

“Korach the son of Yitzhar took”

**Korach a Gilgul of Kayin Misunderstood
the Significance of His Father's Name Yitzhar**

At the beginning of this week's parsha, parshas Korach, we read about one of the most disturbing controversies in Yisrael's history. Korach, along with two-hundred and fifty esteemed princes, had the audacity to confront and question the leadership of Moshe Rabeinu (Bamidbar 16, 1):

“ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן, ויקומו לפני משה ואנשים מבני ישראל חמושים ומאתים נשיאי עדה קרואי מועד אנשי שם, ויקהלו על משה ועל אהרן ויאמרו אליהם רב לכם כי כל העדה כולם קדושים ובתוכם ה' ומדוע תתנשאו על קהל ה'.”

Korach the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, separated himself, with Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and Ohn the son of Pelet, sons of Reuven. They arose before Moshe with men of Bnei Yisrael, two hundred and fifty of them, princes of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown. They gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon and said to them, “It is much for you! For the entire assembly—all of them—are holy and Hashem is among them, so why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?”

Rashi explains the bone of contention which prompted Korach to challenge Moshe and Aharon. Here is his source as it appears in the Midrash Tanchuma (Korach 1):

“ויקח קרח, על ידי מה נחלק, על ידי אליצפן בן עוזיאל אחי אביו שנעשה נשיא על משפחתו, שנאמר (במדבר ג-ל) ונשיא בית אב למשפחות הקהתי אליצפן בן עוזיאל. אמר קרח, ארבעה אחים היו אחי אבא, שנאמר (שמות ו-יח) ובני קהת עמרם ויצהר חברון ועוזיאל, עמרם הבכור זכה [שנתמנו] אהרן ובניו לכהונה ומשה אחיו למלכות, מי ראוי ליטול את השניה, לא השני, ואני בנו של יצהר, הייתי ראוי להיות על משפחתי נשיא, והוא עשה בנו של עוזיאל, קטן של אחי אבא יהא גדול עלי, הריני חולק ומבטל כל מה שנעשה על ידו, לפיכך היתה מחלוקתו.”

What was the cause of his dispute? Elitzafan the son of Uziel, his father's brother, was appointed prince of his family . . . His father was one of four brothers, as it states (Shemos 6, 18): “The sons of Kehas were Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron

and Uziel.” Amram, the oldest, merited that Aharon and his sons were chosen to be the priests, and Moshe his brother (Aharon's) was appointed king. Who should have rightfully received the next position of honor? Shouldn't it have been the second son? And I am the son of Yitzhar; I deserved to be the prince of my family. Instead, he made the son of Uziel the prince; it is not right that the youngest of my father's brothers should have superiority over me. Hence, I dispute and annul all of his decisions and appointees. This was the basis of the controversy.

Later on in the passage (ibid. 10), Moshe says to Korach: “ויקרב—And He drew you near, אותך ואת כל אחיך בני לוי אתך ובקשתם גם כהונה” and all your brethren, the offspring of Levi, with you—yet you seek priesthood as well! If, indeed, Korach's jealousy stemmed primarily from the appointment of Elitzafan—the son of the youngest of the four brothers—as prince, why did he covet Aharon's position as Kohen Gadol? After all, Aharon was the son of Amram, the oldest of the four brothers. What was the source of this chutzpah?

**Korach Challenged Moshe on the Basis of His
Father's Name “Yitzhar”—Meaning Oil**

We find a tremendous chiddush from our blessed sages concerning this matter. They contend that Korach was prompted to dispute Moshe and Aharon due to the fact that he was the son of “Yitzhar”—which means oil. Here is the chiddush as presented in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 18, 16):

“אמר רבי לוי, למה חלק קרח על משה, אמר אני בנו של שמן, בן יצהר, שנאמר (דברים ז-יג) ותירושך ויצהרך... תירוש זה יין, ויצהרך זה השמן, ובכל משקים שתתן את השמן הוא נמצא עליון, ולא עוד אלא שכתוב (זכריה ד-יד) אלה שני בני יצהר העומדים על אדון כל הארץ, וכי יש לשמן בנים, אלא זה אהרן ודוד שנמשחו בשמן המשחה, אהרן נטל כהונה ודוד מלכות, אמר קרח, ומה אלו שנמשחו בשמן המשחה בלבד נטלו כהונה ומלכות, אני שאני בנו של שמן איני נמשח ונעשה כהן ומלך מיד נחלק על משה.”

Rabbi Levi said: Why did Korach dispute Moshe? He said, "I am the son of oil, the son of Yitzhar," as it says (Devarim 7, 13): "Your wine and your oil" . . . "Tirosh" is wine and "yitzhar" is oil. If you pour oil into any fluid, it will remain on top. Furthermore, it is written (Zechariah 4, 14): "These are the two sons of 'yitzhar,' who stand before the Lord of the entire earth." Does oil have children? Rather, this is a reference to Aharon and David, who were anointed with the anointing oil. Aharon took the priesthood and David the kingship. Korach argued: If these that were anointed with the anointing oil alone took the priesthood and kingship, I, the son of oil, shouldn't I be anointed and appointed priest and king. Thus, he immediately challenged Moshe.

At first glance, this Midrash is quite baffling. Therefore, let us refer to Rashi's bewilderment concerning Korach: **"קרח שפיקח היה—מה ראה לשטות זו—but Korach was a clever person, so what did he foresee that led him to this folly? Why would he think that he was entitled to the lofty position of Kohen Gadol solely because he was the son of "Yitzhar"—whose name means oil—and that this made his claim to the position superior to that of Aharon, whose kedushah was the result of being anointed with the anointing oil? An explanation based on the simple interpretation of the passage can be found in the Maharzu's commentary on the Midrash (ibid.):**

"פירוש, שמה שכתוב בן יצהר כאילו כתוב בן שמן, שיצהר פירוש שמן, שעל כן קרא קהת שם בנו שהוא אבי יצהר, שדומה לשמן שהוא עליון על כל אחיו בעשירות ובחכמה ובגדולה... שהראשונים שהיו צופים ברוח הקודש, והיו רואים מה שיקרה לבניהם, היו קוראים שם לבניהם כפי המעשה שיקרה להם, ואם לא צפה קהת ברוח הקודש שזרע יצהר יהיו גדולים מכל בני קהת, לא היה קורא שם אבי יצהר."

When it is written: "the son of 'Yitzhar,'" it is as if it is written: "the son of oil"; for "yitzhar" means oil. It was for this reason that Kehas, the father of Yitzhar, named his son such; for he resembled oil, in that he was superior to all of his brothers in wealth, wisdom and greatness . . . For, our early ancestors would envision via "ruach hakodesh" what would befall their children, and would name their children based on the events they were destined to experience. (Thus, Korach reasoned :) Had Kehas not foreseen via "ruach hakodesh" that the offspring of Yitzhar would be greater than all of the descendants of Kehas, he would not have named my father Yitzhar.

Along these lines, we should note what we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 7b): **"דשמה גרים"—a person's name influences future occurrences** in his life. Similarly, the Midrash explains (Yalkut Shimoni Yeshayah 449): **"אילו זכו הדורות, היה הקב"ה: קורא שם לכל אחד ואחד, ומשמו היו יודעים את טיבו ואת מעשיו, וכן אתה מוצא**

במצרים (במדבר כו-נח), אלה משפחות לוי משפחת הלבני, על שם טיט ולבנים, משפחת השמעי, ששמע הקב"ה את תפלתם, משפחת החברוני, שנתחברה להם. Had the generations of mankind been meritorious, HKB"H would have named each and every individual; from his name, we would have known his qualities and his deeds. This, indeed, is what we witnessed in Mitzrayim (Bamidbar 26, 58): "These are the families of Levi, the family of Livni"—named after clay and bricks ("leveinim"); "the family of Shimi"—because HKB"H heard ("shama") their prayers; "the family of Chevroni"—because the Shechinah attached herself (from the word "chibur") to them.

This then is the meaning of the Midrash. When Korach saw that his grandfather Kehas, the elite of the offspring of Levi—evidenced by the fact that HKB"H chose his offspring to transport the Aron—chose to name his second son Yitzhar—meaning oil—he concluded that Kehas was alluding to him personally. As the son of Yitzhar, he was worthy and deserved to be the Kohen Gadol, as if he was anointed with the anointing oil.

Notwithstanding, this still does not satisfy us completely. We must still endeavor to understand how the clever Korach made such a tragic error—coveting the position of Kohen Gadol merely because his father's name was Yitzhar. Furthermore, we should explain why HKB"H subjected Korach to such a difficult test. Why was Moshe instructed to appoint Elitzafan the son of Uziel, the youngest of Kehas's sons, as prince of the family, skipping over Korach the son of Yitzhar, the second of Kehas's sons, in the process?

"If Hashem will create a creation, and the earth opens its mouth"

Let us begin our journey of enlightenment by examining Moshe Rabeinu's choice of punishments for Korach and his assembly. He called upon the Almighty to alter the laws of nature and to have the earth miraculously open its mouth and swallow the entire rabble alive into the depths of the earth. Here is the Torah's description of this phenomenal event (ibid. 28):

"ויאמר משה בזאת תדעון כי ה' שלחני לעשות את כל המעשים האלה כי לא מלבי, אם כמות כל האדם ימותון אלה ופקודת כל האדם יפקד עליהם לא ה' שלחני, ואם בריאה יבא ה' ופצתה האדמה את פיה ובלעה אותם ואת כל אשר להם וירדו חיים שאולה, וידעתם כי ניאצו האנשים האלה את ה'."

Moshe said, "Through this shall you know that Hashem has sent me to perform all these acts, for it was not from my heart. If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has

sent me. But if Hashem will create a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the pit, then you shall know that these men have provoked Hashem!”

HKB”H complied with Moshe’s demand, in the sense of (Iyov 22, 28): “ותגזר אומר ויקם לך”—when you speak a decree, it will be fulfilled for you. Based on this passuk, the sages assert (Sotah 12a) that HKB”H fulfills the decree issued by a tzaddik. Hence, the earth opened its mouth, as the passuk describes (ibid. 31):

“ויהי ככלותו לדבר את כל הדברים האלה ותבקע האדמה אשר תחתיהם, ותפתח הארץ את פיה ותבלע אותם ואת בתיהם ואת כל האדם אשר לקרח ואת כל הרכוש, וירדו הם וכל אשר להם חיים שאולה ותכס עליהם הארץ ויאבדו מתוך הקהל, וכל ישראל אשר סביבותיהם נסו לקולם כי אמרו פן תבלענו הארץ.”

When he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households and all the people who were with Korach, and all the possessions. They and all that was theirs descended alive to the pit; the earth covered them over and they were lost from among the congregation. All Yisrael that was around them at their sound, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us!” Rashi comments: “ורבותינו פירשו: “(סנהדרין קי.) אם בריאה פה לארץ מששת ימי בראשית מוטב, ואם לאו יברא ה” —our Rabbis interpreted the passuk as follows: “If” the mouth of the earth is “a creation” from the six days of creation, then fine; but if not, “may Hashem create.”

The Alshich hakadosh is greatly surprised by this interpretation. After all, we have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 5, 6) that the “פה” —the mouth of the earth—was one of the ten things created during the six days of creation on erev Shabbas at twilight. Now, we are believers, the descendants of believers. We sincerely believe that Moshe received both Torah she’b’chtav and Torah she’b’al peh at Sinai. This is stated explicitly in the Mishnah (ibid. 1, 1): “משה קיבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים למשה—thus, the Torah was transmitted from generation to generation. So, how could Moshe have had doubts concerning something stated explicitly in a Mishnah, which he himself transmitted—namely that the mouth of the earth was created during the six days of creation at twilight?

Moshe Rabeinu Decreed that the Earth Should Open Its Mouth with Speech

A wonderful solution to this problem can be found in the commentary of the great luminary, the Tosfos Yom Tov, on the

Mishnah (ibid. 5, 6). He too senses the difficulty pointed out by the Alshich hakadosh. He notes, however, a subtle change in the language of the pesukim. When Moshe issues the decree, he uses the term “פציה”: “ופצתה האדמה את פיה”. Afterwards, when the ground opens up and swallows the assembly of Korach, the passuk employs the term “פתיחה”: “ותפתח הארץ את פיה”.

Based on this difference of language, the Tosfos Yom Tov proposes a tremendous chiddush. During the six days of creation, HKB”H created the mouth of the earth so that it would only open up and swallow Korach and his assembly. Moshe Rabeinu, however, added another condition to his decree. He decreed that HKB”H should create a new entity: “קול דברים, להשמיע קול שפתים, להגיד כל הנעשה בתוכה עד שאול תחתית המדרגות”—an entity that could emit a voice, articulate words and chronicle everything taking place within it, down to its lowest depths.

This then is the interpretation of the passuk: “ותפתח הארץ את פיה”—the earth opened up the very mouth created by HKB”H during the six days of creation to swallow Korach and his assembly; “and swallowed them and their households and all the people who were with Korach, and all the possessions.” Then the Torah adds the following narrative: “וכל ישראל אשר סביבותיהם נסו לקולם”—all of Yisrael surrounding them fled from the frightening voices emerging from the earth, as Moshe had decreed: “ופצתה האדמה את פיה”. The Tosfos Yom Tov concludes his explanation with the following pronouncement: “וכל זה נראה לי, ובעיני הוא כמו כפתור”—this all appears correct to me; in my opinion, it explains every detail perfectly.

Based on his explanation, we can interpret Moshe’s statement: “ואם בריאה יברא ה’ ופצתה האדמה את פיה”—Moshe was in doubt as to whether or not HKB”H had created a mouth for the earth. He recalled the Mishnah stating explicitly that the mouth of the earth was created during the six days of creation; however, he was uncertain whether it was created to merely swallow Korach and his assembly or if it was created to also speak. Therefore, he proclaimed that even if it was not created to speak, he was now decreeing: “יברא ה’ ופצתה האדמה את פיה”—that it open its mouth to speak loudly and noisily.

Upon review of the events, we find that the punishment meted out to Korach and his assembly focused primarily on the earth opening its mouth to speak, instigated by Moshe’s decree: “ופצתה האדמה את פיה”. It was ordered to report loudly everything that happened to Korach and his assembly within the bowels of the earth. This coincides with the reliable testimony of Rabbah bar Chana found in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 110a). He reported

hearing Korach and his assembly accepting their imposed sentence and fate from the depths of the earth in Gehinnom with the pronouncement: “משה ותורתו אמת”—**Moshe and his Torah are “emes.”** Yet, we should endeavor to explain why from Moshe’s vantage point, it did not suffice for the earth to merely swallow Korach and his assembly. He felt compelled to add an additional decree to be fulfilled by HKB”H--the decree of a tzaddik that HKB”H create a new entity—that the mouth of the earth sound its voice and report everything that transpired to this assembly after being swallowed.

The Covert Service of the Kohanim Resembles Oil while the Overt Service of the Leviim Resembles Wine

I was struck by a wonderful idea which I would like to present on the royal table. Let us achieve a better understanding of the Midrash cited above. It stated that Korach wanted to be the Kohen Gadol, because he was “בן יצהר”—**“the son of Yitzhar”**—which means “the son of oil.” The Zohar hakadosh Shemini 39a) teaches us a fascinating principle explaining why HKB”H cautioned Aharon HaKohen (Vayikra 10, 9): “וְיִין וְשֵׁכָר אַל תִּשֶׁת אֹתָהּ וּבְנֶיךָ אִתָּךְ—**do not drink wine or any intoxicating beverage, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Ohel Moed.**

Our holy sources explain that there are two paths regarding the service of Hashem. Path #1: Serve Hashem inconspicuously. Path #2: Serve Hashem publicly for all to see. Hence, we recite the formula every morning in Shacharit: “לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אָדָם יִירָא שָׁמַיִם—**a person should always fear Heaven privately as well as openly.** In Likutei Torah (Nitzavim), the Arizal applies this concept to interpret the passuk (Devarim 29, 28): “הַנְּסֻתוֹת—**the hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed things are for us and for our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah.** Here are his hallowed words: ‘לה’—**the hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d**’ refers to “yirah” and “ahavah”—fear and love—which are located in the heart: whereas “**the revealed things are for us and our children**” refers to Torah and mitzvot, which are visible to everyone.

The Zohar hakadosh explains that these two approaches are represented by wine and oil. Wine symbolizes service of Hashem openly and audibly. For, we are all familiar with the famous aphorism (Eiruvim 65a): “וְכַנֵּס יֵין יֵצֵא סוֹד—**when wine enters, secrets escape.** This teaches us that wine counteracts the

element of secrecy concealed in a person’s heart and brings things into the open. In a similar vein, we have learned (Berachos 35a): “אֵין אוֹמְרִים שִׁירָה אֲלָא עַל הַיֵּין—**song is only uttered in association with wine.** We see that wine causes a person to open his mouth and sing to Hashem. In contrast, oil symbolizes secrecy and quiet. The commentaries explain that when oil is spilled from one vessel to another, it does not make any noise. Thus, it represents service in the heart which is performed silently and with internal focus.

Accordingly, the Zohar hakadosh explains that the kohen, who performs the sacrificial service in the Beit HaMikdash, resembles oil. While the actual sacrificing of the korbanot is a physical act, nevertheless the essential, sacred avodah is internal and silent—focusing on the deeper, secret significance of the act and having proper intent for the sake of Hashem. This is the meaning of the phrase (Devarim 11, 13): “וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶּם—**and to serve Him with all of your heart**—service that emanates from the inner aspects of the heart, which is inconspicuous and silent like oil. For this reason, Aharon the Kohen Gadol, the head and foremost of all the kohanim, was anointed with the “shemen hamishchah”—the anointing oil—as it is written (Vayikra 8, 12): “וַיִּצְוֶק מִשְׁמֵן הַמִּשְׁחָה—**he poured from the anointing oil upon Aharon’s head, and he anointed him to sanctify him.** Concerning Aharon, it states (Tehillim 133, 2): “כִּשְׁמֵן הַטּוֹב הַיּוֹרֵד עַל—**like the precious oil upon the head running down upon the beard, the beard of Aharon.**

In contrast, the avodah of the leviim involved singing songs out loud to accompany the korbanot. Their service was public and apparent to all, similar to wine—which is consumed in association with outward song, not silent and inconspicuous like oil. Hence, HKB”H cautioned Aharon: “**Do not drink wine or any intoxicating beverage, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Ohel Moed**—because the avodah of the kohanim is performed in secrecy, within the internal confines of the heart, akin to oil and not to wine.

Based on this passage from the Zohar hakadosh, the Imrei Noam (Acharei 4) provides us with a wonderful insight concerning Rashi’s comment regarding the passuk (Vayikra 10, 3): “וַיִּדּוּם אַהֲרֹן, קִיבֵל שְׂכָר עַל שְׁתִּיקָתוֹ, וּמָה שְׂכָר קִיבֵל שְׁנֵתִיחֵד עִמּוֹ הַדִּיבּוּר, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לֹא לִבְדּוֹ קִיבֵל שְׂכָר עַל שְׁתִּיקָתוֹ, וּמָה שְׂכָר קִיבֵל שְׁנֵתִיחֵד עִמּוֹ הַדִּיבּוּר, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לֹא לִבְדּוֹ—**and Aharon fell silent**”: **He was rewarded for his silence. What reward did he receive? That the speech of G-d was directed to him alone, that to him alone was said the passage of the Torah that deals with those intoxicated with wine.** Let us try to understand; after all, we have a fundamental principle that (Megillah 12b): “בְּמִדָּה שֶׁאֵדָם מוֹדֵד בָּהּ מוֹדֵדִין לוֹ— in

the manner a person deals with others, so will Hashem deal with him. That being the case, how does this reward demonstrate the notion of “midah k’neged midah”—measure for measure?

Yet, based on what we have just discussed, an explanation is apparent. When Aharon stood silent and accepted HKB”H’s decree—the death of his two sons—without protest, he demonstrated that he was worthy to be the Kohen Gadol. As explained, the avodah of the Kohen Gadol is inconspicuous like oil. Therefore, “midah k’neged midah,” HKB”H gave him the following passage personally: **“Do not drink wine or any intoxicating beverage, you and your sons with you.”** The reason he was given this passage in particular is because wine symbolizes the open, public service of Hashem, consistent with the notion of: “נכנס יין יצא סוד”. That type of service does not befit the kohanim; it only befits the leviim, who utter songs to accompany the korbanot. This concludes his wonderful insight.

We can now shed some light on the statement in the Midrash. Korach wanted to be the Kohen Gadol, because he was “בן יצהר”, the son of oil. It did not make sense to him why his grandfather would name his second son Yitzhar, meaning oil. For, as we have learned, the avodah of the leviim was public and visible to all resembling wine. Therefore, they utter songs to accompany the korbanot. So, what possessed Kehas to name his son Yitzhar, a name more befitting a kohen, whose avodah is performed silently, akin to oil. Surely he must have foreseen via “ruach hakodesh” that Korach the son of Yitzhar would be worthy to serve as Kohen Gadol. Therefore, he challenged Moshe and Aharon and wanted to be the Kohen Gadol.

Korach a Gilgul of Kayin Was Jealous Once Again of Moshe a Gilgul of Hevel

Continuing onward along this exalted path, let us clarify and attempt to justify the actions of Kehas—the righteous leader of the elite of the Levite clans. As we have seen, Korach tragically misunderstood the naming of his father Yitzhar. He interpreted his father’s name as a sign that he was meant to be the Kohen Gadol. Due to his grievous error, he and those who joined him were swallowed alive by the earth. Hence, it should be our mission to explain the logic behind Kehas’s naming of his second son Yitzhar—a name meaning oil and fitting for a kohen. After all, the service of the leviim involves singing out loud in accompaniment of the sacrificial service, an avodah more related to wine than to oil.

It appears that we can explain Kehas’s deeper intent based on an idea presented at length by the kabbalists, led by our teacher, the Arizal, in Shaar HaPesukim and Shaar HaLikutim on our parsha. They explain that Moshe Rabeinu was a gilgul—a reincarnation—of Hevel; whereas Korach was a gilgul of Kayin, who murdered Hevel out of jealousy. So, just as Kayin was envious of Hevel during their first gilgul; so, too, was Korach, Kayin’s gilgul, envious of Moshe, Hevel’s gilgul.

This explains why Moshe—Hevel’s gilgul—decreed that Korach—Kayin’s gilgul—be punished in such dramatic fashion. He ordered the earth to open its mouth and swallow him just as the earth had previously swallowed Hevel’s blood; thus, performing a tikun. Recall that HKB”H said to Kayin (Bereishis 4, 10): **קול “דמי אחיך צועקים אלי מן האדמה—the sound of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the earth!** Therefore, Korach, Kayin’s gilgul, was punished correspondingly (Bamidbar 16, 33): **וירדו הם “וכל אשר להם חיים שאולה—they and all that was theirs descended alive into the depths of the earth.**

The Kehillat Yaakov presents this explanation with a valuable addition. With regards to Kayin, we find that the earth was cursed on his account, as it is written (Bereishis 4, 11): **“ועתה ארור אתה מן “האדמה אשר פצתה את פיה לקחת את דמי אחיך מידך—therefore, you are cursed more than the earth, which opened wide its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hands.** Therefore, when he reincarnated into Korach, Hevel’s gilgul—Moshe—came and issued the following decree: **“ופצתה האדמה את פיה.”** He ordered the earth to open its mouth to swallow Korach, Kayin’s gilgul; thus, the earth received its revenge from Kayin, who had caused it to be cursed.

Upon careful scrutiny, we discover a long thread of jealousy extending from Kayin’s dispute with Hevel—ultimately leading to the murder of the latter—to the dispute between Korach (Kayin’s gilgul) and Moshe (Hevel’s gilgul). Kayin killed Hevel because he was jealous of the fact that HKB”H accepted his brother’s offering, as it is written (ibid. 4): **“וישע ה’ אל הבל ואל מנחתו, ואל קין ואל מנחתו לא —שעה, ויחר לקין מאד ויפלו בניו—and Hashem turned to Hevel and his offering, but to Kayin and his offering, He did not turn. This angered Kayin exceedingly, and his countenance fell.** As a consequence (ibid. 8): **“ויאמר קין אל הבל אחיו ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם קין —Kayin spoke with Hevel, his brother; and it so happened when they were in the field, that Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him.** Rashi explains: **“ויאמר קין, נכנס עמו בדברי ריב ומצה להתעולל עליו להרגו”—**Kayin initiated a quarrel with his brother, in order to find a pretext to kill him.

Generations later, Korach—Kayin’s gilgul—appears and continues in his predecessor’s evil ways. Kayin was envious of Hevel’s lofty status—evidenced by the fact that HKB”H accepted Hevel’s offering; therefore, he created an argument with his brother, concocting a justification for killing him. In similar fashion, Korach was envious of Moshe’s lofty status—Hevel’s gilgul—so he invented a reason to challenge Moshe and Aharon’s leadership: **“רַב לָכֶם כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֹּלֵם קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה’ וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל הָעָם”**—**“It is much for you! For the entire assembly—all of them—are holy and Hashem is among them, so why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?”**

Kayin’s Tikun

We can now better appreciate the greatness of Hashem’s ways and the depth of His calculations. He subjected Korach to a difficult and trying situation by instructing Moshe to appoint Elitzafan the son of Uziel, the youngest of Kehas’s four sons, as prince of the family. In contrast, Korach the son of Yitzhar, Kehas’s second son, was not awarded any special designation or appointment—other than being a levi. Seeing as he was a gilgul of Kayin—who became jealous of Hevel, and opened his mouth to initiate a quarrel and find a pretext to kill him—HKB”H chose to test him. HKB”H placed him in a situation once again, where he would become jealous of Moshe, Hevel’s gilgul; so that he would have the opportunity to overcome the yetzer of jealousy and accept HKB”H’s decree lovingly.

Had Korach accepted HKB”H’s verdict—delivered by His loyal servant Moshe—lovingly and quietly; and had he not become envious of Aharon’s status as Kohen Gadol and Elitzafan’s status as prince; he would have successfully rectified the damage he had wrought during his incarnation as Kayin. As we know, during that gilgul, his jealousy got the better of him, and he opened his mouth seeking a pretext to kill his brother. Had he passed HKB”H’s test, he would have fulfilled the words of the Gemara (Shabbas 88b): **“הַנֶּעֱלִבִין וְאִינוּ עוֹלְבִין, שׁוֹמְעִין חֲרַפְתָּם וְאִינוּ מְשִׁיבִין, עוֹשִׂין מֵאֲהָבָה וְשׁוֹמְחִין בִּיסּוּרֵין, עֲלֵיהֶן הַכְּתוּב אֹמֵר (שׁוֹפְטִים הֵם—לֹא) וְאֹהֲבֵיו כִּצְאֵת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כְּגֹבֹרֹתָ”**—**those who suffer insult but do not insult in return, who hear their disgrace but do not reply, who perform G-d’s will out of love and are happy even in suffering, regarding them the passuk states: “But they who love Him shall be as the sun going forth in its might.”**

At last, we have succeeded in our quest. We have achieved a better understanding of Kehas the son of Levi’s profound intent. He foresaw by means of “ruach hakodesh” that HKB”H was destined to subject his grandson Korach—a gilgul of Kayin—to a difficult test. His extreme jealousy would be aroused once again—this time directed toward Moshe Rabeinu, the gilgul of his brother Hevel. Therefore, Kehas devised a way to establish the cure prior to the ailment by naming his second son, Korach’s father, Yitzhar—meaning oil. He intended to convey to Korach that his tikun hinged on his remembering that he was the son of Yitzhar, the son of oil, whose outstanding characteristic is silence. He wanted Korach to realize and understand that it was vital for him to remain silent and accept with love everything that Moshe—a gilgul of his brother Hevel—would do at HKB”H’s behest.

Korach, however, was not equal to the test. The yetzer of jealousy caused him to misconstrue his grandfather Kehas’s intention. Kehas named his son Yitzhar in order to hint to Korach that he should keep his mouth shut and remain silent. Instead, Korach interpreted his intent as suggesting that he was meant to be the Kohen Gadol, whose avodah was symbolized by oil. Consequently, as he did in the previous gilgul, he audaciously opened his mouth and acted with “chutzpah” toward Moshe Rabeinu, the gilgul of his brother Hevel. Not only did he not rectify the damage he wrought in the previous gilgul, but he added insult to injury.

At this point, we have achieved a better understanding of Moshe Rabeinu’s motive for decreeing: **“וְאִם בְּרִיאָה יִכְרָא ה’ וּפְצֵתָהּ הָאֲדָמָה אֶת פִּיהָ”**. As we learned from the Tosfos Yom Tov, Moshe prayed to Hashem that it would not be enough for the earth to open its mouth and merely swallow Korach and his assembly; rather, it must also open its mouth and chronicle everything that Korach would experience and endure within the bowels of the earth.

As we have learned, Korach’s punishment truly exemplifies the concept of “midah k’neged midah.” He dared to open his mouth and challenge Moshe, Hashem’s loyal servant; he failed to remain silent when he should have adopted the characteristic of oil. Therefore, the earth, which is silent by nature, opened her mouth and spoke out loudly to all of Yisrael, reporting back all that happened to Korach within its depths. For this same reason, after Korach and his assembly were swallowed up, they, too, opened their mouths, crying out to this very day from the depths of the earth: **“מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אִמֵּת”**—**Moshe and his Torah are “emes.”** In this manner, they rectify and make amends for having opened their mouths to challenge Moshe Rabeinu.

Donated by Family Madeb for the Refuah Shelimah of Lea bat Virgini

To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com