

Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778*

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

Essay 5. Moses' treatment of Korach's people

סוֹטָה פָּרָק קמ"א "רַב־לְכֶם בְּנֵי לֵוִי". אָמַר רַבִּי לֵוִי: בְּ"רַב" בִּישָׁר, בְּ"רַב" בִּישָׁרוֹהוּ. בְּ"רַב" בִּישָׁר, "רַב־לְכֶם בְּנֵי לֵוִי". בְּ"רַב" בִּישָׁרוֹהוּ. "רַב לָךְ". ע"כ. קִשָּׁה וְהֵלֵא בְּמַעֲשֵׂה קִרַח הִנֵּה הִדִּין עִם מֹשֶׁה רַבְּנוּ ע"ה וְלָמָּה נִחָשֵׁב לוֹ לְמַעֲשֵׂה רַע מֵה שְׂאֵמֶר "רַב־לְכֶם" וְכו'.

In tractate **Sotah, the first chapter**, we find an analysis of the verses, “Do this: Take fire pans for yourself, Korach and all his band, and put fire in them and lay incense on them tomorrow before the L-rd. Then the candidate whom the L-rd chooses, he shall be the holy one. **It’s too much for you [rav lachem], sons of Levi!**”¹

[The Mishna teaches:] Who, to us, [had] a greater [burial] than Moses, [as no one involved himself in his burial other than the Omnipresent Himself]. [The Gemara teaches: When Moses relates how G-d responded to him when denying his request to enter the Land of Israel, he states: “And the L-rd said to me: It’s too much for you [rav lach]; [speak no more to Me of this matter]” (Deut. 3:26).

Rabbi Levi says: [Moses] **proclaimed** [to the Jewish people when rebuking them] **with** [the term] **“rav,”** [and therefore] **it was proclaimed to him with** [the term] **“rav”** [that he would not enter the Land of Israel].

[What is this referring to?] **He proclaimed with** [the term] **“rav”** [when speaking with the congregation of Korach]: **“It’s too much for you [rav lachem], sons of Levi.” It was proclaimed to him with** [the term] **“rav,”** [as G-d denied his request and said:] **“It’s too much for you [rav lach].”**

- Sotah 13b

I.e., Moses used the term “rav” in rebuking the people at the time of Korach’s rebellion, and then G-d used the term “rav” in telling Moses that he would not be entering the Land of Israel. Sotah suggests that the use of the same word means that G-d was upset with Moses for the manner in which he treated Korach’s people. **A difficulty is that: In the incident with Korach, wasn’t the law with our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace? Why is this considered as a bad action on his part that he said “It’s too much for you, sons of Levi”?**

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¹ Num. 16:6–7.

ומלבד מה שכתב בזה המגלה עמוקות (אופן רל"ט) עוד נראה לומר עם מה שכתב הש"ך על פסוק "קחו-לכם מחתות", שמשנה אמר להם כן כדי שיאמרו שאין להם מחתות של קדש. וכן "ותנו בהן אש" דהיינו אש של המזבח ולא אש של הדיוט, ובין כך יעשו קל וחמר, אם המחתה והאש צריכה להיות של קדש ולא של הדיוט מפל שכן המקריב הקטרת צריך שיהיה קדוש ולא הדיוט והם היו הדיוטים עכ"ל.

Apart from what the *Megaleh Amukot* wrote on this,² it also apparently can be said what the Shach³ wrote on the verse, “take fire pans for yourselves,” that Moses said this to them in order that they would say that they didn’t have sanctified firepans. I.e., he was giving them an opportunity to back down. Similarly, he said, “and put fire in them and lay incense on them,” which was a specific reference to fire of the altar and not common fire. Through this, he hoped they would make an *a fortiori* argument, if the firepan and the fire need to be holy and not common, then even more so, the one who brings the incense needs to be holy and not a layman, and they were all laymen.

ועל זה אמר להם "רב-לכם בני לוי" כלומר דבר גדול אמרתי לכם שמכאן ואילך אתם פושעים בעצמכם, וזהו דכתיב "את מחתות החטאים האלה בנפשותם", דמשמע שאבדו עצמם לדעת במרד ובמעל מתמת התראה זו של משה. ולפי מה שכתבנו לעיל בסמוך בשם הילקוט ראובני שקשנפל משה על פניו הראו לו מן השמים שקרח אי אפשר לו להנצל שכבר נגזר דינו בשריפה אבל עדתו אפשר לה להנצל אם לא יתמידו ויוסיפו בהטאם. אם כן לא היה לו למשה ליתן מקשול לפניהם, ואדרבא נקרא שהגדיל חטאם שעשעם פושעים ומגידים יותר ממה שהיו עד שחטאו בנפשותם, ובה לא עשה טוב.

Regarding this, he said to them, “It’s too much for you, sons of Levi,” as if to say, I have said something important to you, that from now on you are causing harm by yourselves. This is the meaning of what is written after their deaths, “[Remove] the fire pans of those who have sinned at the cost of their lives,”⁴ that means that they lost themselves knowingly with revolt and treachery because of this warning of Moses that they ignored.

According to what we wrote above, essay 3, in the name of the *Yalkut Re’uveini*,⁵ that when Korach and his band approached Moses and he fell upon his face,⁶ he was shown from Heaven that it was impossible for Korach to be saved, as his judgment to be burned had already been decreed. However, it was possible for his band to be saved if they did not persist and add to their sin. If so, it was not for Moses to put a stumbling block in front of them, and to the contrary, he is said to have increased their sin by making them transgressors and intentional sinners more than what they had been before they sinned at the cost of their lives, and in this he did not do good.

² Rabbi Natan Shapira (1585-1633), Polish rabbi and Kabbalist, whose principal work was *Megaleh Amukot* (1637).

³ Rabbi Mordechai Ha’Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Sifte Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605).

⁴ Num. 17:3.

⁵ Reuben Hoshke HaKohen (Sofer) (d. 1673), Kabbalist and rabbi of Prague, *Yalkut Re’uveini* (Prague 1660).

⁶ Num. 16:4.

ולפיכך ב"רב" בישרוהו שאמר לו "רב לך", שאף על פי שמשנה ואהרן שניהם חטאו במי מריבה ושניהם מתו במדבר בחטא זה. עם כל זה יותר גדול היה חטאו של משה ששמע הציווי מפי המקום וגם הוא עשה המעשה דכתיב "ויך את הסלע", ואדרבא הוא גרם לאהרן שימות שהרי משה הקפיד ואמר "שמעו-נא המרים". וכן פרש רש"י על פסוק "ויקצף משה על פקודי הקהל" בא לכלל פעם, בא לכלל טעות, וכן אתה מוצא "שמעו-נא המרים" וכו' עכ"ל. ועתה שפבר מת אהרן במדבר הלא אין עוד מקום להתפלל מקל נחמר, ועל זה אמר לו "רב לך".

Therefore, it was proclaimed to him with [the term] “rav,” as [G-d] said to him: “It’s too much for you [rav lach],” that he had merited enough in his life, but would not enter the Land of Israel. **For even though Moses and Aaron, both of them, had sinned at the waters of Meribah, and the two of them died in the wilderness from this sin. With all of this, Moses’ sin was greater than Aaron’s, as he heard the command from the mouth of the Omnipresent and he committed the act, as it is written, “You and your brother Aaron take the rod and assemble the community, and before their very eyes order the rock to yield its water; thus you shall produce water for them from the rock and provide drink for the congregation and their beasts. . . . And Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; out came copious water.”⁷** I.e., G-d only told Moses to speak to the rock, and yet he struck the rock.

Also **contrary** to the thinking that Moses and Aaron’s sin was equal in striking the rock, **[Moses] caused Aaron to die, for Moses was particular and said, “Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?”⁸** I.e., Moses also erred in angrily insulting the people. **Thus Rashi explained on the verse, “ ‘Moses became angry with the commanders of the army, the officers of thousands and the officers of hundreds, who had come back from the military campaign.’⁹ [Because Moses] fell into anger, he fell into error, and you also find when he said, ‘Listen, you rebels,’ it was through his anger that he made the mistake.”¹⁰**

Now that Aaron has already died in the wilderness, there isn’t any place for Moshe to pray for G-d to allow him to enter the Land. This is an *a fortiori* argument: Moses and Aaron both sinned, but Moses’ sin was worse. As Aaron had already died and therefore wouldn’t enter the Land of Israel, how could G-d allow Moses, whose sin had been greater, to enter the Land. **For this reason, [G-d] said to him, “It’s too much for you.**

אי נמי בדרך אחרת כתב הש"ד הנ"ל "רב-לכם בני לוי" חטא גדול הוא לכם בערפכם, שאתם נלויים את ה' והקב"ה מדקדק עם חסידיו כחוט השערה עכ"ל. כלומר הטעם שאני אמרתי לכם עצה זו שבודאי תמותו בה, היינו מפני שפבר אתם חייבים מיתה לפי ערפכם שאתם נלויים אל ה', וב"רב" בישרוהו שפרש רש"י ששהקב"ה מדקדק עם חסידיו ונענש באותה מיתה עכ"ל. כלומר אתה הקרבת מיתתו של אלו האנשים בעצתך מטעם שפבר היו חייבים מיתה לפי ערפכם, אף הקב"ה אמר לך "רב לך", לפי ערפך חטאת ואין אתה יכול להכנס.

Alternatively, in a different way of analysis, the Shach mentioned above writes, “It’s too much for you, sons of Levi,” that this was a great sin for you considering your worth, for

⁷ Num. 20:8, 20:11.

⁸ Num. 20:10.

⁹ Num. 31:14, but Rashi’s comment was actually on a later verse, Num. 31:21.

¹⁰ Rashi on Num. 31:21.

they were connected to G-d, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, is exacting with His pious ones to the degree of a hair's breadth.¹¹ In other words, the reason I gave you this advice, by which you would surely die, is because you already deserve death according to your worth, that you are connected to G-d. Then, it was proclaimed to [Moses] with [the term] “*rav*,” as Rashi explained that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is exacting with His pious ones, and [Moses] was punished with the same death. In other words, you brought the deaths of these people by your advice, with the reason that they already deserved death because of their worth, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to you, Moses, when you pleaded to enter the Land of Israel, “It’s too much for you [*rav lach*], because of your [own] worth, you have sinned, and you are not able to enter the Land of Israel.”

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¹¹ Yevamot 121b.