** [garment] **that is entirely of blue does not exempt itself?**”

- Rashi on Num. 16:1

**Similarly**, regarding the laws of *mezuzah*, they argued, **the two Scriptural sections** [*parashiot*] of a *mezuzah* [viz, Deut. 6:4–9 and 11:13–21] **exempt** a house [from violating the law], **but a house full of Torah scrolls**, each with 175 Scriptural sections, would not exempt the house from violating the law requiring a *mezuzah*?<sup>3</sup>

**It is difficult** to understand **that this principal controversy was because of jealousy of the leadership of Elizaphan son of Uziel, as Rashi explained there,<sup>4</sup> for what is the connection of Elizaphan’s leadership to these two commandments of *tzitzit* and *mezuzah*?**

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<sup>1</sup> Num. 16:1.

<sup>2</sup> Midrash Tanchuma, Korach 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Rashi on Num. 16:1, “And what induced Korach to quarrel with Moses? He was envious of the princely dignity held by Elizaphan the son of Uziel [Midrash Tanchuma, Korach 1] whom Moses had appointed prince over the sons of Kohath, although this was by the express command of G-d [Num. 3:30]. Korach argued thus: ‘My father and his brothers were four in number — as it is said, [Ex. 6:18] “and the sons of Kohath were [Amram and Izhar and Hebron

ונש לוֹמַר שֶׁהַטַּעַם הוּא לְפִי שֶׁקִּרַח הָיָה יוֹתֵר חָכָם מִמֶּנּוּ, וְהָיָה נָמִי גְדוֹל שֶׁהָיָה בְּרִי-צָהָר שֶׁהוּא שְׁנֵי לַעֲמֻרָם וְאֵלִיצָפָן הָיָה בֶן עוֹזִיאֵל שֶׁהוּא רְבִיעִי לַעֲמֻרָם, וְנִשְׂיָאוֹת זֶה הָיָה רְאוּי לְקִרַח. אֲלֵא שֶׁמִּשְׁשֶׁה עָשָׂה נִשְׂיָא אֲלִיצָפָן בְּצִיּוּי הַקַּב"ה שֶׁהָיָה יוֹתֵר רְאוּי מִמֶּנּוּ, וּמִצָּא מְקוֹם לְחִלּוּק דִּנְקָא עַל שְׁתֵּי מִצְוֹת אֵלּוּ שֶׁלְּפִי הַנִּרְאָה שֶׁפִּשְׁט הַכְּתוּב נִצְטוּנֵינוּ בְּצִיּוּת כְּדִי לְזַכּוֹר אֵת כָּל מִצְוֹת ה'. וּבְמִזְוֹתָהּ כְּדִי לְהַגִּין עָלֵינוּ, וְכֵן אָמְרוּ ו"ל שֶׁאָמַר הַקַּב"ה כְּתוּב שְׁמִי עַל פֶּתַח-דָּר וְאִי אַתָּה מַתְיַירָא מִן הַמְּזִיקִין, וְהַרְמֵז בְּמַלְת מְזוּזוֹת זֶה מְנַת, וְקָרָא קָא סְמִיד "לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם" וְכו'.

**It can be said that the reason that Korach gave in challenging Moses was that Korach was wiser than [Elizaphan]. He was also greater in that he was the son of Izhar, who was the second son born to Kohath, Amram being the firstborn, while Elizaphan was the son of Uziel, who was the fourth in line to Amram, being the fourth son born to Kohath, and this position of chief was appropriate for Korach.**

**However, Moses made Elizaphan chief on the command of the Holy One, Blessed be He, that he was more suitable for the position than [Korach].**

**[Korach] found a basis to quarrel specifically on these two commandments, as it appeared that the plain meaning of the Scripture commanded us with *tzitzit* in order that we remember all the commandments of G-d.**

He commanded us with *mezuzah* in order to guard over us, and as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, **“Write My name on your gates, or are you not afraid of demons?”** The hint in the word **“mezuzot”** [מְזוּזוֹת], the plural of *mezuzah*, is ***zaz mavet*** [זָז מָוֶת] [“death departs”],<sup>5</sup> that a *mezuzah* would protect against death. **Scriptural support is “inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children will be increased.”**<sup>6</sup>

וְקִרַח חָשַׁב שֶׁהַקַּב"ה אָמַר לְמִשְׁשֶׁה שֶׁיִּקְחוּ תְּכֵלֶת עַל בְּגָדֵיהֶם לְפָחוֹת חוּט אָחָד, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר הַכְּתוּב "הַכְּנֶנָּה פְּתִיל" וְאַחַר כֵּן הוֹסִיף "וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וְזָכַרְתֶּם" וְכו' דְּשָׁמַע מִיָּנָה שֶׁעִיקָר הַמִּצְוָה הִיא הַזְכִּירָה. וּמִמִּילָא אָנוּ לְמַדִּים שֶׁכְּשִׁיחָיָה טְלִית פְּלָה תְּכֵלֶת תִּהְיֶה גַם הַזְכִּירָה יוֹתֵר גְּדוּלָה, דְּאִי לֹא הָכִי לֹא הָיָה לוֹ לְכַתּוּב "וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וְזָכַרְתֶּם" וְכו' אַחַר "הַכְּנֶנָּה פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת" שֶׁזֶה הוּא דְּבָר הַבָּא אֲפִילוּ מִן הַלְבָּן לְבָדוֹ כְּשֶׁהָאָדָם יִלְבַּשׁ הַטְּלִית.

**Korach thought that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses that he should put at least one blue string on their garments, as Scripture said, “Speak to the Israelite people, and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages; let them attach a string of blue to the fringe at each corner.”<sup>7</sup> Afterward, [Scripture] added, “look at it and remember all the commandments of the L-rd.”<sup>8</sup> Korach thought that we hear**

and Uziel].” As to Amram, the eldest, his two sons [Moses and Aaron] have themselves assumed high dignity, one [i.e., Moses] as ruler and the other as High Priest. Who is entitled to receive the [rank] second [to the ruler]? Is it not ‘I’ who am the son of Izhar, who was the second to Amram amongst the brothers? And yet he has appointed as prince the son of [Amram’s] brother who was the youngest of all of them! I hereby protest against him and will undo his decision.’ ”

<sup>5</sup> Zohar III:300b.

<sup>6</sup> Deut. 11:20–21.

<sup>7</sup> Num. 15:38.

<sup>8</sup> Num. 15:39.

from this that the principal part of the commandment is the remembering, and since the remembering is mentioned not immediately after the “fringes on the corners” but after the “string of blue,” it is the blue strings that cause the remembering of the commandments and not the other [white] strings.

In any case, Korach reasoned, we learn that when there is a prayer shawl that is entirely blue, there will be an even greater remembrance of the commandments. If not so, argued Korach, there would have been no need to write “look at it and remember” after “a blue string at the corner.” If the fringes alone would have been enough, than this remembering of the commandments is something would have come even from the white strings alone that are placed on the corners when the man wears a prayer shawl. Thus, Korach argued that Moses’ reasoning was flawed, and that there should be no need to require a blue string on the corner of a garment that was entirely blue.

וְהָכִי נָמִי בְּמִזְוָה לֹא הָיָה לוֹ לְכַתּוֹב "לִמְעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם", אֲלֵא וַדַּאי לְהוֹדִיעַנו שְׁלִפְחוֹת צְרִיף שִׁיכְתוּב שְׁתֵּי פְרָשִׁיּוֹת אֶמְנָם אִם יוֹסִיף לְכַתּוֹב עוֹד יוֹתֵר הַרְשׁוֹת בְּנִדּוֹ וְתִבְאָ לוֹ שְׁמִירָה יוֹתֵר מֵעוֹלָה, וְהוּא לְהַפְדֵּי מִמָּה שֶׁהֵבִין מִשָּׁה שְׁבִטְלִית בְּעֵינָיו דִּנְקָא חוּט אֶחָד וּבְמִזְוָה דִּנְקָא אוֹתָן שְׁתֵּי פְרָשִׁיּוֹת.

Indeed, for *mezuzah* there was no need to write “so that your days [and the days of your children] will be increased,” except certainly to inform us that one has to write at least two Scriptural sections. However, if one adds to this minimum, reasoned Korach, writing more than this, he has permission, and an even more prominent protection will come to him. But, Korach argued, this is the opposite of what Moses understood, as Moses said that even if a house is full of Torah scrolls, it still needs a *mezuzah*. That is [like] the case of the prayer shawl, for which Moses said that one blue string was required even if the prayer shawl itself was entirely blue, and here particularly those two Scriptural sections are required to be added to a *mezuzah* for a house, even if the house is filled with many Torah scrolls.

Thus, Korach challenged that Moses was not a logical thinker, and that similarly his decision to appoint Elizaphan was wrong, as Korach was wiser and also had a greater right of succession, as a son of Kohath’s second born, whereas Elizaphan was a son of Kohath’s fourth born.

וְהִשְׁתָּא אֲתֵי שְׁפִיר שְׁלֵא מְלֵאוּ לְבוֹ לְתַלּוּק עַל הַקַּב"ה, שְׂאָם כֵּן לָמָּה חֵלֵק עַל שְׁתֵּי פְרָשִׁיּוֹת אֵלּוּ בְלִבְדָּ? הָיָה לוֹ לְתַלּוּק עַל כָּל הַתּוֹרָה, אֲלֵא לְפִי שְׁשִׁמֵי מִצְוֹת אֵלּוּ אֵינָם לְכַאוּרָה מִצְוֹת גְּמוּרוֹת אֲלֵא לְטוֹבְתָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּדֵי שִׁיִּזְכְּרוּ הַמִּצְוֹת וּכְדֵי שִׁיִּהְיוּ נִשְׁמָרִים. מִשּׁוֹם הָכִי מְצָא מְקוֹם לוֹמַר שְׂאָם תִּהְיֶה הַשְּׁמִירָה וְהַזְכָּרָה יוֹתֵר גְּדוּלָה טְפִי עֲדִיר, וְשִׁבְנָדַי לֹא הֵבִין מִשָּׁה כּוֹנֵנַת הַקַּב"ה בְּאֵלּוּ הַמִּצְוֹת וְטַעַם בְּסִבְרָתוֹ.

Now, it’s fine that [Korach] didn’t dare to quarrel with the Holy One, Blessed be He, for if so, why did he quarrel only on these two Scriptural sections? He could have quarreled on the entire Torah. Rather, he selected these two commandments, because these two commandments are apparently not complete [independent] commandments, but instead they

serve for the betterment of Israel in order that they should remember the commandments and in order that they should be guarded. Because of this, he found a basis to say that if the guarding and remembering of the commandments would be most important, then certainly Moses didn't understand the intention of the Holy One, Blessed be He, in these commandments and that he erred in his logic.

וּכְמוֹ כֵן הָיָה סוֹבֵר שְׁטַעַה בְּעֵינָיו מִיָּנֹי הַנְּשִׂיא שֶׁהַקַּב"ה אָמַר לוֹ שְׂיִמְנֶה נְשִׂיא אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי מִשְׁפַּחַת אָבִיו וּמִמִּילָא מִשְׁמַע שֶׁהַגְּדוֹל רָאוּי הוּא דְנִקְא לְהִיּוֹת נְשִׂיא וְלֹא הַקָּטָן מִמֶּנּוּ. אָמְנָם לְפִי הָאָמֶת גַּם בְּהִיּוֹת כָּל הַטְּלִית תְּכֵלֶת עִם כָּל זֶה צִיּוּי הַמְּקוֹם דְנִקְא בְּחוּט אֶחָד וְלֹא בְּכָל הַבְּגָד, וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי אֵין לְתַמוּזָה אִם קָרַח שֶׁהָיָה יוֹתֵר גְּדוֹל מְאֻלִּיצְפֵן בְּחֻכְמָה וּבְמִנְיָן עִם כָּל זֶה לֹא רָצָה בּוֹ הַקַּב"ה כְּמוֹ שֶׁלֹּא רָצָה בְּטְלִית כּוֹלָה תְּכֵלֶת.

Similarly, his opinion was that [Moses] erred in appointing the chief, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, had told him to name one chief from the sons of the family of his [grand]father, and thus he heard that the greatest was particularly suitable to be the chief and not the youngest of them. However, in truth, even if the entire prayer shawl were blue, nevertheless the commandment of the Omnipresent was specifically for one blue string and not the entire garment. Because of this, there it is not surprising that even if Korach was greater than Elizaphan in wisdom, nevertheless the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not want him, just as He did not want a prayer shawl that was entirely blue.

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