



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Korach's Irrational Desire

Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Korach | Sichah 1

The Question:

Chassidut explains that Korach was a deeply spiritual person whose ambitions were ahead of his time. He wanted to implement divine service according to the future reality of the Messianic Era. But reading the narrative literally, it is hard to find any redemptive quality in Korach or his 250 followers. Shouldn't we also be able to detect this inner dimension of Korach's rebellion in an external, literal reading?

The Explanation:

Korach and his followers wanted to be *Kohanim Gedolim*. (*Bamidbar* 16:10) At Sinai they heard G-d say, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of *Kohanim*." (*Shemos* 19:6) They understood that, in essence, every Jew can be close to G-d as is the *Kohen Gadol*. (*Ba'al Haturim, ibid.*) This potential was frustrated only due to the subsequent sin of the Golden Calf. But through supplication and prayer, they reasoned, they could reverse this state of affairs and truly become *Kohanim Gedolim*.

Moshe sympathized with their desire. "I, too, want this." (*Rashi, 16:6*) But this desire had to remain just that — it could not be fulfilled practically. G-d wanted there to be only one *Kohen Gadol*.

Still, Korach's followers forged ahead and agreed to Moshe's test. They were so consumed by this desire to become *Kohen Gadol* that even the potential of death could not deter them. This is similar to the *Kohanim* who bribed Roman officials for the chance to be *Kohen Gadol* in the Second Temple era, even though each unfit *kohen* would die within the year on Yom

Kippur. (*Yoma* 9a) They, too, wanted the chance to be alone with G-d in the Holy of Holies just once — even if it meant that they would die.

Thus, in Korach's rhetoric, "for all of the community are holy, and G-d is in their midst" (*Bamidbar* 16:3), we hear the spiritual undertones of his intense, albeit misplaced, thirst for unity with G-d.

For this reason, the Torah portion is named "Korach" alone, and is not named after the first words of the portion, "Korach *took*." We want to preserve Korach's desire, but we do not want to perpetuate the division he sowed by "taking" part of the community aside in his rebellion.