

# The Legitimacy of the Torah

Category: Bamidbar, Korach

*Why didn't Moses forgive Korach, and how did that impact the entirety of Jewish history?*

## Korach's Fight

Today, Israel is fighting Hamas. But often in the history of the conflict, there was fighting in Gaza between Hamas and Fatah themselves. Hamas and Fatah have always been clashing over who will be the legitimate leaders of the Palestinian people.

In this week's Torah portion, we read about a similar situation that happened thousands of years ago in the desert. Korach, Moshe's cousin, gathered a group of people and confronted Moshe and Aharon. He said, "The whole congregation is holy, and G-d is in their midst, so why do you raise yourselves above G-d's people?" Korach and his followers felt that all Jews were important. As Rashi explains, they argued, "You were not the only ones to hear 'I am the Lord your G-d' at Mount Sinai; the whole congregation heard it." They questioned why Moshe and Aharon made themselves more important than everyone else.

Their claim for equality seemed legitimate. However, Moshe tried to persuade them otherwise. He reminded them that they, too, were chosen by G-d as Levites and held important positions among the Jews. They were not equal to the rest of Israel; they had significant roles. Moshe also tried to speak with Dasan and Aviram, who were among Korach's men, but they refused to even talk to him.

Then, something extraordinary happened. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed Korach and his followers, taking them alive to their graves. It was an incredible punishment.

## Why No Forgiveness?

When we read this story, a question immediately arises. Every time the Jews sinned before—whether with the Golden Calf or the Spies—Moshe always prayed

for their forgiveness. Why didn't Moshe pray for Korach and his followers? Moshe even told them beforehand what their punishment would be. Why did he react so harshly?

Looking closer, what was Korach's real complaint? When he asked, "Why do you raise yourselves above G-d's nation?" he was essentially questioning who made Moshe the leader and why he appointed Aharon as High Priest. Korach's claim was that Moshe had taken these roles for himself, not that they were divinely appointed. He was challenging Moshe's legitimacy, suggesting that these positions were self-assigned rather than given by G-d.

This is evident from Moshe's response: "You and your entire company who are assembled are against the L-rd, for what is Aaron that you should complain against him?" Korach was essentially asking, "Who are you, Moshe? Who made you king and declared that we need to listen to you?" He argued that everyone was equal, and each person should do what they believed was right.

This was a very serious issue. Rejecting Moshe's leadership meant rejecting the Divine order and suggesting that there was no central authority. In any society, the moment the ruler loses legitimacy, chaos ensues—just like the fights between Hamas and Fatah.

## **The Importance of Government**

The Mishna in Avos tells us, "Pray for the integrity of the government; for were it not for the fear of its authority, a man would swallow his neighbor alive." Without a strong and respected authority, chaos reigns, and people turn against each other. In such an environment, it's impossible to study Torah peacefully because there's constant uncertainty about what might happen next.

When there is a respect for the government, even if the ruling party's behavior is less than ideal, there is still order. This prevents a situation where everyone acts solely according to their own desires, reducing the risk of societal breakdown and ensuring that people don't "swallow each other alive."

The Rebbe points out that these words were spoken by Rabbi Chanina, who suffered greatly under the Roman government. Despite his suffering, he recognized the importance of having a ruling authority. Rabbi Chanina was one of

the Ten Martyrs killed by the Romans, yet he still emphasized the need for a government to maintain order (ש"פ קרח תשד"מ ח"ג עמ' 2050).

Korach's complaint had the potential to create immense chaos among the Jewish people. Therefore, there was no room for leniency or exceptions in this case. For the newly formed Jewish nation, the damage from such chaos would have been particularly devastating. If Korach's claims were accepted, suggesting that Moshe had taken his leadership and Aharon's position for himself and not by G-d's command, it would undermine the entire foundation of Judaism.

If people believed that Moshe had made up his own rules, they might also question the authenticity of other commandments like tefillin, Yom Kippur, or circumcision.

The foundation of Judaism is built on the belief that at Sinai, everyone witnessed G-d speaking to Moshe. The Rambam explains, "What did they believe in at Sinai? That our eyes saw and not a stranger's, and our ears heard and not another's, the fire and the sounds, and he (Moshe) approached the smoke and the voice spoke to him, and we heard 'Moshe, Moshe, go speak to them such and such.' Therefore, we believe that every word of Moshe's is true and comes from G-d."

Thus, when someone casts doubt on Moshe's trustworthiness, it casts doubt on the entirety of Judaism. That is why there could be no leniency for Korach. It was essential to eliminate these doubts at their source and leave no trace of them. This is why Moshe declared, "And with this you will know that G-d has sent me to do all these things and it does not come from my heart."

## **How To Emphasize It**

It is interesting to note that in all the following generations, even though many movements have arisen within the Jewish nation raising doubts against the Oral Torah, none of them questioned Moshe's legitimacy. None of them claimed that the Written Torah is not true.

In our generation, too, there are many movements that disagree on various aspects of Judaism. However, one thing unites them all: the Torah. In every synagogue, regardless of its type or affiliation, there is a Torah. The same Torah is read from every week, and every Bar Mitzvah boy goes up to the Torah and

makes the same blessing, “Nosain HaTorah...Who gives the Torah.” Nobody questions the Torah’s legitimacy.

This respect for the Torah extends beyond the Jewish community. More than a billion Muslims and Christians agree that the Tanach is true, acknowledging that Moshe and the Torah he brought are both the truth. The Rebbe often emphasized that every Jewish home should be filled with Jewish books, encapsulated in the phrase: “Bayis Molei Seforim”—a home filled with books.

So, let’s make sure that in every Jewish home there is a set of the Five Books of Moshe—for this is the foundation of all Judaism. Keeping this book in our homes signifies to our children that it is important and that we believe in it. And every once in a while, someone might even open it!