

# Parsha Ponders

Korach | July 4, 2019 | 2 Tammuz 5779

## *Keeping our loved one in mind<sup>1</sup>*

ויקח קרח וגו' ודתן ואבירם וגו' ואון וגו' ויקמו לפני משה ואנשים מבני-ישראל חמשים ומאתים וגו'  
Korach took [his *tallis*]<sup>2</sup> ...and Dasan and Aviram...and Ohn...they and two-hundred and fifty men from  
the Jewish people confronted Moshe...<sup>3</sup>

This week's parsha details the rebellion of Korach. He challenged the leadership of Moshe and Aharon, convincing a group of the greatest sages of Israel to join his cause. To kick off his rebellion, he took a *tallis* which was entirely dyed *techeiles*<sup>4</sup>, a blueish color. Normally, only some of the *tzitzis* strings need to be dyed *techeiles*<sup>5</sup>, but not the garment itself. He had two-hundred and fifty of his men wear<sup>6</sup> a similar garment in front of Moshe<sup>7</sup>. Korach asked Moshe: "This *tallis*, whose material is entirely colored *techeiles*, does it require *tzitzis*?" Moshe responded: "It does". Korach rejected this ruling, and argued that if just some strings of *techeiles* exempt the garment, having the entire garment be *techeiles* should be more than sufficient<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, there was no need for *tzitzis* in such a garment. Why did Korach specifically pick this topic to start his rebellion? As well, Korach wasn't an ignoramus. He was an incredibly learned individual<sup>9</sup>. How then could he ever think that such a *tallis* would be exempt from *tzitzis*?

The Torah tell us<sup>10</sup> the purpose for the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. It's in order that we remember Hashem's *mitzvos*. As well, our Sages explain to us<sup>11</sup> the purpose behind the *techeiles* colored strings. Their color is similar to the color of the

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Kesav Sofer to Numbers 16:1 [#3]

<sup>2</sup> Targum "Yonasan" and Rabbeinu Bachaye ad. loc. The verse doesn't specify what Korach took. There are various explanations given, and this one is based on the implication of Bamidbar Rabbah 18:3,4, and Midrash Tanchuma Korach § 3

<sup>3</sup> Numbers 16:1,2

<sup>4</sup> See note 8

<sup>5</sup> Numbers 15:38. See Rashi and Tosafos to Menachos 38a s.v. התכלת for one explanation for how many strings need to be dyed, and Mishneh Torah Hilchos Tzitzis 1:2,7 for another

<sup>6</sup> Rashi ad. loc., quoting Midrash Tanchuma loc. cit. § 2. Not all the sources for this *Midrash* mention that **they all** wore this garment. Some only mention Korach's question about it, Midrash Mishlei 11:5 says Korach himself wore it. Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:1 only says he made many of these garments; presumably, so they would wear them

<sup>7</sup> The Gur Aryeh ad. loc. § 9 explains that Korach's aim was to spread his rebellion against Moshe. If he simply asked his question, only some would have heard about it. If two-hundred and fifty sages wore this bright blue garment, it would attract everyone's attention

<sup>8</sup> Bamidbar Rabbah 18:3; Midrash Tanchuma, Midrash Mishlei, and Yerushalmi loc. cit. This is learned from the juxtaposition to the previous *parsha* (Numbers 15:37-41), which discusses the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. This is according to the original language of the *Midrash*. The way this is phrased, it sounds like the garment is entirely *techeiles*, and **doesn't have** any *tzitzis* on it. Korach wanted to know if they were unnecessary, and Moshe responded that they were required. This exchange doesn't make sense, as what does it matter what color the garment is? Regardless, there's a *mitzvah* to put *tzitzis* on it! Korach's response also doesn't make sense, as he says some strings of *techeiles* can exempt a garment from *tzitzis*, which isn't true. Therefore, the commentaries (Mizrachi ad. loc., Eitz Yosef, Maharzu, and Chiddushei HaRashash to Bamidbar Rabbah, Eitz Yosef (quoting Zayis Ra'anan) and Biur HaAmarim to Midrash Tanchuma, and it seems the Korbon HaEidah to Yerushalmi) all explain that Korach wanted to know **if he needed to dye** the *tzitzis* in his garment *techeiles* or is the garment being that color sufficient. Moshe responded that he still needed to make some of the strings *techeiles*. However, as we'll soon see, the Kesav Sofer somehow understood the *Midrash* according to its literal wording. Even with his explanation behind it, I don't quite follow the logic

<sup>9</sup> Chazal refer to him as a פקח (Bamidbar Rabbah 16:7; Midrash Tanchuma Korach § 5; Tanchuma Yashan Korach § 12), which in their usage means someone very clever (see Tzidkas HaTzaddik § 65, who gives Kesubos 88a as an example). He was also worthy of prophecy (Bamidbar Rabbah; Midrash Tanchuma; Tanchuma Yashan)

<sup>10</sup> Numbers 15:14

<sup>11</sup> Chullin 89a

sea, and the sea is similar to the sky, and the sky is similar to Hashem's Throne of Glory. Therefore, the *techeiles* strings are to help us remember Hashem at all times.

Now, when two beloved individuals separate from one another, one usually gives an object to his companion to be remembered by. However, if their love for each other is so intense, such that it would be impossible to forget each other, their parting is still very difficult to bear. As such, one will give the other something similar to themselves, like something with a certain color or shape. This way, even though they don't see their beloved, they'll see this object, which bears some similarity. This way, they'll be at least slightly appeased.

The *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* is only a reminder for those who are not as attached to Hashem. They need the *tzitzis* so they will not forget Him. However, someone who is constantly attached to Hashem with never-ending love, doesn't need any reminders. For them, the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* is mostly for the *techeiles*. The color of *techeiles* is similar to the sea, which is similar to the sky, which is similar to Hashem's Throne of Glory. Since it's impossible to see Hashem and live<sup>12</sup>, something similar to the Throne of Glory is the next best thing. Someone who isn't as attached to Hashem needs something abnormal to catch their attention and remind them of Hashem. Someone who is in fact attached doesn't need this reminder, they just want something similar to their beloved to be in their sight at all times.

Korach was arguing to Moshe that a *tallis* that is entirely made of *techeiles* doesn't need *tzitzis*. *Tzitzis* are extraneous to the garment, as they're strings with seemingly no purpose. They're solely there to remind the wearer of Hashem. Korach felt the entire nation was holy<sup>13</sup>, and therefore didn't need any reminders. They were so attached to Hashem, they only needed *techeiles*<sup>14</sup>. The similarity to the Throne of Glory would satisfy those with ever-lasting love of Hashem. Moshe responded that indeed such a *tallis* would still need *tzitzis*. Korach felt this meant that Moshe held the Jews to be on a lower level. If they needed *tzitzis*, that meant they weren't as attached to Hashem, and needed a constant reminder. With this argument, he was able to start his rebellion<sup>15</sup>.

In the end, Korach was proven wrong. His rebellion failed and the earth swallowed him up alive. Where did he go wrong? It could very well be that the Jews were on such a high level. They were completely bound to Hashem, body and soul. However, *halacha* doesn't always conform to our logic. Some things are beyond our understanding. Even if the reasoning for *tzitzis* and *techeiles* is as Korach understood, it doesn't affect the law. A four-cornered garment still needs both, no matter who the person is. Who knows, perhaps it could be because someone who is on such a high level may not always stay that way. Or worse, they may be overestimating themselves. Hashem knows best, and has His reasons. Our job is simply to follow His commandments, and not try to come up with excuses or exemptions. Korach learned that message the hard way. Good Shabbos

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<sup>12</sup> [Exodus 33:20](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Numbers 16:3](#)

<sup>14</sup> This would sound like Korach is דורש טעמא דקרא, i.e. he holds that the underlying reason behind the *mitzvah* can affect its laws. This is pointed out by, *inter alia*, [Avnei Eliyahu parshas Chukas](#) s.v. י"ל ובוזה, [Harei BaShamayim ad. loc.](#) s.v. במדרש מה ראה, [Chavtzeles HaSharon parshas Ki Seitzei](#) s.v. וסמך נחמד (although he provides an alternative explanation), [Chakel Yitzchak parshas Korach](#) s.v. והנה לר' שמעון. Some of them say that Korach learned this from the *Parah Adumah*, the Red Heifer, which the Torah calls a חק, a decree. This implies other *mitzvos* have underlying reasons which are to be studied and applied. This is based on a [Midrash Pliah](#) which is quoted, which says מה ראה קרח לחלוק על משה, פרה אדומה ראה. For example, the [Chasam Sofer Al HaTorah](#) to [Numbers 16:1](#) says he found it quoted in the margin of his [Yalkut Shimoni](#). The earliest source I found for this is [Yedei Moshe](#) to [Bamidbar Rabbah 18:8](#), quoting מ"ת. However, applying the reasons behind *mitzvos* is actually a dispute (see [Bava Metzia 115a](#)), and some of the above say this was the dispute between Korach and Moshe. We happen to rule that we aren't דורש טעמא דקרא (see [Bava Metzia 9:13](#) and [Mishneh Torah Hilchos Malveh ULoveh 3:1](#) with [Hagahos Maimoniyos](#) § 1. Cf. [Mishneh Torah Hilchos Issurei Biah 12:1](#) with [Ma'aseh Rokeach](#))

<sup>15</sup> This is the end of the [Kesav Sofer's](#) commentary on this topic