

Parsha Ponders

Korach | June 15, 2023 | 27 Sivan 5783

*Beautiful exposition prohibition*¹

ויקח קרח בן-יצהר בן-קהת בן-לוי וגו'

Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took *something*²

This week's *parsha* describes the rebellion of Korach. It starts off by recounting that Korach took, but it doesn't specify what he took. To this, Rashi comments that: "This *parsha* is expounded beautifully in *Midrash Tanchuma*." While this statement sounds innocuous³, it bothers many commentators⁴. Why? We are taught by our Sages⁵ that it is forbidden to say, "this teaching is good, this teaching is no good". If so, how could Rashi say that this *parsha* is expounded beautifully by our Sages? Shouldn't this be a forbidden thing to record?

One could perhaps suggest that only saying both expressions, saying that teaching A is good and teaching B is no good, is forbidden. However, only praising a teaching without comparing it would be permissible, and this is what Rashi is doing. Rav Dovid HaLevi, known as the *Taz*, rejects this approach⁶. He says that since it's obviously forbidden to simply say "this teaching is no good", then the other statement of "this teaching is good" should similarly be forbidden. The reason is simple, since saying "this teaching is good", implies that other teachings are not good.

Another suggestion for Rashi's intent is also the implication, albeit a different one than we thought. Usually when we analyze verses, we have two ways to look at them: What's known as *peshat*, the simple understanding of the verse, and *derash*, the homiletic meaning⁷. Rashi is teaching us that this verse⁸ is expounded very well in the *Midrash*, as a way of conveying that that's the only way to understand the verse. The simple reading of the verse, the *peshat*, is only the *derash*, the homiletic meaning. There's no way to understand the verse simply, since the verse doesn't specify what Korach took. As a result, we are told that the verse is expounded very well in the *Midrash*⁹.

¹ Based on Pardes Yosef HaChadash to Numbers 16:1 § 3

² Numbers *loc. cit.*

³ Rav Dovid Avraham Mandelbaum, who put together the Pardes Yosef on *Bamidbar* and *Devarim*, quotes his friend Rav Yechiel Baum, who notes that the *gematria* of יפה, beautiful, is 95, the same as the number of verses in this *parsha*

⁴ Divrei Dovid *ad. loc.* See the sources below. See also Pardes Yosef to Exodus 21:6 § 20, citing Sifsei Tzedek *parshas Mishpatim* § 10

⁵ Eruvin 64a. Rav Mandelbaum notes that the Rambam, Tur, and Shulchan Aruch didn't bring down this prohibition, although the Rif and Rosh *ad. loc.* did

⁶ Divrei Dovid *loc. cit.* The Maharsha and Ben Yehoyada *ad. loc.* understood the the *gemarra* same. See Rashash *ad. loc.* who asks on the Maharsha from Berachos 14b and Kesubos 21a where we see the Sages praising teachings that they heard

⁷ I'm not sure why the Taz ignores the other two ways of analyzing verses: *remez* and *sod*, which are part of the acronym *Pardes* (apparently the first usage of this acronym was used by Rav Moshe di Leon, the publisher of the Zohar. His usage appears in Shaylos UTeshuvos L'Rav Moshe Di Leon Belnyanei Kabbalah, published by Professor Yeshaya Tishbi in Chikrei Kabbalah U'Shluchoseha I p. 64 and Kovetz Al Yad XV p. 31). Perhaps he means that Rashi only comes to explain the *peshat* of the Torah, and will use *derash* when necessary, but not *sod* and *remez*

⁸ I'll note that Rashi says *parsha*, yet the Taz understands Rashi meant verse

⁹ See Yeriyos Shlomo with Mizrachi *ad. loc.*, who seems to understand Rashi like the Taz (the Yeriyos Shlomo was written by the Maharshah, who actually preceded the Taz)

The problem is, if we look at Rashi's explanation of the words of our Sages¹⁰, that it's forbidden to say, "this teaching is good, this teaching is bad", the question doesn't get started. Rashi there says explicitly that the prohibition is only if both are said together, comparing teaching A, which is good, to teaching B, which is bad. Saying a teaching is good on its own is totally fine¹¹. Therefore, Rashi is justified in saying that this *parsha* is expounded well in *Midrash Tanchuma*¹².

Good Shabbos

¹⁰ Rashi to Eruvin *loc. cit.*

¹¹ See Einei Kol Chai Kesubos 85b by Rav Chaim Palagi, who discusses if saying "this teaching is good" alone is forbidden or not. He doesn't note the above dispute in how to understand the *gemarra*

¹² See Yabia Omer Yoreh Deah 2:16 who notes this as well and goes through the whole *sugya* in depth with all the relevant sources, some of which were brought above. He also brings a different answer to the Taz's question, and comes out with a clear ruling in the end