



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Korach / פרשת קורח

Divisiveness, Peace and Yerushalayim

In the aftermath of the heavenly fire burning the 250 men of Korach's rebellion, God instructs that the remaining pans should be made into a cover for the altar. The purpose is that it should serve:¹

as a reminder for the children of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the seed of Aharon, shall approach to burn incense before the Lord, so as not to be like Korach and his company, as the Lord spoke regarding him through the hand of Moshe.

While the simple meaning of the verse is that God does not want people to act like Korach in his insurrection against the divinely ordained hierarchy of leadership, the Talmud offers a more expansive meaning:²

Rav says: Anyone who perpetuates a dispute violates a prohibition, as it is stated: "And he will not be like Korah and his company."

A straight read of the passage indicates that anyone who perpetuates a conflict violates a biblical negative commandment.

While the rishonim debate if Rav meant that on a technical level this verse should be counted on the list of the official 613 commandments or it is more of an overarching principle, one thing is clear.³ This verse, and the story of Korach more generally, is one of the major sources in the Torah for God's love of peace and disdain for divisiveness. In this sense, the context of this verse raises a question. There are many conflicts and fights in the Torah. Why would the Torah choose this particular context to express the flagship verses about God's disgust for unnecessary fights?

¹ Bamidbar 17:5. Translation is adapted from Chabad.org.

² Sanhedrin 110a. Translation is adapted from Sefaria.org.

³ See, for example, Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot, shorsh 8 and Semak mitzvah 132.



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Perhaps one avenue of response is that Korach's fight was fundamentally about control of the Mishkan and the sanctified service. He wanted to be the High Priest. His company was tested by each bringing an incense offering in the Mishkan.

Perhaps the Torah is teaching us that areas of life and the world that revolve around sanctity and religion are often the most contentious. We care about things that are holy and are passionate about the service of God. Accordingly, many fights, from small issues in synagogues to full blown wars, are ostensibly or honestly fought over religious issues. Therefore, it is particularly in this context that the Torah warns us of the importance of peace. The more sanctified the space or the event, the more peace we need.

This leads us to the name of our holiest city – Yerushalayim. Many fights, involving both non-Jews and Jews, have been fought in and about Yerushalayim. Unfortunately, as the holiest spot on earth, Yerushalayim has seen its share of divisiveness and full-blown war. However, we must always remember that embedded in Yerushalayim is the word "Shalom". The sanctity of the space requires us to overcome this tendency towards fighting and instead be extra careful about interpersonal issues within the walls of the city. It is only through combining peace and holiness that we will be able to fully live out the name of our city and actualize its full potential.