

Korach challenges Moshe and Aharon.

וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב-לָכֶם כִּי כָל-הָעֵדָה כִּלְמִם קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמִדְּוַע תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל-קְהַל ה':

“And they gathered upon Moshe and upon Aharon, and they said to them, ‘it is too much for you, because this entire assembly is holy, and are amongst Hashem. And why then did you lift yourself above this Congregation of Hashem?’ (Bamidbar 16:3).

What is the challenge here? If all are among Hashem, didn’t Korach believe that everyone does Hashem’s work in their own way? Korach seems to challenge Moshe and Aharon as being leaders when Hashem did not designate them; but he himself was not designated. On one hand the challengers are saying everyone is equally holy, but then they are also saying that some are more holy than others – just not Moshe and Aharon. It can be read that they are trying to drag Moshe and Aharon down, so everyone is equal and no one is elevated. However, a congregation needs leaders and the nation needs priests. How is this a proper challenge? Or are they just being petty?

Gemara Sanhedrin 109b says *On did not repent on his own. His wife convinced him by saying “the entire congregation is holy. Do not get into fights about who is more holy.” She gave him wine to drink and when the gathering of firepans occurred, he was asleep in his tent.*

Gemara Sotah 13b says *Moshe said to Korach “it is enough for you.” (Bamidbar 16:7). When Moshe davened to Hashem to allow him to enter the Land, Hashem responds with “it is enough for you.” (Devorim 3:26).*

This Gemara seems to indicate that Moshe may have done something wrong by saying “it is enough for you.” However, it appears from our pasuk that Korach said it first, and Moshe was answering him in kind.

Midrash Tanchuma, Korach 4, says, *the gathering said they are all holy because they heard it from Hashem on Har Sinai when Hashem said to all of them, “I am Hashem, your Lord.” (Shemos 20:2).*

Rashi says, *you take too much upon yourself, means it is more than allotted. They challenged Moshe because it was enough that he became leader, he did not have to make his brother kohen gadol.*

Ibin Ezra says, *similarly, Moshe grabbed too much, Aharon was made kohen gadol and Moshe made himself the teacher above him. The entire nation became holy when they stood by Har Sinai. "From among them" refers to when Levi was chosen to do service in the Mishkan.*

Gur Aryeh says, *the challenge was against Moshe but it was because of Aharon. Every nation needs a leader but the high priest did not have to be his brother.*

Sforno says, *the challengers gathered at a time of day when there was a large crowd before Moshe so that their challenge will have the maximum publicity and effect. The challengers said, everyone one of the people are holy, their entire body. Moshe elevated himself and Aharon above all, because now the firstborn sons were no longer chosen for service.*

Chizkuni and Rabbeinu Bachya say, *when Korach was saying the entire congregation was holy, he was referring to the firstborn sons.*

To understand the challenge, the desired results must be understood. This was not a mere "muttering." This was a challenge that was meant to create a change. The change could not be that the holy status of Mishkan service was taken away from the firstborn son. First, the firstborn sons were never designated for Mishkan service, specifically. They were made holy because of the final *mako* in Mitzrayim, but the Leviim were made holy for Mishkan service as payment for the firstborn sons' ability to be redeemed (and not live ascetic lives). (See Maamarei Mordechai, Parshas Beha'aloscha 5782). Second, even if they were designated for Mishkan serviced instead of the kohanim – this is more readily apparent as it says, "You shall be unto me a Kingdom of Priests." (Shemos 19:6). It was originally the eldest son of each family that would represent the family in the Mishkan – why was Korach involved? He was a Levi and he was now designated for service. We can answer, Korach was a bechor – firstborn son. It was not because he was a Levi that he challenged, but because he was a firstborn son. Why then was Aviram involved, when he was not firstborn?

If the challenge was that Moshe designated himself as king and Aharon as High Priest, did they now want elections? Certainly, no one was reporting that Hashem spoke to them and said a new king and kohen gadol should be appointed. This challenge does not make sense. If they want Moshe to choose a different kohen gadol, because the entire nation is worthy as being holy, who did they suggest? Why Korach or any of them over anyone else? None proved they were more worthy.

The Midrash suggests that the challenge was because Korach's family was skipped over. (Tanchuma, Korach 3). Kehas's family were "Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron, and Uziel." (Shemos 6:18). The son of Uziel was made prince of the Kahas family. (Bamidbar 3:30). Korach—from second born Yitzhar—felt slighted. He dragged in members of Shevat Reuven because Reuven was the oldest, and the king should come from him. (Midrash Tanchuma, Korach 3). However, this does not explain the remaining two-hundred and fifty men. Were they firstborn sons? Were they also from families that were slighted? And even if a king should be from Reuven, what does this have to do with being holy? What does the leader of the House of Kahas have to do with being holy? The challenge was brought to Moshe and Aharon, not to Eltzaphon ben Uziel. Also, why, when giving Korach's lineage, would the pasuk add: "son of Levi" (Bamidbar 16:1) if the main purpose was that he was son of Yitzhar? Finally, the two hundred and fifty were already chieftains (Ibid 16:2) and important people. Additionally, the challenge to the rights to the kahuna and Mishkan service comes later. (Ibid 17:17). What was their criticism?

We read the pasuk like this. Korach, Dasan, Aviram, On, gathered against Moshe and Aharon and then were joined by two hundred and fifty chieftains. "They gathered upon Moshe and upon Aharon." That was their challenge, they gathered upon Moshe and Aharon. Then, Moshe and Aharon respond to this gathering: "It is enough for you because this entire assembly are all holy people." It was not the challengers but Moshe and Aharon that speak now. Moshe is telling Korach, you are already a Levi. Dasan and Aviram, you already have Dasan representing your family. Two hundred and fifty chieftains, are already "men of repute." (Ibid). Dasan and Aviram, whatever your dispute

it, are you still “among Hashem. “And why do you raise yourself above Hashem’s congregation?”

“It is enough for you” is Moshe’s term. He uses it again when he commands Korach on the test. (Ibid 16:7). Hashem tells it to Moshe when the nation carries a couple of times. (Devorim 1:6 and 2:3), and when Hashem tells Moshe that he will be buried in the desert. (Ibid 3:19). Moshe tells Korach and those gathered that they already have enough. They should not grab more. “And why did you raise yourselves over the Congregation of Hashem” to now try to be the leaders? Why do you count yourselves greater than the rest? (See Bamidbar 4:22).

A challenge to leadership needs further explanation. Moshe already earned his place. He gave the signs in Mitzrayim and he performed miracles there. He delivered the enslaved to freedom and taught them the Word of Hashem. Aharon, too, earned his place. He went before Pharaoh, he performed miracles, and he was a prophet in Mitzrayim. (See Shemos 4:27). Moshe and Aharon asked the gathered “why.” This word means *on what account*. *What is your calculation that you can challenge us out of our leadership roles?*

Since it was Moshe and Aharon that responded, what was the challenge that they responded to? To understand the challenge, first understand the timing of this rebellion. There was tremendous unity when the leaders of each tribe brought their inaugural korban. (Ibid 7:2). Then Aharon was given the special task of lighting the Menorah (Ibid 8:2) and the rest of Levi was given service in the Mishkan. (Ibid 8:6). Eldad and Meidad prophesized in the camp. (Ibid 11:26). Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe. (Ibid 12:1). And then, the entire nation was told they would die out in the desert. (Ibid 14:35). Taken in this context there is a terrible chain of events. After a showing of great unity and believing in the power of Moshe and Aharon, others were able to give prophecy in the camp, Moshe was found to be less than godly when attacked by his own sister, and the entire nation was now told they would die in the desert. Also, immediately after each tribe was made special through their unified offerings, Aharon was elevated; he was given the special task of lighting the Menorah. These events lessened Moshe and Aharon

in their eyes. Now that Miriam showed Moshe was not invulnerable – able to be subject to attack – there was place for this challenge.

There is one more event to consider. “And Aaron's sons, Nadab and Avihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before Hashem foreign fire, which He had not commanded them.” (Vayikra 10:1). On the very day of the Mishkan’s inauguration, Aharon's own sons died while bringing a firepan offering. (Ibid 10:2). Moshe then spurned Korach. “And Moshe summoned Mishael and Eltzaphan, the sons of Aharon's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Draw near; carry your kinsmen from within the Mishkan, to the outside of the camp.” (Ibid 10:4). Koarcha’s father, Yitzhar was skipped over. Korach’s younger cousins were given this task.

Korach “took himself” with Dasan, Aviram, and On out of the *klall*. They removed themselves from the general public and they “stood in front of Moshe.” Their challenge was that Moshe and Aharon are no longer fit to lead. Moshe was knocked down a peg by his own sister and his kohen gadol brother. Moshe randomly assigns tasks to younger brothers before older brothers, as in the case of removing the holy sons from the Mishkan. Others are able to give prophecy in the camp. And now, Moshe and Aharon tell the entire nation they will die. It is time for new leadership. It is Moshe and Aharon’s fault that the entire nation was about to die. It was their failing as leaders.

Korach and his gathers *took* themselves. “Take” in the Torah is often a financial transaction. Korach bought himself leadership. Through money and favors, Korach bought himself a following. These men of esteem, including three prominent men from the eldest tribe, Reuven, came to stand before Moshe. Korach, Dasan, Aviram, and On stood before Moshe and were then joined by these men of repute. That gave their challenge of power credence.

Korach’s lineage being from Levi is almost incidental. It is just as incidental that Dasan, Aviram, and On were from Reuven. Korach’s real dispute is by being the son of Yithar. This challenge was about leadership and did not consider a Levi having any more rights to lead than any other shevat. Eliav was the prince of Shevat Reuven, yet, it is his sons that challenge Moshe, not he himself. On is from Peles who is otherwise not

mentioned, previously. The Torah, to the contrary, is teaching these men had no rights and yet they still challenged Moshe and Aharon, and were joined by two hundred and fifty anonymous chieftains.

Moshe and Aharon respond: *the entire nation is holy; it is a Congregation of Hashem. Further, you are already men of standing and repute. You take too much upon yourselves.* This is when Moshe fell on his face (or his face fell). (Ibid 16:4). Moshe responded to them with the very challenge they responded to him. He told them to take firepans. (Ibid 16:6). These rebels saw how Nadav and Avihu offered unauthorized firepans and they died. Moshe challenges his challengers: If you are so certain you should be leaders, then bring firepans. Let Hashem decide. This is treason and now you will decide your own fate. You saw how Aharon's sons died from an unauthorized firepan offering. You will do that same and see if you do not get the same result.

BONUS SHTIKEL

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן־יִצְחָר בֶּן־קֵהָשׁ אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי לֵוִי וְדָסָן וְאַבִּירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיָּאָב וְאֹן בֶּן־פְּלִז וְאֵלֶּם בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן: "And Korach the son of Yitzhar the son of Kehas a descendant of Levi, took, along with Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav, and On son of Peles, descendants of Reuven." (Bamidbar 16:1). Who was Dasan?

Dasan is not mentioned in the Torah previous to this. He is the son of Eliav. Eliav is mentioned. Eliav is the *nasi* prince—chief family elder—of shevat Reuven. (Ibid 1:9). He represented the entire Reuven in giving the korban at the Mishkan's inauguration. (Ibid 7:29). His Korban was given third and it matched the previous two exactly. Eliav was a man of *achdus*, unity. He was also not one of the spies. The spy from Reuven was Shammua son of Zachur. (Ibid 13:4). Therefore, it is likely that unlike the spies that died out immediately after their report, Eliav was still alive. Even though Eliav was righteous, he had two treasonous sons, Dasan and Aviram.

Dasan and Aviram joined Korach to challenge Moshe. From the pasuk it appears that Korach persuaded them. They must have had a gripe and grumblings as they are singled out as joining Korach (along with On, who remains a mystery). They stood in front of their father and challenged leadership. This adds another layer to their treason and it diminishes their position. If they had an honest challenge, then it would be their father's challenge—or at least on behalf of their father. It was on their own behalf, and they were bought by Korach. Their flaw was joining up in someone else's fight of which they had little to gain—even if it was for a compensation.

Dasan is not mentioned in the Torah previously, so where did he come from? The Midrash makes Dasan famous when it mentions him as the villain in the Torah. And Moshe "went out on the second day, and behold, two Hebrew men were quarreling, and he said to the wicked one, "Why are you going to strike your friend?" (Shemos 2:13). The Midrash says this is Dasan. (Shemos Rabbah 1:29). It says that the Mitzri that Moshe killed was a man that engaged in adultery with Dasan's wife. (Ibid). What is further confounding is that the Midrash says Dasan was actually fighting with and striking Aviram, his brother. (Ibid 1:30). And yet, later we see that Dasan and Aviram joined

together to spread the manna and joined the Korach rebellion together. Why would Dasan strike his own brother? This is questionable, especially if a Mitzri is the one that had the affair. What was Dasan's fight with Avriam?

The Midrash says, besides for Dasan was fighting with Aviram, Dasan and Aviram rebelled at the Yam Suf (Shemos 14:11), left over the manna until morning (Ibid 16:20) and searched for it on Shabbos (Ibid 16:27), they demanded to return to Mitzrayim (Bamidbar 14:4), and joined the Korach rebellion. (Shemos Rabbah 1:30).

If Dasan and Avriam were so involved in these rebellions and disputes, why did they deserve to leave Mitzrayim by the geula and why did the Torah not mention them by name? The Midrash also says, Dasan and Aviram intended to kill each other. (Shemos Rabbah 1:31). How does this fit with their joining together later on? Where are the hints that these incidents are Dasan and Aviram?

By the Yam Suf the rebellion was: "They said to Moshe, 'Is it because there are no graves in Mitzrayim that you have taken us to die in the desert? What is this that you have done to us to take us out of Mitzrayim? Isn't this the thing about which we spoke to you in Mitzrayim, saying, *Leave us alone, and we will serve the Egyptians, because we would rather serve the Mitzriim than die in the desert.*'" (Shemos 14:11-12). The complaint was their not wanting to leave Mitzrayim and instead continue to be enslaved, rather than go into the unknown. If so, then they should never had left Mitzrayim. Clearly even those that did not want to leave left. This is a *tzarech iyun* on the Midrash that says four-fifths of the Ivrim remained in Mitzrayim, unworthy to leave. (Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 13:19). The response to this complaint was: "And Yisroel saw the great hand, which Hashem had used upon the Mitzriim, and the people feared Hashem, and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant." (Shemos 14:31). It appears the dispute was resolved and they became believers.

The hint to it being Dasan and Aviram is the Midrash Mechilta. The reference to the complaint in Mitzrayim was said when Moshe and Aharon failed with Pharaoh and Pharaoh demanded bricks without straw. (Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 14:11). "And they said to them, "May Hashem look upon you and judge, for you have brought us into foul

odor in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants, to place a sword into their hands to kill us." (Shemos 5:21). This was a complaint as to Moshe and Aharon failing as leaders.

While there it may be derived that the complainers were Dasan and Aviram – as said in the Midrash, albeit circuitously – others not so easily. Moshe commanded Bnei Yisroel not to leave over the manna until morning. (Ibid 16:19). Yet, some men did and Moshe became angry. (Ibid 16:20). Then they searched for it on Shabbos even though they were told not to. (Ibid 16:27). However, no punishments came from this incident. Instead, Moshe taught them about Shabbos. (Ibid 16:29). The Torah does say that Hashem said to Moshe, "How long will they refuse to obey my commandments?" (Ibid 16:28). However, the connection to Dasan and Aviram is not readily apparent.

After the spies it says, "And they said one to another, 'Let us go back to Mitzrayim.'" (Bamidbar 14:4). However, it was the entire Bnei Yisroel that were complaining here. (Ibid 14:1).

While the manna incident and complaints after the spies does not fit, there is a reason to say Dasan had it out for Moshe. "And he retorted, 'Who made you a leader, a prince, and a judge over us? Do you plan to slay me as you have slain the Mitzri?'" (Shemos 2:14). The evil man who Moshe stopped from quarreling challenges Moshe and asks him: *who made you a leader or prince over me?* This is the same complaint Dasan had when he joined Korach's rebellion to challenge Moshe and Aharon as leaders.

Here he asked how Moshe can be a judge over him. Then he and his brother, apparently reconciled, and they demand that Hashem judge Moshe and Aharon for their failing. (Shemos 5:21). Moshe and Aharon had their first failing as leaders. Then by the Yam Suf they demand to return to Mitzrayim, basically saying they knew Moshe and Aharon would fail as leaders and that would lead to their deaths in the treacherous desert. This is why it was so easy for them to be paid to join Korach. Korach knew of Dasan's hatred of Moshe and his constant questioning of Moshe's leadership. Korach saw in Dasan a malcontent who can rally more support.

If we look further at Dasan, we see he – or his namesake – is indeed mentioned in the Torah. Yoseph is sent by Yaakov to look for his brothers, who were tending the family sheep. Yoseph encounters a man and “And the man said, ‘They have traveled away from here, for I overheard them say, *Let us go to Dosan.*’” So Yoseph went after his brothers, and he found them in Dosan.” (Bereishis 37:17). Dosan was the place where the brothers threw Yoseph in a pit which led to his eventual sale into slavery. Dosan is hinted as a place of malcontent and contention. The issue the brothers had with Yoseph was on account of “Will you reign over us, or will you govern us?” (Ibid 37:8). The brothers challenged Yoseph’s rule over them. Thus, Dasan, is the challenger to leadership.

Now it is understandable why the Midrash inserted Dasan into all of these challenges. The Midrash did not want it to appear that Moshe’s main adversary were the Bnei Yisroel as a whole. The fighting among Ivri slaves, panic at the sea, noncompliance with the manna, and crying after the spies’ report were all directed at Moshe. (Other complaints mentioned in the Torah were more directed at Hashem, through Moshe). The Midrash made Dasan the adversary, putting the blame at his feet, not the entire nation. Likely, if Dasan was the quarreler in Mitzrayim, it was not with his brother but one of the elders who served as intermediary Ivri task masters.

Evil joins evil and the malcontents joined together against a greater adversary: Moshe. Dasan left Mitzrayim only to complain much and cause a lot of trouble and grief. This is because every hero needs a villain. A hero is only as great as the adversary that he has to overcome. Moshe constantly was at odds with Dasan. He finally defeated him and put an end to him with the Korach rebellion.