

Getting Rid Of Korah Once And For All!

The story of Korah first appears in Numbers 16, where we read how his rebellion against Moses ended when the earth swallowed him, his family and all his followers, in the second year after the Exodus.

The Midrash (Gen. Rabba 19:2) places Korah early in the story of Genesis; in the Garden of Eden alongside the wily and seditious Serpent, the wicked and manipulative Haman, and curiously, Pharaoh's hapless baker.

In the Zohar, a running commentary to the Pentateuch, Korah appears even earlier. According to the Zohar (Vol. I 17a), on the Second Day of Creation when God says, 'Let there be firmament in the water...', Korah had already rebelled, refuting and contradicting Creation before it was half finished i.e. even before the Serpent, the Garden of Eden or even the possibility of Good and Evil existed.

When I look speculatively at a rabbi, a master, especially one who is said to follow in the ways of the Baal Shem Tov, wondering 'Is he the rabbi for me?', I ask myself this question; would he have made the Golden Calf at the foot of Mount Sinai while Moses was away, or not?

Aaron did, but Korah would not have.

Before Moses went up the mountain for forty days and forty nights he told the elders, 'Wait here for us until we return to you. See, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute, let him come to them.' (Ex. 24:14) It didn't take long for things to go awry, because: 'When the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, they assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."' (ibid. 32:1)

Aaron did as he was asked, but Korah would not have done so. Later, while Israel tried its hardest to atone and make amends for worshipping the Golden Calf, Korah looked on sadly and pityingly, for he knew in his heart that if Moses had only told everyone to refer their questions to *him*, the sin of the Golden Calf would never have been committed. To be honest, all Israel knew it too. Korah understood that he was a natural leader and the moral authority who would have stood in the breach and fought to the death to prevent the calamity of the Golden Calf, had he only been tasked with preventing it. No idolatry would have happened on Korah's watch while Moses was away on the mountain.

Aaron, according to Korah, wasn't a leader - he was a follower,ⁱ and what use is a follower in a crisis when only a leader with guts and smarts can stand between order and chaos?

There's a tradition that in the messianic era Korah will take his rightful place as the High Priest instead of Aaron. The Tribe of Levi will supplant the family of Aaron the Cohen as hereditary priests. Some attribute this idea to the ARI (Isaac Luria 1534-1572), father of modern kabbalahⁱⁱ. I suspect they have misinterpreted the ARI.

I think the future-to-come referred to by the ARI, when Levites will take the place of the Cohens is happening right now. The ARI's prediction is a gloomy presentiment about our time, not some bright future messianic era. Korah has already taken over spiritual leadership of the Jewish People.

To understand the extent of the prevailing perversion of history, one must first comprehend Korah's fundamental argument. He says, '*HESED*, Loving-kindness, Giving and Compassion are all very nice and virtuous when carefully confined within the boundaries of decency set by discipline and the ordering of priorities. Obedience to the Law must come first and last. *HESED*/Giving must be firmly wrapped in a rigid framework of *GEVURAH*/Withholding, so as to maintain the proper hierarchies of an ordered universe.'

Well, isn't Korah right? Who could possibly argue with him? Through Korah's eyes, it is incomprehensible that Aaron should succeed to the Cohen-Priesthood after fashioning the idolatrous Golden Calf with his very hands, while he, the saintly Korah who would gladly have died to prevent it, should be relegated to a footnote in history! Aaron makes the Golden Calf and Moses lays down his life for him. Korah summons all the true Sons of Levi to lead them in a war against idolatry and Moses thinks up some unprecedented and horrible death for him?

Ask yourself this question: which Jewish leader of your acquaintance would have stepped into Aaron's place and manufactured the Golden Calf? Open any Jewish newspaper or website and Korah jumps out at you from the front page – he's all we seem to have nowadays.

Without the Zohar's explanation the whole narrative is utterly inexplicable.

Korah represents the ordering of forces, the arrangement, organization and tidiness within the universal system. Aaron represents chaos - and chaos prevails. Looking at the way God runs this world, His very considered opinion seems to be that 'GEVURAH/Withholding is all very nice and virtuous when its obedience to the Law, its priorities and hierarchies of order and decency are wrapped in a very free-flowing framework of compassionate judgment, within an open structure of unspecified authority, amid random acts of undeserved kindness and unconditional love.' The left hand/*Gevurah*, must be wrapped inside the right hand/*Hesed* and not the other way around, lest it constrict the universe and prevent chaos.

To answer the original question 'Why was Korah so wrong?' Korah was never wrong. He was always, in Moses' era as he is in ours, 100% right - just totally irrelevant. He was completely at odds with God's desires and out of sync with the universe. Because Korah's rectitude and probity are so impeccable, there is nothing you can say or do to make him and his congregations deviate from their commitment to impose strict order, discipline and compliance. Their response to adversity and resistance is always to Double Down.

Doubling Down means strengthening one's commitment to a particular strategy or course of action, typically one that is potentially risky.

The Mishna (Avot 5:17) describes the quarrel Korah started with Moses as 'Not a *Machloket L'Shem Shomayim* – not a quarrel for heavens' sake'. Though used ubiquitously, the phrase 'for heavens' sake' is never adequately explained in rabbinic literature and remains obscure to this day. The above mentioned Zohar attempts to fix that oversight by connecting Korah's rebellion over Aaron's appointment to his repudiation of God's act of Creation on the Second Day.

The first day of Creation has its divisions and separations: God divides light from dark, calling one day and the other night. Korah does not oppose that division. It is only on the second day that, according to the Zohar, Korah's personality begins to create mischief. The Torah tells us: 'God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And it was evening and it was morning, the second day.' (Gen 1:6-8) To which the Zohar comments, 'The description of God dividing between upper and lower waters is written left-handedly, while the story of Creation and the first day's narrative is written right-handedlyⁱⁱⁱ. And though the first day describes a division of light from dark, there is no splitting. It is on the second day that splitting occurs. Left-handedness writes a split which provokes a reaction from the left side, creating friction, opposition, passion and rage. It is out of this rage that all Hell is formed.

'Moses saw that the Third Day of Creation creates the necessary compromise to balance left and right. The left was absorbed into the right in the upper waters above Heaven, while rage and hell descended into the waters below Heaven. Thus when Korah the Left, raged in opposition to Aaron the Right, Moses attempted to create balance in the same manner as Creation did on the third day. But Korah resisted by trying to change the very name of Heaven. He wanted to disengage the left from its safe place in the upper waters, wrapped within the gentle right. Instead, he wanted to raise his rage to the upper waters, dragging Hell upwards with him to vanquish the right and absorb it within himself. Moses could not allow that to happen. Korah was denying all of Creation and showing no respect or consideration for the Divine Presence, he was reversing the course of history. This provoked Moses' anger, which in addition to Korah's anger, tipped the balance. Korah was consumed by his own rage and plunged, still alive, into Hell.'

From this Zohar, it would seem that acting *L'Shem Shomayim* (or heavens' sake) assumes that the left allowed to act unsupervised is malignant, and that one must only do things which emphasize and strengthen the dominion of right over left, preventing rage from rising and taking over. This means keeping the left very firmly secured and contained within the benign right. 'For heaven's sake' really means 'for heaven's name' because the left is always trying to change the name of the game, change the name of Heaven to Hell.

Hillel says, 'Be a student of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and attracting them to Torah' (Mishna – Avoth 1:12). It is no coincidence that Hillel is mentioned in the Mishna, quoted earlier, as an example of someone whose quarrels were indeed 'for the sake of heaven'. He is famous for having Aaron's characteristic compassion, cheerfulness and patience, so Hillel's recommendation that everyone adopt Aaron's peace-loving behaviors is perfectly understandable. But a closer look at the text doesn't support such a simple reading. Hillel did not say, 'be like Aaron,' he said, 'be a students of Aaron.'

History does not record Aaron having any students. His brother Moses was our teacher, and remains to this day, *Moshe Rabeinu* – Moses our Teacher. What's wrong with being one of the students of Moses - loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and attracting them to Torah? And since we're examining this premise, why not also ask where it is actually written or intimated in the biblical narrative, either in Egypt or after the Exodus, that Aaron possesses these peaceful, people-loving traits? How did such an assessment of Aaron's character come to be assumed?

Perhaps Hillel is hinting at a pivotal moment in the narrative where, had he been there to guide us, he would have pointed us in a completely different direction.

Immediately following the Ten Commandments, we read: 'Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the horn and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die"' (Ex. 20:16-17). We could not stand the terrifying sound of God's voice speaking directly to us, so we asked Moses to do the listening for us. But the result was that God withdrew onto the mountain and Moses had to go up to listen for the word. We were suddenly bereft of the presence of God.

In the Mishna, Hillel tells us that had he been there at the time, he would have urgently signaled us not to make that demand of Moses. Hillel would have advised, 'Listen! this is an opportunity to avoid a future filled with mistakes, grief and anguish. Let's ask Aaron to be our teacher. He does things differently.' But Hillel was not there, so Moses became our teacher/interlocutor, and forty days later we came to Aaron begging him to 'make us a god who walks in front of us...' By then the damage was done.

We were not suited to the style of Judaism we had just brought about by our own request. We had appointed a chief-prophet who went up to heaven to bring down not the Divine Presence, but the Law - the Word of God. We may have needed a teacher, but what we really *wanted* was a priest, someone who could invoke the divine while still among us, teaching and showing us how to worship Him, rather than someone who went up a mountain to encounter God on his own and to bring us His word. We wanted to *feel* God's presence and *see* Providence, rather than be taught His word. The Torah tells us what happened: 'When the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, they assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."'

It was a terrible sin, for which we have never fully been forgiven. Nor do we seem to have forgiven ourselves for worshipping the Golden Calf, and yet God acquiesced without demur to our request for a different sort of Judaism. 'Let them make me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them,' God said to Moses (Ex. 25:8), granting us a sacred location on earth, a dwelling place within a constructed building where He promised to join us. Then, agreeing to our request for Aaron to be the priest in place of Moses, God told Moses, 'And you, bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons,' (ibid. 28:1). Had we not sinned with the Golden Calf, none of this would have happened (although we might have avoided the blunder if we had been able to take Hillel's advice and become Aaron's students at the start, before Moses went up the mountain).

It's no wonder Korah's blood boiled at the spectacle of Aaron, glorious and resplendent in his priestly vestments, occupying the position for which he, Korah was most naturally suited. It galled him beyond bitterness - it was so unfair.

Of course we have not yet addressed the basic question of why Aaron not only went unpunished, but was actually rewarded for his part in the sin of the Golden Calf.

We keep on coming back to the events of the Second Day of Creation, because that is where the key lies.

What does it mean when the verse tells us that ‘God made the firmament, and divided the waters under the firmament from the waters above the firmament’? What is a firmament? What is it made of and what does its separation of the waters represent? Taking our cue from the Zohar we can dispense altogether with the necessity of reconciling the verse with any scientific understanding of cosmology, whether the firmament is a great solid dome covering the flat, waterborne earth as the ancients thought, or some expanse of space/time in harmony with modern cosmological ideas. We can simply adopt the Zohar’s view that the firmament is a split, a cleft separating right from left like the two hemispheres of the human brain. A human has only one brain and one mind, even when the two sides of the brain are at odds with one another, even when a person feels they are in two minds about something. The two sides share tasks and information without being identical, although one side usually dominates the other. A consequence of this broken symmetry is apparent everywhere, for no matter where we look in the world or through history, the overwhelming majority of people are left-brained and right-handed. In the Genesis story, the split creates an upper and lower region; right and left don’t exist yet. By Korah’s time it has evolved into a right/left split.

Korah is a Levi, and Levites are not natural risk takers. Of the Twelve Tribes, Levi is most rigid in his outlook; he is most certain that what he’s doing is the right action and proper thing to do. He longs for clarity, for life without grey areas, a life of stark contrasts between good and evil. Levi does not want to begin anything where the outcome is doubtful, or to commit any act requiring subsequent qualification.^{iv} The Tribe of Levi prefers the safe path. They want a world where the light reflects the Will of God which is good, while the Dark is always bad and forbidden. Levi takes it a step further; trying to maintain a clear and absolute distinction between good and bad, he attempts to divest the act of sinning from all pleasure, taste and joy. Levi wants to distinguish clearly between the beautiful and the ugly, to leave no connection or confusion between what has grace and what has ugliness. He can separate between Good and Evil Desire, ensuring that only good is satisfying or pleasurable, and only evil is unpleasant or painful.

If all mundane and physical pleasure were removed from the worship of God, from learning Torah and fulfilling the Commandments (e.g. if it became impossible to feel proud of one’s virtuous accomplishments, if one could not enjoy the esthetic beauty in the music of synagogue liturgy or the sight of Chanukah lights, or the taste of Matza, or dancing at a wedding, etc.) Levi would feel vindicated. To him that would be like taking out insurance against sin. We would have to see it as the exact opposite. We would say, ‘Cursed be the man that makes a graven or molten image, an abomination to God, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret’ (Deut. 27:15). Korah the Levite is just as capable and inclined to worship the Golden Calf as the rest of us. His idol, though, is hidden in his heart.

When physical pleasures are all sinful, and spiritual or cerebral pleasures are all disconnected from the flesh and its five senses, when every virtue is stripped and purged of selfish ego indulgence and no trace of good remains inside the evildoer or deed, then God’s left hand will have triumphed. Korah will be high priest and we, his flock, will resemble one massive golden bullock skipping about like a calf from the stall. When our women are covered from head to toe in black polyester, when their voices, pictures and laughter banned from public view via the print media and every forum of mass communication, when Halacha Police measure the correct length or tightness of their skirts, we will have become Muslim Jews. Indeed, we have become so in many places throughout the world today.

Korah is so certain that his Levite perspective is the only possible true one, and that he will be vindicated by history and ultimate triumphant,^v that he keeps on Doubling Down. I am not implying that he is incorrect or ill-advised, one cannot show that Korah is wrong. That’s the whole point, for when all is said and done, he is simply insisting that the letter of the law be upheld, that the tradition be honored allowing nothing new or deviant to infect his followers, avoiding anything experimental or previously untried. Korah is always sure about this point – he knows how to recognize idolatry and how to prevent it spreading among Jews. His duty is always clear.

The Torah tells us how Moses gambled his life and reputation in the struggle with Korah over Aaron's appointment to the high priesthood. "Then Moses said, "This is how you will know that God has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, then God has not sent me. But if God brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated God with contempt."As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all those associated with Korah, together with their possessions. They went down alive into the realm of the dead, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community.' (Num. 16:28-33)

When Aaron is High Priest things are different. Often, in our hedonistic pursuits, we blunder and deviate from the true path. In the doctrine of Hedonism, pleasure or happiness is the highest good, and in Aaron's world hedonism is enshrined in Law. 'There is no higher good than pleasure,' (*Sefer Yetzira* Cap. II Mishna 4). We repent our misdeeds and sins, then move on as swiftly as we can. Occasionally we explore new paths and discover fresh forms of worship, developing technologies and skills undreamt of by our ancestors. And all the while, what does Levi do? Why, he makes music, plays musical instruments and sings to heaven, for that is a proper occupation for the Levite. It is his vocation and calling, it is what makes him happy and gives him pleasure.

In the abstract, we can understand the events of the Second Day of Creation as the splitting of higher from lower, the making of hierarchies which then produced dominant and submissive functions, and this split later becomes the polarity of right and left throughout nature.

There is another, concrete way of understanding the split between the upper and lower waters. Since thirst is our first physical desire and primary craving, water will forever remain the symbol of our desires. The splitting of upper and lower waters represents the lifelong human struggle between instinctual and generally selfish desires such as greed, gluttony and lust representing the water below the heavens, and rational, generally elevated desires such as seeking God, pursuing the truth and desiring happiness for others represented by water above the heaven.

Understand this split has been a contentious issue since ancient times. The Midrash (Genesis Rabba 4:6) describes one rabbi's difficulty with this concept. It is written, "God made the firmament," (Gen. 1:7) this is one of the verses with which Ben Zoma shook the world. "What do you mean, 'God made?'" Ben Zoma demanded to know. "The text already tells us that God said, 'Let there be firmament.' Wasn't God's command sufficient? Is it not written, 'At God's word the heavens were made and in the breath of His mouth all their hosts?'" (Ps. 33:6).'

Ben Zoma's thundering question is directed at the Torah's need to tell us that God 'made it' so. The standard Genesis description of creation has God saying 'Let there be so-and-so,' and the verse telling us that 'it was so.' But here the verse doesn't say, 'God said "Let there be a Firmament," and it was so.' Instead, the verse says 'God *made* the Firmament,' suggesting that the firmament needed some adjustment after it was spoken into creation. 'If God adjusted it,' Ben Zoma complains, 'why is there still a split between my Good Desire and my Evil Desire?' Ben Zoma was never able to reconcile the gap between who he thought he was supposed to be and who he actually was. It drove him mad. His cravings were insatiable.

His colleagues wondered what happened to Ben Zoma after his attempt to negotiate Paradise failed, as we read in the Talmud, 'Our sages taught: Four entered paradise, Ben Azai, Ben Zoma, Acher and R. Akiba. R. Akiba told them, "When you reach the place of pure marble stones, do not say, 'Water, Water,' for it is written, 'Whoever tells lies, cannot stand in My sight.'" (Ps. 101:7) Ben Azai glanced and died. It was said, the verse (ibid. 116:15), 'Precious in the eyes of God the death of His saints,' applies to Ben Azai. Ben Zoma glanced and was injured. The verse (Prov. 28:16), 'You found honey, eat cautiously, lest you eat to satiation and vomit,' applies to Ben Zoma. Acher uprooted the plantings, and R. Akiba came out in peace.' (Hagiga 14b)

In Paradise, Ben Zoma encountered his own insatiability to the nth degree, he found Ur-Honey; lapping from the infinite source of irrational and instinctual desire, he drove himself insane with the unfathomable sweetness of it.

They asked Ben Zoma, “What is the law; is it permissible to castrate a dog?” and he answered, “No”. Then they asked him, “May a high-priest marry a virgin who’d become pregnant?” and he answered, “Yes”. (ibid.) His friends were perplexed. They couldn’t understand Ben Zoma’s madness. At first they tried understanding the damage to his mind as a consequence of some prior flaw in his psyche. Perhaps he was too grandiose in his self-estimation? so they asked him whether it is permissible to castrate a dog, but he gave them the correct answer; every creature deserves respect, even a dog. They wondered whether his problem was low self-esteem? so they asked him about the high-priest marrying the pregnant virgin, but he gave them the right answer; no creature deserves that level of respect, not even the high-priest.

‘Well then, what is his problem?’ they wondered. R. Joshua b. Hanania put his finger on it, as the Talmud describes in this anecdote: ‘R. Joshua b. Hanania was standing on the steps of the Temple Mount. Ben Zoma saw but did not acknowledge him. R. Joshua said, ‘Whence and whither Ben Zoma?’

‘I was peering into the gap between the upper and lower waters,’ answered Ben Zoma. ‘And there is no more than three finger-breadths between them.’

‘Ben Zoma is still out of it,’ R. Joshua said to his disciples. (ibid. 15a)

Ben Zoma’s mistake was in perceiving such a wide gap between the waters above and the waters below, because at the source they are one and the same. He understood that a person has two kinds of desire: the first is instinctual and comes with birth, while the second is rational and evolves with a person’s emotional and intellectual maturity.^{vi} His mistake was in thinking that they proceed from different sources, that the desires which spring from our instincts are not equal to or as deserving of respect and celebration as those desires chosen after careful and rational weighing of circumstances and ethics. He couldn’t grasp that we are entirely a product of our nature, even the parts of us we think of as the fruits of maturity, evolution and personal growth. In the Nature versus Nurture debate, even nurture is a product of nature.

Channeling Korah, Ben Zoma is convinced that rational choices are always the preferred option because only the careful rational mind can make a flawless selections and decisions devoid of selfish and self-serving desires. A thoughtful human being is capable of nobility in the purest sense. What good is human instinct in comparison? Instincts are useful for the preservation of the species, but little else. Aren’t we always commanded to hold our instincts in check, to maintain control over all those parts of our body that desire to act of their own accord, in their own interest?

Instincts lead to chaos and must be tightly governed. Thus Ben Zoma ignores the advice of his teacher, R. Akiba, and calls twice ‘Water, water’, when only one type of water exists, All desires flow from the same wellspring; there is no space between upper and lower waters, and no real split.

The problem with Ben Zoma’s perception of his own good and evil inclination, is identical to Korah’s problem. It leaves no room for mistakes and chaos, no place for innovation, no space where the unplanned, unscheduled and unconventional are allowed to happen. Ben Zoma thinks all his own instincts as contemptible, and so leaves no room for God to work through him. The fact remains that the highest good does not come about through the highest rational human act. For when all is said and done, a human is merely human, and even the highest achievements of human rationale can never be greater than the person who thought them. Instincts, animal as well as human are divine. They are the wisdom God planted inside our bodies and minds, in every cell and fiber of our being, in every limb and thought. The highest good will always remain God’s good.

Aaron could see what Korah was incapable of admitting. We in our insistence, in our blind and stupid demand for a Golden Calf, we Children of Israel were expressing an instinct, which itself expressed the Will of God written in all our genes. It is up to God, not Korah, to judge between a successful and a failed design, a winning or losing gamble. When we step out of our own way and allow God to work through the instincts and urges He wrote into the fabric of our body, we become capable of unimagined greatness.

Korah left to his own devices goes mad, as does Ben Zoma. They are on the outside, opposed to God’s Will, which, as always, will be end up being done, because the plan is both subtle and inexorable. We

don't get to where God needs us to go by only being good, we get there by making lots of mistakes despite meaning well; and by blundering. God's plan includes self-correcting mechanisms for us (in the shape of Aaron and the priesthood, and even self correcting mechanisms to fix the priesthood when it loses touch), it's the divine plan and all the angles are covered. You needn't be anxious about messing up or spoiling God's plan, it will happen regardless of your input. Stop worrying about ruining everything with your ignorance, stupidity and ineptitude - you cannot begin to fathom the meaning of it all until you've ruined everything you've touched^{vii}. You'll keep doing it all wrong until you do it right, that's the plan. King Solomon said, 'Blessed is the one who is always fearful,' (Prov. 28:14) while Reb Nachman of Breslov argued that 'the whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the main thing, the chief thing is not to be afraid at all.' (*Likutei Mehoran - Batra* 48)

We don't need Korah, King Solomon, Ben Zoma or the chief rabbinate to police us and prevent us from sinning. We need Aaron to help us make our dreams of God come true!

ⁱ The Klausenberger Rebbe (1905-1994) had this to say, 'My father (R. Tzvi Hirsh Halberstam of Rudnik 1851-1918) narrated the following which was told to him by my grandfather, (R. Yekusiel Yehuda Teitelbaum of Sighet 1808–1883), the *Yetev Lev*, who heard it from the mouth of his holy grandfather, R. Moshe Teitelbaum of Ujhely (1759–1841), the *Yismach Moshe*.

"In a previous *Gilgul* - incarnation," the *Yismach Moshe* explained. "I was a part of that generation which experienced the Exodus from Egypt. I still recall the time I spent in Egypt and the face of my tormentor, the overseer who ordered my tasks. If I saw him today I would still be able to pick him out from among a hundred gentiles. I remember exactly what my house in Egypt looked like and can recall every detail of the furniture, where each and every pot and pan had its place."

"That means you still remember standing at Sinai, witnessing the Revelation," said his grandson, the *Yetev Lev*.

"Naturally," he answered. "Of course I remember receiving the Torah at Sinai, as though it happened yesterday."

"Do you remember the dispute with Korah?"

"Yes."

"What was really going on during that dispute, what was the general consensus?"

"There were three groups. First was the group backing Moses, 'Moses is true and his Torah is true,' they said. The second group backed Korah, while the third group stood on the side, not mixing into the dispute."

"Which group did you belong to?" asked his grandson.

"I didn't get involved in the dispute," answered the older man.

The *Yetev Lev* was astonished, asking, "How could you let such a thing happen. You heard them saying terrible things about Moses our Teacher and you just stood by, saying nothing?"

The *Yismach Moshe* replied, "You're still too young for me to be able to explain it so you can understand."

The Seer of Lublin (c. 1745 – 1815) used to refer to him as 'my holy ancestor, Korah'.

ⁱⁱ Loosely translated it reads, '...Cain had to be the firstborn of [of Adam and Eve] due to the mystery hidden in the verse, 'A woman of valor is her husband's crown' (Prov. 12:4). *GEVURAH*-Withholding is feminine (i.e. Cain), while *HESED*-Giving is masculine (i.e. Abel). Now, in the future-to-come all the offspring of Cain will be Cohen – Priests while the offspring of Abel who are currently the Cohens will become the Levites, because everything which is currently Levitical emanating from the *GEVURAH*-Withholding side, such as Korah the Levi, will be taken by the offspring of Cain. They will have the Cohen-Priesthood since it really belongs to the firstborns...' (Shaar HaGilgulim - Hakdama 35)

ⁱⁱⁱ As though the Zohar were suggesting that God's handwriting displays different and contradictory personality traits depending on which hand God is writing with. If, as tradition has it, the Written Torah is God writing Himself, then two-handed writing must reveal two selves. A very subtle way of saying there are various possibilities for the expression of divine will, and not all of them are compatible with each other. In humans the difference between hands becomes very obvious in the handwriting, as each hand is controlled by a different side of the split human brain, wherein each struggles for dominance. In God there is no brain, no split and no opposite sides. But by introducing the idea that God has left-hand writing and right-hand writing the Zohar is making space to introduce an arena of conflict and the need for a dominant paradigm within the Sephirotic Tree of Life. Thus the Second Day of Creation provides the first intimation of the possibilities of balance and imbalance in the Divine Narrative.

^{iv} The Tribe of Levi always guards itself against overstepping the boundaries of Torah law. The truth is that all laws of the Torah are clothed in garments so that everyone can grasp and observe and obey them. But there are times when God wants to vanquish the

person, as is written, 'So that Your words may be seen to be right, and You may be clear when You are judging.' (Ps. 51:6) The Tribe of Levi, however, must not worship the Golden Calf, for them to do so will mean doing damage to the very source of their Life-Force, damage they will never be able to repair. The sin of the Golden Calf sprang from the desire to grasp the Light of God before the time was right. (Mei Hashiloach Vol. II Ki Tavo)

^v We read in the Midrash, 'Korah was such a brilliant man, what possessed him to do such a stupid thing? He was deceived by his own vision, seeing, prophetically, that a chain of greatness would be coming out of him, (4,000 Levite musicians of the First Temple era led by the Sons of Korah).' (Num. Rabba 18:8)

^{vi} *Mei Hashiloach* Vol. I *Emor*

^{vii} Gittin 43a