

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 33

Pinchas, Sicha 2

The Context:

After the plague which descended on the Jewish people due to their idolatrous behavior ceased, G-d commanded Moshe to take a census of the people. In the course of the census, the Torah mentions Dasan and Aviram of the tribe of Reuven who “incited against Moses and Aaron in the assembly of Korah.” The Torah continues to recall the punishment of Korach and his followers descending into the earth, and then concludes, “Korah's sons, however, did not die. (Bamidbar 26:11)

Commenting on this verse, Rashi writes:

Korah's sons, however, did not die — They were involved in the conspiracy from the beginning, but during the dispute they contemplated repentance in their hearts; therefore, an elevated area was set apart for them in Gehinnom, and they stayed there.

The Questions:

1. Rashi is unnecessarily verbose here. Why is it important to note the severity of their offense, “they were involved in the conspiracy **from the beginning**,” and not simply “they were part of the conspiracy”?
2. “During the dispute they contemplated repentance:” Why is it important to specify when their repentance occurred, and how does Rashi ascertain this detail from the simple reading of the narrative?
3. “They contemplated repentance in their hearts:” What is Rashi trying to convey with this phrase? It seems to imply that they did indeed achieve repentance, yet they did not express that outwardly, why is that relevant to this narrative?

The Explanation:

The central concern Rashi is addressing is the unique punishment meted out to Korach's children. Nowhere else in the Torah do we find such a paradoxical punishment — on the one hand, they descended into the earth like their coconspirators, on the

other hand, they were preserved peacefully within the depths of the earth, until they emerged at a much later date. What is the purpose or function of this miraculous consequence?

Rashi resolves this by explaining the unique inner state of the children of Korach. Outwardly, they seemed to persist in their conflict with Moshe. Internally, however, they “contemplated repentance in their hearts” during the conflict itself. While engaged in apparent conflict, they already regretted their stance and repented in their hearts, albeit without expressing that regret to anyone else. Therefore, their punishment reflected this limbo state. They outwardly were punished together with Korach’s followers, yet they were preserved within the earth without anyone above knowing of their salvation.

This lends insight into another fundamental anomaly of this narrative. Why would the Torah place this detail of Korach’s children here, in a tangential comment in the midst of the census, and not earlier in the narrative of Korach’s rebellion itself?

The explanation is as follows: In parshah Korach, the Torah says that those who were swallowed by the earth “were lost to the congregation.” This implies that there were those who were lost **only** to that congregation of Jews at the time, but not for eternity. There would be another congregation to whom those in the earth

would not be lost. In our parshah, the Jews who were alive during Korach’s rebellion had all passed away. Now, the children of Korach emerged again, reuniting them with the “congregation” of the Jewish people. Thus, this detail emerges here and not in Korach, because it was at this point that the survival of Korach’s children was revealed.

There is still a further curiosity about the placement of this detail. Korach’s children are not mentioned when their tribe of Levi is counted, but rather during the census of Reuven, and in connection with Dasan and Avriam. Rashi clarifies this by adding, “They were involved in the conspiracy from the beginning.” The verse placed the sons of Korach next to Dasan and Aviram to illustrate that they both were instigators of the conflict, not mere participants. This highlights the novelty of Korach’s son’s repentance: even though they were deeply invested in the conflict, like Dasan and Aviram, they still were able to recognize their error and repent, at least internally.

This is an enduring lesson for the power of repentance: No matter how mired in negative behaviors we may be, even the thought of repentance can lift us from the depths and place us in an “elevated area” — like the sons of Korach who composed psalms to G-d from their perch — and bring us to the redemption which will be prefaced with every one of us returning to G-d.
