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Parashat Korah.

According to Ibn Ezra the events of this Parasha happened in the desert of Sinai, during the first year, after the sin of the golden calf, after that the first born were discharged from their function and replaced by the Levites. The clan of Korah accused Moshe of favoritism in favor of his brother Aaron and in favor of the tribe of Kehat among the Levites. The tribe of Reuben was angry because they had lost their importance in favor of Joseph: Korah himself was a firstborn. According to him this event happened very early after Moshe went down from the mountain with the tables of the law. But why create new anachronism and not follow the order of the Torah and place the events of Korah in the order of the Torah after the *ma'aseh ha meraglim* in the second year. This was a moment of profound demoralisation after that the project of early conquest of Kanaan had miscarried, after the events of Ta'aveira, Kivrot hata'avah and then the *ma'aseh ha meraglim* and the condemnation of all the people to die in the desert at the age of 60. It is in these circumstances that the revolt of Korah happened. This revolt was not a democratic revolt aiming at the improvement of the whole people. It was clearly a revolt of dissatisfaction of a clan. We are certainly in an oligarchic society. This cannot be contested. Moshe was the uncontested leader. His brother Aaron and his sons were the priests. In Shemot 24, 14, when Moshe climbed Har Sinai he let the authority in the hands of Aharon and Hur. And Rash writes in situ, that Hur is the son of Miriam and Kaleb. At the construction of the Mishkan Moshe chooses Betsalel as main architect of the Mishkan. Betsalel is the grand-son of Hur and great grand-son of Miriam. It was thus still a very young man of about 24 if we consider Miriam having 84, Hur 64, Uri 44 and Betsalel 24.

We are thus certainly in an oligarchy but Korah belongs also to this oligarchy: he belongs to the tribe of Levi, to the branch of Kehat and is a cousin of Aaron. It is a quarrel of a clan thus a palace' quarrel between two branches of the same family. Korah tries to gather all those who have a reason to complain because Moshe withdrew some of their prerogative.

Apparently his positive message, because we cannot imagine an attempt of a revolution without a positive message, is that he could manage a better future to the people than a slow death in the desert. The people is desperate as we read in Bamidbar 17: 27: *אבדנו, גוענו הן: 27* and therefore it is receptive to his arguments. The Tana'im understood the reason of this revolt on the same way when they wrote in Avot 5, 17: it was a quarrel motivated by jealousy:

כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים ושאינה לשם שמים אין סופה להתקיים. איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי, ושאינה לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת קרה וכל עדתו.

Tossefot yom Tov notes that in the second case it doesn't mention the second party the Mishnah does not mention the two parties in the quarrel because they were not comparable, Moshe had no personal interest at stake and acted contrary to Korah.

Another indication of the exact nature of the revolt of Korah for his own interest and honor is given by the following point.

In Bamidbar 16:30 it writes:

ואם בריאה יברא ה' ופצתה האדמה את פיה ובלעה אותם ואת כל אשר להם...

Such a phenomenon occurs only one other time in the Torah. In Bereshit after that Kaïn murdered Hevel, it writes in Bereshit 4: 11

ועתה ארור אתה מן האדמה אשר פצתה את פיה לקחת את דמי אחיך מידך

This similarity must certainly inform us about a common point between Korah and Kaïn and this must certainly be their jealousy.

Now about the unfolding of the plot and its end there is a certain blur and imprecision. We know that the 250 men who brought the Ketoret were burned, we know that Datan and Aviram, their wives and children and other people in the tents of Datan, Aviram and Korah, including those, who happened to be in his tent were swallowed in the depth of the ground subsoiling. We know that 14700 people indirectly connected to the revolt or at least dissatisfied by the way it ended, were killed in the following outbreak. But we don't know for sure what was the fate of Korah because we don't know exactly where was Korah when each of these punishments happened. This is the result of the concision of the text. Therefore it is possible to understand that Korah was from the swallowed.

It is also possible to understand that he belonged to those who were burned.

It is also possible to understand that he belonged to none of them but he died in the epidemic, which followed. Each of these three theories is championed in Gemara Sanhedrin 110. Ibn Ezra thinks that according to Pshat, he was among the burned because he was with the 250 busy with the Ketoret and indeed this seems the most likely understanding. He could not be at home at that moment. However the text in Bamidbar 26 :10 seems to indicate that he was among the swallowed:

ואתאותם ותבלע פיהאת הארץ ותפתך לנס. ויהיואיש ומאתים חמישים את האש באכל העדה במות קרה
Now let us say a few words about Korah's sons. The Torah tells us in one of the shortest possible sentences: ובני קורח לא מתו. Thus apparently the sons of Korah, who were at the beginning his most devoted partisans, withdrew their support from Korah's cause. Now because of the text ואת כל האדם אשא לקרה the Midrash Rabbah and the Gemara felt obliged to understand that Korah's sons, belonged to the swallowed but had a special fate and did not perish. Rashi in the same vein, writes in the beginning of Psalm 42, the first psalm of the Benei Korah, that Assir, Elkanah and Aviassaf, Korah's sons, were swallowed but they could escape in caves where they could write these poems, which would later be incorporated in David's Psalms.

However we don't need to have recourse to such a farfetched and miraculous explanation. Targum Jonathan on the Passuk writes in Aramic, which I translate: "and Korah's sons were not (at the end) in the plot of their father and they followed the Torah of Moshe the prophet. They did not die in the epidemic, they were not burned in the fire and they were not swallowed in the earth".

In Divrei ha Yamin we have the genealogy of Samuel, a direct descent of Korah, and of his own descent, who were poets at David's Court. They were called the benei Korah or ha-Korhim.

We have 11 psalms of the Benei Korah, some of them of the greatest beauty and in particular psalm 47 of the benei Korah, which we recite as an introduction to the Tkiyot shel Meyoushav. Among them one psalm is attributed to Heiman who was the grandson of Samuel, שמואל הרמתי, who, himself was a descent of Aviassaf the son of Korah. Heiman was a poet and had the tittle of חוזה המלך, similarly as his far cousins assaf and yedoutoun, who were not Korhim.

Korah had a terrible punishment. Nevertheless Korah had a magnificent descent and particularly the prophet Samuel and his descent, which acted as official poets of David and apparently were not ashamed and were called the beni Korah or ha Korhim. They could have begun a new yihous with their grandfather Samuel ha-Ramati.