

YAAKOV'S DISSOCIATION WITH KORACH'S REBELLION

Parshas Korach

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Korach's denunciation of Moshe is introduced by recording his lineage: "...the son of Yitzchok, the son of Kehos, son of Levi...". Upon tracing back his ancestry, the Torah stops with Levi, discontinuing one more step, the son of Yaakov. Rashi quotes Midrash Tanchuma that Yaakov pleaded to Hashem for mercy that his name should not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion. To this he referred when he said in his Tzvo'oh (last will) blessing: "With their congregation do not join, O my honor" (Braishis 49:6).

The question should be pondered, since the ancestors back to Levi were Tzadikim, why are also their names not omitted? (The Or Hachaim poses this question). The answer may be that the names of those progenitors had to be enumerated because this ancestry was Korach's main reason he rebelled. Counting himself a closer and older descendant of these mentioned, he was upset that the position of tribal leadership was awarded not to him but to his cousin Elizafan. In his furious resentment, he challenged Moshe's authority as G-d given.

Korach's sarcastic rhetoric against Moshe in public was dangerously planting some doubt in the people's minds concerning the EMES (veracity) of Moshe's prophecy. It was the very EMES of all Torah that needed protection. Indeed after he received his punishment, the earth opened up and swallowed the rebels, without a trace that anything had happened, Korach screamed "Moshe EMES and his Torah is EMES". The Talmud (Bava Basra 74a) relates that this sound is heard every Rosh Chodesh, emanating from that space in the ground where Korach and his group were swallowed: "Moshe EMES and his Torah is EMES and Korach and group are falsehood".

The Midrash states "SHEKER AIN LO RAGLAYIM". Falsehood has no base to stand on (see Yalkut Shimoni Beraishis 3). The unique creation of the ground swallowing up falsehood is a fitting testimony to the preservation of TRUTH.

Yaakov has been bestowed the title "Symbol, custodian, of Truth". "Grant truth to Yaakov, kindness to Abraham, as you swore to our forefathers from ancient times" (Micha 7:20). The Bracha following the morning Shema, "Emes Veyatziv..." mentions fifteen "branches" of truth. It includes "Tzur Yaakov", the Rock of Yaakov. As the emblem and personification of Emes, Yaakov's name is appropriately mentioned in the Bracha. It now becomes perspicuously intelligible that in his Ruach Hakodesh foresight about a future falsehood, as Korach's rebellion, Yaakov's name should not appear in that connection. This was his way of protecting the EMES, the EMES L'YAAKOV.

Turning to that quoted passage in Micha, "Give Emes to Yaakov..." the sagacious student would surely wonder whatever happened to Yitzchok? Emes is associated with Yaakov, Chesed (kindness) with Abraham, what about Yitzchok? The standard commentators are already perplexed by this omission. Radak expounds the concluding sentence in Micha, "As You swore to our ancestors" a reference to all three, including Yitzchok (see also Rashi and Metzudos). Indeed in one passage, the word "swore" is mentioned specifically regarding Yitzchok, "the covenant Hashem made with Abraham and His 'Shvuoh' (oath) to Yitzchok, then He established it for Yaakov as a statute..." (I Chronicles 16:16,17).

Still the omission of Yitzchok's name needs illumination which may be suggested as follows, based on a striking observation of Divrei Yechezkel of Shinova. The portion of Akaida begins: "And it happened after these things that Hashem tested Abraham... please take your son... to the Land of Moriah... as an offering... (Beraishis 22:1). "After these things..." what things? Expounds Rashi, "These things are words, which Yishmoel uttered arrogantly, mocking Yitzchok's circumcision at the age of eight days, in no position to refuse. Yishmoel was 13 years old at the time of his circumcision, in a position to refuse, which he claims he didn't. To this Yitzchok responded: You praise yourself for one organ in the body, I would be prepared to give my whole body for Hashem." After this disputation, Yitzchok demonstrating self-sacrifice, Hashem tested Abraham.

Maintains the Shiniver that Yishmoel lied when he said he was circumcised willingly. In fact he was forced. For this reason the passage "On that very day was Abraham circumcised (NIMOL) and Yishmoel his son"

(Beraishis 17:26). NIMOL (in the singular) not NIMOLU (in the plural), because Yishmoel's was forced, therefore could not be reported on the same level in plural.

When Hashem promised Abraham Sarah will bear him a son, Abraham says: Halavai "May Yishmoel live before you". Hashem responded "Avol (nonetheless) your wife Sarah will bear you a son" (Beraishis 17:19). Unkeles renders the word "Avol" "Bekushta" in truth. Yishmoel apparently was speaking falsehood, Yitzchok would be the representative of truth, EMES.

A Gimatria (numerical number) may substantiate the Shiniver's theory: Lo bekushta (not truth) equals numerically Yishmoel. Twice Yitzchok (he was renamed Yitzchok following the Akaida) is equal numerically to kushta (truth).

According to this Shiniver opinion, Yaakov's identification with the concept of truth was a "Yerusha", an inheritance from his father, Yitzchok. As an inheritor of this precious principle, Yaakov was vehement about protecting it against the onslaught of a falsifier. Korach rebelled against Moshe because of his grievance as a Yoresh, inheritance from his progenitors. Precisely for this very reason, protecting an inheritance, Yaakov disassociated from the rebellion because he wished to protect the concept of truth which he inherited from his father.

In his farewell prophecy about Korach's rebellion, pleading his name should be omitted, he uses the word "honor". "With their congregation do not join O my honor". This is atypical for Yaakov who was a humble, meek person. "Fear not O worm-weak Yaakov..." (Yeshaya 41:14). How is it that he speaks about his own "honor". According to the above, however, it is his father's honor he seeks to protect.

Micha, then, does not ignore Yitzchok's contribution to Kneses Yisroel. The contrary; Yitzchok's personification of EMES is even strengthened, fortified and protected as it is bequeathed as an inheritance to Yaakov.

