



נשמת התורה SOUL OF TORAH

A Chassidic Take On The Parsha

By

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The Holiness Within

One of my favorite fantastical childhood stories is related to this week's parsha, parshat Korach.

It is an audacious story, and for some of you, no doubt, it may sound a bit out there. But Chassidic stories are often powerful less because of their veracity than because of the religious message they convey. It is in that spirit that I share this unusual story.

The story is told about R. Moshe Teitelbaum, the Yismach Moshe (1759-1841). He believed that, in an earlier incarnation, he had lived among the generation that left Egypt and journeyed through the wilderness.

Once, as he described the conflict between Moshe Rabbeinu and Korach, he recalled that many of the prominent people of the generation were drawn to Korach, while the simpler members of the community remained loyal to Moshe.



His grandson asked him, "Zeidy, whose side were you on?" The Yismach Moshe answered that he had remained neutral. His grandson was astonished. "How could you not side with Moshe Rabbeinu?" The Yismach Moshe responded, "Had you known how great Korach was, you would not ask such a question."

However one understands this story, its religious point is startling. Korach was not a simple villain. His challenge to Moshe was dangerous, and the Torah presents it as a rebellion that had to be defeated. But as the *Yismach Moshe* tells it, Korach's claim carried enough force that even he would not have dismissed it out of hand.

The Arizal gives this idea an even sharper formulation. In the Shir Shel Yom of Shabbat, the day that gestures toward the repaired world of the future, he finds a hidden allusion to Korach. In that future world, Korach will no longer be remembered only as the rebel who challenged Moshe. Something in his approach will be recognized and accepted.

The Yismach Moshe and the Arizal, each in his own way, point to the same striking idea: beneath Korach's rebellion there was a religious insight that could not simply be dismissed.

That insight is found in Korach's own words:

"You have gone too far! For the entire community, all of them, are holy, and Hashem is among them. Why then do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?"

At first glance, Korach seems to be challenging Moshe and Aharon's leadership. Why should they stand above the rest of the community? But his words go deeper than that. Korach is also making a claim about where kedushah resides. Holiness, he says, is not concentrated only in leaders or in those who live on a visibly higher plane. It is present throughout the community.

That claim is profound. Kol ha'edah kulam kedoshim: the whole community is holy. Kedushah is not the possession of a spiritual elite. It is not reserved for rare people with unusual gifts. Every person carries a nitzotz Elokai, an inner spark of Godliness, even when it is covered over or hard to reach.

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The religious task is to bring that hidden holiness forward and let it find expression in the way we live.

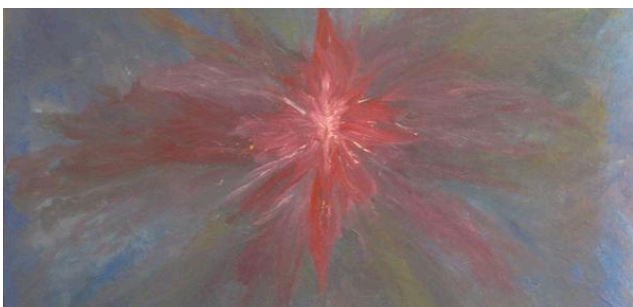
Korach's mistake was not that he believed holiness lives within ordinary people. That belief is true and precious. His mistake was that he turned that truth into a weapon against Moshe.

The truth at the heart of Korach's words is empowering, but it is also demanding. If holiness is already within us, then we cannot live as if kedushah belongs only to other people. We cannot outsource religious depth to those we admire. Religious leadership matters, of course. Torah needs guidance and authority. But the work itself cannot be delegated. Each person has to uncover the kedushah within and allow it to shape the way they live.

A well-known Chassidic story makes this point beautifully.

A man once dreamed that a treasure was buried under a bridge in Vienna. He traveled there and stood near the bridge, wondering how to dig without being seen. A guard noticed him and asked what he was doing. The man told him about his dream.

The guard laughed. "You foolish Jew. I also dreamed of a treasure buried under the oven in the home of a Jew in such-and-such a town." He then named the man's own town and house. "Do you think I would travel all that way because of a dream?"



"Divine Spark" by Israel artist Galia Naveh

The guard laughed. "You foolish Jew. I also dreamed of a treasure buried under The man returned home, dug beneath his oven, and found the treasure.

The treasure had been at home all along.

The point is not that one never needs to travel. The man had to go to Vienna in order to discover what was waiting in his own home. Sometimes we need someone else to help us recognize the treasure that was there all along. That is the deeper version of Korach's claim. The treasure is already within. Kedushah is not imported from the outside. It is not created by leaders or owned by institutions. The task of religious life is to uncover it, nourish it, and allow it to flourish.

Korach's challenge also contains a warning for religious leaders. His question, *madua titnas'u*, "why do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Hashem," was not, by itself, a fair description of Moshe and Aharon. Their leadership was not self-appointed; it was commanded by God and necessary for the Jewish people. The Torah does not erase religious authority or pretend that all roles are the same.

But Korach's question still has to be heard. Leadership becomes dangerous when it forgets the holiness of the people it serves. A leader's task is not to eclipse the inner kedushah of the community, but to help reveal it.

Korach's sin was rebellion. His mistake was arrogance. But beneath the rebellion was a real religious claim: "The entire community, all of them, are holy, and Hashem is among them."

Not everyone is Moshe. Not everyone is Aharon. But every person carries a measure of kedushah that only they can bring into the world.