

## Message 2025-06-28

Parashat Korach recounts the rebellion of Korach (a cousin of Moses and Aaron), Dathan, Abiram, and 250 of their followers. Some rebels are swallowed by the ground, while others are consumed by a fire from God and others die in a plague. The portion ends by describing gifts given to priests and Levites.

Torah: Numbers 16:1-18:32

Haftarah: I Samuel 11:14-12:22

### Eat Your Words

**שלום החברים והמשפחה שלי**

**Shalom, khaverim v'mishpokhah sheli.**

**Shalom, my family and friends.**

This message, like most of my messages, can be summed up with these words.

**"Little children, love one another."**

I repeat this story because I like this story from Jerome, an early historian and teacher of the faith records this story about Yochanan HaShaliakh like this:

*The blessed John the Evangelist lived in Ephesus until extreme old age. His disciples could barely carry him to community and he could not muster the voice to speak many words. During individual gatherings he usually said nothing but, "Little children, love one another." The disciples and brothers in attendance, annoyed because they always heard the same words, finally said, "Teacher, why do you always say this?" He replied with a line worthy of John: "Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient."*

While that is certainly sufficient, I would like to give you a little more specific summary for my teaching today where we will delve into some of the ways in which we can accomplish this, and that would be this:

**Our lives depend on the words that come out of our mouths.**

I had several other ways I wanted to go with the message for this week, but I felt that I was supposed to stick to the weekly reading. Our parashah this week once again deals with rebellion,

and this time it is bold and direct. It's an insurrection. Parashat Korach recounts the rebellion of Korach, Dathan, Aviram, On, and 250 of their followers. Some of the rebels and their households are swallowed by the ground, while others are consumed by a fire from God, and others die in a plague. This rebellion, which amounted to refusing to walk in emunah, in faith, with Adonai led to an entire generation being judged unfit to enter Israel.

Last week, our parashah described the rebellion of Israel against G-d by refusing to enter into the land of promise. These two parashot work together to paint a pretty clear picture of both what Hashem expects of His people and what He thinks of their rebelliousness. This is because the rebelliousness of the people is not really against their leadership in Moshe, it is against G-d, and it demonstrates their lack of gratitude for what G-d has done and their lack of faith in Him and in His will.

The point of these stories is not to show us God's harshness or make us afraid, but rather to show us His graciousness and mercy. When Adonai threatened to wipe out the entire congregation of the children of Israel, Israel had justly earned that punishment. When God accepted Moshe's' petition on behalf of the people, He demonstrated Himself to be merciful and forgiving.

We would not understand how merciful and forgiving He was being by sparing Israel if we did not first understand that Israel was deserving of obliteration. Rather than a contrast to the God of the gospel, the message is identical. In the Brit Chadashah, humanity is depicted as worthy of obliteration and damnation. Rather than carry out that judgment, God willingly accepts the intercession of Yeshua, demonstrating Himself to be the same gracious and forgiving God that He was in the days of Moshe.

The point of this story, at least the point I want to elucidate, is how very important our words are. Words lead to action, and negative words seldom lead to positive actions. Our words carry real weight, and they have real consequence.

## **Lashan Hara**

*Which of you takes pleasure in living? Who wants a long life to see good things? [If you do,] keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceiving talk; turn from evil, and do good; seek peace, go after it!*

### **Psalms 34:13–15 (CJB)**

Jewish law considers the broad category of lashon hara to be a significant sin because it harms social cohesion and is difficult to atone for. There are three primary categories of problematic

speech in Judaism, all of which are Lashon hara. The most general is rechilut, or gossip. It can be positive or negative. Negative speech that is false is called in Hebrew motzi shem ra — literally “gives a bad name,” or more commonly slander or defamation. Finally, there is lashon hara, which technically refers to speech that causes harm. The statement might be true, but speaking it will hurt the person about whom it is said.

Once such speech has been let loose in the world, it is virtually impossible to undo its damage.

Jewish law also regards both the speaker and the hearer of lashon hara as liable.

The story of Korach illustrates the danger of lashon hara. What started as griping and complaining, snowballed into a full insurrection that claimed the lives of all of these people. While our grumbling and complaining may not result in the earth literally swallowing us, it nevertheless **leads to death**. The death of relationships. Death of our community. Damage in the home.

*They assembled themselves against Moshe and Aharon and said to them, “You take too much on yourselves! After all, the entire community is holy, every one of them, and ADONAI is among them. So why do you lift yourselves up above ADONAI’s assembly?”*

#### **Numbers 16:3 (CJB)**

Our speech doesn’t just affect us. It affects those closest to us too. The families of Korach, Dathan, Abiram, and On were neighbors in the camp. They lived next to each other on the south side of the mishkan according to how Hashem had told Moshe to organize the camp, and they were obviously close. A community within the community.

Being close and being in agreement does not make you righteous, or right. It just means you are not alone. Being a neighbor to a wicked person is risky. It is easy for a person of good character, who is empathetic and kind, someone who bears his brother’s burdens, to be influenced and corrupted by the complaints of others.

However, other people’s issues are not your issues. Yes, we bear each other’s burdens, but not each others’ complaints and grievances and annoyances and pet peeves.

*Like someone who grabs a dog by the ears is a passer-by who mixes in a fight not his own.*

#### **Proverbs 26:17 (CJB)**

Viewing the kingdom of G-d hierarchically led to Korach and his follows feeling like Moshe had elevated himself and his brother Aaron above the rest of the people of Israel. However, it was God

who had separated out the Levi'im from among the people of Israel to serve in the tabernacle, and it was G-d who had separated the family of Aaron to be the cohanim.

*The people spoke against God and against Moshe.*

### **Numbers 21:5 (CJB)**

Adonai does not view his kingdom in the same way we do. People are set apart for a role, for a task, and being 'chosen' by G-d does not make you better than or less than anyone else. It simply means that G-d has chosen you for a task. Envy and resentment towards people who G-d has called to a different role than your own often manifests in our words.

## **Negativity Only Brings You Down**

**This leads to negativity in the Community.**

Evil speech does not lead to good results. Nothing positive comes from talking negatively about other people.

Clement, who was a talmid of both Kefa and Sha'ul, wrote a letter to the Corinthians sometime between 70 and 140 of the common era. It deals mostly with a community in turmoil, and it is because they refused to submit to leadership in their community.

*Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, that there would be strife over the office of congregational leadership.*

### **1 Clement 44:1**

1 Clement is a rebuke of insurrection against community leadership. To sum it up, when it comes to congregational leadership, there will always be strife.

Korach's big problem was that he was not in charge, and he felt that Moshe had elevated himself and his family above the rest of the children of Israel. However, we have read throughout the Torah that Moshe was chosen by for this task by Hashem, and he frequently tried to get out of it. Moshe was a servant of the people, and that is the example we see here. He pleads to Hashem for mercy for the people. He doesn't try to defend himself. He works to reconcile both with Korach and his followers and with Reunites who had joined with him.

Moses did not rely on political maneuvering, rhetorical challenges, or character assassination. He did not try to defend himself at all. Instead, he left the matter entirely in God's hands. This is

difficult to do. When a person is challenged, criticized, or falsely accused, his normal human reaction is to hit back, defend himself, and try to convince others that he is in the right. It takes a person of great faith and spiritual maturity to simply leave the matter in God's hands. Ultimately Moshe places himself at the mercy of G-d in the exact same way as everyone else, and G-d once again demonstrates His will through judgement and mercy.

We are not accountable only to G-d. There is accountability in our friendships and our families. There is also authority within the community, and we are accountable to them. We all need accountability.

*Likewise, you younger ones, submit yourselves to the elders. And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.*

**1 Peter 5:5 (TLV)**

Peter then quotes from Proverbs 3 where it says:

*The scornful he scorns, but gives grace to the humble. The wise win honor, but fools win shame.*

**Proverbs 3:34–35 (TLV)**

The different roles in Israel were G-d's choice, not Moshe's. So, the people were not complaining about Moshe, they were complaining against G-d. This is not dissimilar to the way that Israel was separated out from the nations to serve G-d's purposes.

We are supposed to keep the whole torah, but not every commandment applies to every child of G-d. We are not all priests. We are not all Levi'im. We are not all men, and we are not all women. We do not all live in the land of Israel. We don't live with a physical tabernacle or temple. We are not all children of Israel, and we are not all grafted into Israel.

Adonai does not view his kingdom in the same way we do. In the kingdom of heaven, we are all children of the most high G-d. However, people are set apart for a role, for a task, and being 'chosen' by G-d does not make you better than or less than anyone else. It simply means that G-d has chosen you for a task.

We see this principle of being called to fulfill different roles continued within the body of Messiah.

*Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers. Their task is to equip God's people for the work of service that builds the body of the Messiah.*

## **Ephesians 4:11-12 (CJB)**

Korach's complaint against Moshe was not legitimate, but, even it had been, he did not handle it the right way. He had already built up a large rebellion through grumbling and complaint before he ever approached Moshe. As disciples of Yeshua we need to be wary to not fall into the trap of sedition. We are told not to even listen to accusations against the leadership in our community except on the basis of 2 or 3 witnesses.

*Do not accept an accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

## **1 Timothy 5:19 (TLV)**

2 or 3 witnesses? That should sound familiar because this is a concept that is repeated.

*"Now if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault while you're with him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen, take with you one or two more, so that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand.' But if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to Messiah's community. And if he refuses to listen even to Messiah's community, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector.*

## **Matthew 18:15-17 (TLV)**

This is based on an understanding of Deuteronomy.

*The death sentence is to be carried out only if there was testimony from two or three witnesses; he may not be sentenced to death on the testimony of only one witness.*

## **Deuteronomy 17:6 (CJB)**

You might be thinking that we're not talking about matters of life and death here, but that is exactly what we are talking about. Lashon Hara is a matter of life and death.

{aside}

## **What about the children?**

The families of Dathan and Abiram are the saddest part of the story of Korach to me. The earth swallowed them all. Were their families truly united in their rebellion against G-d, or was the rebellion of the fathers so complete that there was no escaping their negative influence?

That should be a warning to us. What we say and do impacts those closest to us. The way we view others and the world around us echoes in our homes, and, while it may not literally drag our

households down to Sheol, it has profound and unexpected consequence.

The three chief Reubenites who joined with Korah were named Dathan, Abiram, and On. The Torah never mentions On again after Numbers 16:1–2. Dathan and Abiram met a grim fate for their part in the rebellion, but On was apparently spared.

The Talmud tells a story to explain how the rebellion started and how it was that On was spared from judgment in Tractate Sanhedrin 109b–110b.

According to the story, Korah's rebellion began at his wife's instigation. She resented Moses for assigning her Levite husband what she considered the lowly status of servant. She was jealous of the wives of Aaron's household who were married to prestigious priests. So she began to subtly undermine her husband's loyalty toward Moses and Aaron.

Every day, when Korah came back from the assembly, his wife asked him what Moses had said, and then she would ridicule his teachings. When Korah finally decided to raise a rebellion, he thought it was his own initiative, but his wife had planted the ideas in his head.

The wife of On the Reubenite was just the opposite. When she found out that her husband had joined Korah's insurrection against Moses and Aaron, she took him aside and asked, "Why are you getting involved with these Levites? What business is it of yours? You are a student of Moses. If Korah deposes him, you will be a student of Korah. How does that improve your situation? As it is, you have gotten yourself into matters in which you should not be involved." Her husband explained that he had been swept away with Korah's rhetoric and taken a vow to join him in a rebellion the next morning. "Do as I say and I will get you out of your vow," she said. She fed him a rich meal and gave him plenty of wine so that he overslept. When Korah's men came looking for him, she sat in the doorway of the tent, brushing her hair, and did not let them into the tent to wake him. So her husband, On, missed the entire affair without intentionally breaking his vow.

This illustrates the difference our words make, even in the privacy of our own home. We have the power to build up our home or tear it down.

*Every wise woman builds up her home, but a foolish one tears it down with her own hands.  
A person with upright conduct fears Adonai, but a person who is devious scorns him.  
From the mouth of a fool sprouts pride, but the lips of the wise protect them.*

**Proverbs 14:1–3 (CJB)**

Death or life. When presented with those options, choose life.

## Eat Your Words

*"Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. For the way you judge others is how you will be judged—the measure with which you measure out will be used to measure to you. Why do you see the splinter in your brother's eye but not notice the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' when you have the log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First, take the log out of your own eye; then you will see clearly, so that you can remove the splinter from your brother's eye!"*

**Matthew 7:1–5 (CJB)**

These words of Yeshua teach us how to approach our complaints against others. The next time you hear someone griping about somebody else's shortcomings, observe that the griper has the same issues that he is pointing out in others. Better yet, the next time you hear yourself griping about someone else's shortcomings, realize that you are actually speaking about yourself. After you have examined yourself and removed the log from your eye, and, if you still feel the need to address the issue, then you can go to that person and talk with them about what you noticed. Admonish them because you love them.

Stirring up dissent and trying to build consensus and campaigning for your point of view are never the right approach. If the issue is still large enough to warrant intervention, then take the Matthew 18 approach and bring along others and work your way through the process.

*Better to Remain Silent and Be Thought a Fool than to Speak and Remove All Doubt.*

~Abraham Lincoln or Mark Twain...

This was another of those important sayings I heard several times growing up. There is a Biblical source for this concept as well.

*Even a fool, if he stays silent, is thought wise; he who keeps his mouth shut can pass for smart.*

**Proverbs 17:28 (CJB)**

Essentially, as my Grandma Gorgeous would say, 'zip it'.

**Instead of trying to fix other people, we should take our issues with others to Adonai.** Why? Because he can handle it. We don't risk dragging down our spouse, our children, our families, or our friends. We don't risk appearing foolish, at least not any more foolish than we already appear to G-d. We don't risk lashan hara. We don't risk violating G-d's principles.

This can sometimes feel like a cop out. I know I felt like that often when I was younger, even though now it feels like wisdom. However, the remedy for all the noise in our heads is not using our words to get the noise out. The remedy is a peace that passes all understanding. Besides, taking our issues to God is what we are instructed to do.

*Don't worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then God's shalom, passing all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua. In conclusion, brothers, focus your thoughts on what is true, noble, righteous, pure, lovable or admirable, on some virtue or on something praiseworthy. Keep doing what you have learned and received from me, what you have heard and seen me doing; then the God who gives shalom will be with you.*

**Philippians 4:6–9 (CJB)**

*Don't worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.*

How different would Korach's story have been if he had taken this approach?

How different would **our** stories be if we took these lessons from his story, and really implemented them in our lives? Not only would we have shalom, we would have Immanuel, God with us.

*Always be humble, gentle and patient, bearing with one another in love, and making every effort to preserve the unity the Spirit gives through the binding power of shalom.*

**Ephesians 4:2 (CJB)**

{song}

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**Ephesians 4:2 (CJB)**

May our observance be devoid of all jealousy and filled with humility towards G-d and the choices he makes. Our lives do depend on the words that come out of our mouths. I will close once again with the words of Yockanon HaShaliakh

**"Little children, love one another. Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient."**

{kiddush}

## Bibliography and Notes

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