

Dvar Torah by Rabbi Chanoch Yeres

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

Graciously shared with PhiloTorah

Korach

We find our weekly Parsha named for an anti-hero. There is valid issue in learning from someone how not to emulate, whose characteristics are wrong and behaviors whose are not be adopted.

Korach was an ambitious person who used his demagoguery to incite the people. The Midrash describes in length the methods of Korach. He championed himself as the protector of the poor and the defender of equal standards for all. He used convincing arguments claiming Moshe's decisions were of self-interests and nepotism, between him and his brother, Aharon.

Yet, where in the text do we get our first understandings of the wheelings and dealings of Korach? Maybe we jumped to conclusions and accused Korach falsely too quickly. Perhaps Korach was simply trying to make the fledgling new Jewish nation, more democratic with human and social values.

The first hint seems to be the first two words in the Parsha. VAYIKACH KORACH - "And Korach took" What did he take? No object is mentioned that he took. Maybe read, "Korach betook" meaning he took himself. The great Aramaic translator, Onkelos, translates the words as "Vitpileig Korach" and

Korach separated himself. There is nothing specific, no item in particular that Korach "took", rather Korach just took; he was a taker. Described as someone who is just interested in taking from others, we immediately realize that the Parsha is revealing the dangers of one who is motivated by what others have and what he feels he is lacking. This is the integral flaw presented to us from the very onset of the text, especially in the hands of a leader.

The story seems to teach us that a person, who wants to become a leader, needs to start by giving. If he receives honor and compensation, that is understood. However, that is not the main goal or purpose of being in a leadership role, it is rather to help and give to others. In contrast, one of our great Jewish leaders, Avraham Avinu portrayed to us in the text as one who gave willingly to all those in need. He opened his tent in every direction to host and feed strangers at all hours of the day no matter what his physical condition was. He never asked or expected anything in return. Nor Moshe Rabbeinu, who the text quotes him as saying that never, took a donkey to travel on from anyone of the people. This is a true leader and not Korach described as a "taker".

The true characteristic of any leader is not what one has acquired but what one has given. Korach teaches us not to look for what one HAS but rather what one IS.

