

This second explanation is extremely surprising. After all, the 250 heads of the Sanhedrin are depicted as **“princes of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown.”** They were distinguished, exemplary individuals. So, how did Korach manage to seduce them with words to join his cause opposing the leader and teacher of Yisrael, its preeminent navi, Moshe Rabeinu? They had witnessed with their own eyes what he had accomplished as G-d’s agent—the miraculous exodus from Mitzrayim, Matan Torah at Har Sinai, his sojourn in the heavens forty days and forty nights to receive all of Torah she’b’chsav and Torah she’b’al peh. Yet, somehow Korach managed to lure them to join him in his opposition of Moshe Rabeinu.

Additionally, Moshe’s response was extremely surprising. Exemplifying the concept of “a tzaddik decrees and HKB”H enacts,” Moshe punished them by ordering the earth to open its mouth and swallow the insurgents (ibid. 28):

“ויאמר משה בזאת תדעון כי ה' שלחני לעשות את כל המעשים האלה כי לא מלבי, אם כמות כל האדם ימותון אלה ופקודת כל האדם יפקד עליהם לא ה' שלחני, ואם בריאה יברא ה' ופצתה האדמה את פיה ובלעה אותם ואת כל אשר להם וירדו חיים שאולה, וידעתם כי נאצו האנשים האלה את ה'.”

Moshe said, “Through this shall you know that Hashem has sent me to perform all these acts, for it was not from my heart. If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me. But if Hashem will create a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the abyss ('Sheol'), then you shall know that these men have provoked Hashem!”

Clearly, Moshe’s decree deserves further explanation. Why did it not suffice to punish Korach and his cohorts with a normal, human death implemented by HKB”H? Even in that scenario, it would have been evident that everything Moshe did was exclusively as the agent of HKB”H. This was indeed the case with the 250 leaders of the Sanhedrin who offered ketores (incense) and were consumed by fire. Notwithstanding, Moshe insisted on this unique, peculiar punishment: **“But if Hashem will create**

a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the abyss ('Sheol').”

The Intriguing Revelation of the Targum YoNasan Korach’s Power Stemmed from Yosef’s Treasure that He Found

To answer these questions, we will begin by introducing what the holy Tanna, YoNasan ben Uziel, writes in Targum YoNasan on the passuk (ibid. 19): **“ויקהל עליהם קרח את כל העדה אל פתח אהל מועד וירא כבוד ה' אל כל העדה—Korach gathered the entire assembly to the entrance of the Ohel Mo’ed, and the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire assembly.** He writes that Korach felt entitled because his newfound wealth; for he had found two of Yosef’s hidden treasures full of silver and gold. He planned to use his wealth to oust Moshe and Aharon and do away with them; however, the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire assembly.

The source for this is found in the Gemara (Pesachim 119a): **“שלוש מטמוניות הטמין יוסף במצרים, אחת נתגלה לקרח, ואחת נתגלה לאנטונינוס בן אַסְיִרוֹס, ואחת גנוזה לצדיקים לעתיד לבוא. Yosef hid three fortunes in Mitzrayim; one was revealed to Korach; one was revealed to Antoninus ben Severus; one is stored away for the tzaddikim le’asid la’vo.** Note that according to the Gemara, Korach only found one of Yosef’s three hidden treasures.

We find another pertinent exposition in the Gemara (ibid.) related to the passuk (Koheles 5, 12): **“עושר שמוזר לבעליו לרעתו, אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש זו עושרו של קרח, שנאמר ואת כל היקום Riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune”—Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: This refers to the wealth of Korach. As it says (Devarim 11,6): “And all the wealth at their feet.”** The Rashbam explains that because of his vast wealth, Korach became arrogant and was removed from the world.

The Wonderful Interpretation of the Maharsha

The Maharsha (Sanhedrin 110a) explains how Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish proved that Korach’s wealth was to his detriment from the passuk: **“And all the**

wealth at their feet.” For, this passuk was actually said in relation to Datan and Aviram (ibid.): **“ואשר עשה לדתן ולאבירם בני אליאב בן ראובן אשר פצתה הארץ את פיה ותבלעם ואת בתיהם. And what he did to Datan and Aviram the sons of Eliav son of Reuven, when the earth opened its mouth wide and swallowed them and their households and their tents, and all the fortunes at their feet, in the midst of all Yisrael.”**

Let us explain. The reason Datan and Aviram had the audacity to openly oppose Moshe Rabeinu was because Korach bribed them with his money and empowered them. This explains why Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish proved that Korach’s wealth was to his detriment from the passuk related to Datan and Aviram stating that they and their fortunes were swallowed by the earth.

It appears that we can substantiate the claim that Korach seduced them with his money from an exposition in the Gemara (A.Z. 5a) related to the passuk (Shemos 4, 19): **“ויאמר ה' אל משה במדין לך שוב מצרים: Hashem said to Moshe in Midian, “Go, return to Mitzrayim, for all the people who seek your life have died.”** This refers to Datan and Aviram who lost their possessions and wealth, since a pauper is viewed as a dead man. In other words, they became extremely poor. Yet, the passuk says that they were swallowed up by the earth along with all of their fortunes. Where did that money come from? It corroborates the claim that Korach had bribed them with his money.

This concurs magnificently with the comments of the Maharsha (ibid.) apropos the exposition in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 109b): **“ויקה קרח, אמר ריש לקיש שלקה מקח: Korach took”: Reish Lakish said that he purchased a bad acquisition for himself.** The various commentaries struggle to explain what he purchased. According to what we have discussed, however, it is referring to the **“bad acquisition”** of the 250 leaders.

I would like to demonstrate that the term “taking” is associated with a **“מקח” – a purchase or acquisition.** The Gemara (Kiddushin 2a) expounds on the passuk

chronicling the purchase of the Me’aras HaMachpeilah by Avraham Avinu (Bereishis 23, 13): **“נתתי כסף השדה קח ממני, וקיחה איקרי קנין דכתיב השדה אשר קנה אברהם”** **“I give the price of the field, take (accept) it from me.”** Taking is called an acquisition, as it is written (ibid. 25, 10): **“The field that Avraham had bought . . .”** The same applies here. When he says **“ויקה קרח”**, it is informing us that he acquired something albeit to his detriment. Further on it explains what he acquired with his money: **“Two hundred and fifty of them, princes of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown.”**

Korach Was Pharaoh’s Treasurer

We can now resolve the puzzling question that bothered the commentaries. How did Korach manage to discover one of the fortunes hidden by Yosef? We will attempt to answer this question by referring to the Maharsha (ibid.). Our sages deduced that Yosef hid treasures in Mitzrayim from the following passuk (ibid. 47, 14): **“וילקט יוסף את כל הכסף הנמצא בארץ מצרים ובארץ כנען בשבר: Yosef gathered all the money (“kesef”) that was to be found in the land of Mitzrayim and in the land of Canaan for the purchases that they were purchasing; Yosef brought the money (“kesef”) into Pharaoh’s palace.** The term **“ביתה”** suggests that it is referring to a secluded place inside Pharaoh’s palace. They had a tradition that he hid three fortunes.

It is worthwhile noting that the Tzror HaMor (Mikeitz) provides the same explanation as the Maharsha in relation to this passuk. He, however, adds that this is evident from the language of the passuk. For, at the beginning of the passuk it states that **“Yosef gathered all the money,”** whereas at the end of the passuk, it states: **“Yosef brought the money into Pharaoh’s palace,”** omitting the word **“all.”** This suggests that Yosef only hid a portion of the money. Then he adds: **Our blessed Rabbis taught that Yosef hid three treasures. One landed in the possession of Korach; one landed in the possession of Antoninus; and one will be discovered le’asid la’vo in the times of the Mashiach. They are implying that he (Yosef) did all of this in keeping with Pharaoh’s will and at**

his behest. For, kings stored great fortunes of silver and gold in their honor.

Let us add another piece of information from the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 18, 15): "קרה שהיה קתליקוס Korach was the treasurer of Pharaoh's palace; he had the keys to his treasuries. Thus, it is not far-fetched to presume that Korach, Pharaoh's treasurer, who sought wealth, discovered one of the fortunes that Yosef hid in Pharaoh's palace, and stole it for himself.

Yosef HaTzaddik Buried the Treasures in the Ground to Purify Them of Their Tumah

Following this line of reasoning, we will now explain Yosef's rationale for hiding these three treasures instead of revealing their location to Yisrael to take out of Mitzrayim with them along with the rest of the Egyptian wealth they were destined to receive. In Avodas Yisrael (Mikeitz), the holy Maggid of Kozhnitz, zy"n, comments on the passuk (ibid. 41, 49): «**ויצבור**» «**Yosef amassed grain like the sand of the sea:**

G-d forbid that it was the practice of the offspring of Yaakov Avinu, a"n, and the epitome of a tzaddik to spend his time gathering and accumulating silver and gold like the majority of people. Rather his intention was for the sake of Heaven, to gather the holy sparks . . . referred to metaphorically as "silver" ("kesef") . . . He brought them to Pharaoh's palace under his supervision. Thus, it would subsequently be easier for Bnei Yisrael to take out the holy sparks that had already been brought in and gathered together . . . The same explanation is presented by the Chasam Sofer (Vayigash).

We can now suggest that Yosef only revealed the location of money that he knew was ready to be elevated to the realm of kedushah. Hence, he returned it to the Egyptians knowing that HKB"H was going to instruct Moshe to have Yisrael borrow silver and gold vessels from them. They contained sparks of kedushah that Yosef had already extracted from the tumah of Mitzrayim. The three aforementioned

treasures, however, were still permeated with tumah. As such, they were not ready to enter the realm of kedushah; so, he sequestered them.

Now, we are taught in the Gemara (B.M. 42a): "אמר שמואל כספים אין להם שמירה אלא בקרקע"—**Shmuel said: The only way to safeguard money is in the ground.** This helps us understand the rationale of Yosef HaTzaddik for burying the three treasures in the ground. To clarify the matter, we will introduce a fantastic insight from the incredible teachings of the esteemed Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy"n, in Zera Kodesh (Ha'azinu). In his own sacred way, he interprets the formula we recite thrice daily at the conclusion of Shemoneh Esrei (Elokei Netzor): "ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה"—**let my soul (being) be like dust to all.**

He explains that we pray to Hashem to be like dust, since HKB"H endowed it with the unique capacity to filter out all the good components of everything—even from manure. Those good components are sparks of kedushah that can then be incorporated into healthy vegetation to nourish human beings. If Jews recite Berachos after consuming them and enjoying them, they purify those sparks and elevate them to their ultimate state of refinement. Here are his sacred words:

"והנה אנו מתפללין ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה... הפירוש הוא כך, דהנה אנו רואים בארץ ועפר, שמצמיח לנו כל מיני טובות שבעולם, ועוד הפלא ופלא מצינו בארץ, שכל מה שמוסיפים עליה זבל היא מצמחת יותר, אף שהזבל הוא דבר מאוס מאד, וכן כל מה שהזבל מטונף בטינופת יותר מצמיח עוד יותר.

והענין הוא, שהארץ מבררת אף קצת מהקצת טוב עדיין שבטינופת, ונוטלת מזה הטוב כח הצמיחה, עד שפועלת שמזה הטינופת בא גם כן איזה דבר שבקדושה שפועל כח הצמיחה, ואחר כך מברכין עליה המוציא לחם מן הארץ וכל ברכות הנהגין, וזהו שאומרים ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה, שמכל דבר אף מה שנראה לעין שאין בו טוב כלל כנ"ל, גם כן נפשי תוציא מזה ניצוצי קדושה והטוב שבו כעפר".

He remarks on the phenomenon of growth from the earth. We see that although the earth is composed of dust and dirt, all sorts of bounty and good things grow from the earth. Remarkably, the more fertilizer that is added, the more and better things grow. This occurs despite the fact that fertilizer is disgusting. In fact, the dirtier and more putrid the better.

The secret, however, is that the earth finds the minute good that still remains in the putrid manure. From that tiny positive bit of good it extracts the potential for growth. Consequently, some element of kedushah is released and stimulates growth. Subsequently, we are able to recite the berachah of "המוציא לחם מן הארץ" and all the other Berachos we recite over things that we derive pleasure and benefit from. This then is the message conveyed by the words "ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה"—**and let my soul be like dust to all**. From all things, even those things that appear to be devoid of any good, let my soul find sparks of kedushah and good to extract like the dust does.

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I will expand on this sacred insight by referring to what the Ba'al Shem Tov, zy"l, reveals to us in relation to the passuk (Tehillim 107, 5): «**רעבים גם צמאים נפשם**» «**hungry and also thirsty, their soul became faint within them**. HKB"H intentionally created man such that he could not survive without eating and drinking, because sparks of kedushah related to his being are found within the food and drink a man consumes. By eating and drinking "I'shem shamayim," and reciting Berachos with proper intent, he rectifies and elevates those sparks of kedushah.

Furthermore, concerning the creation of man, it is written (Bereishis 2, 7): «**וייצר ה' אלקים את האדם עפר מן האדמה, ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה**»—**and Hashem Elokim formed man of soil from the earth, and blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living soul**. Rashi comments: **He gathered together soil from the entire earth, from the four directions**. We can propose that HKB"H created man from the dirt of the four corners of the earth, so that he would be like the earth possessing the vital capacity to filter out the sparks of kedushah from everything that exists.

The Earth Cleanses Man's Body of the Contamination of the Nachash

We will now add an incredible idea. We know that death did not become a part of life and creation until after Adam HaRishon sinned with the Eitz HaDa'as. As it is written (ibid. 2, 17): «**ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו**»

«**but of the Eitz HaDa'as Tov VaRa you must not eat thereof; for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die**. This implies that had Adam not sinned, the dust that made up his physical body would have maintained its kedushah and would have continued its sacred mission and work uninterrupted; it would have clarified all of the sparks of kedushah until the entire world would have achieved its ultimate tikun.

However, from the moment Adam and Chava were persuaded by the "nachash hakadmoni" to betray Hashem by eating from the forbidden Eitz HaDa'as, the nachash injected its perversion and pollution into their bodies. As a result, the kedushah of their body was defiled. Therefore, HKB"H decreed that man must die returning to the earth from which he was created, as it is written (ibid. 3, 19): «**כי עפר אתה**» «**for you are dust and to dust shall you return**. Burial in the ground enables the earth to absorb the perversion and pollution that has contaminated the body. The Arizal explains this concept in Ta'amei HaMitzvos (Parshas Veyechi, Mitzvas Kevurah): **The secret of burying the dead . . . it is imperative that those performing the burial have in mind that all the contamination that polluted his soul due to the sin of Adam HaRishon be absorbed by the ground, so that it will remain clean (unpolluted)**.

With this in mind, it appears that we can explain why Yosef HaTzaddik buried the three treasures in the ground. He sensed via his "ruach hakodesh" that it was not yet the time to clarify and refine them. They needed to first be cleansed of the perversion of Mitzrayim. Therefore, he buried them in the ground, which possesses the unique capacity to eliminate the pollution of tumah. Then, when the time is right, and they have been cleansed of all contamination, HKB"H, Who orchestrates everything, will arrange for them to be found by the appropriate person.

Thus, it was orchestrated from above for the treasures to be completely free of contamination in the times of Antoninus King of Rome. Its location was revealed to him, and he used his newfound fortune

to benefit and enrich Rabeinu HaKadosh. Korach, however, Pharaoh's avaricious treasurer, found the treasure that had not yet been completely purified of the tumah of Mitzrayim. Hence, his newfound wealth led to his downfall, in keeping with the words of Koheles: "**Riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune.**" The third treasure was contaminated with the highest level of tumah—tumah from the fiftieth level. It will not be cleansed of all its perversion and pollution until le'asid la'vo.

Moshe Rabeinu Returned Korach and His Possessions to the Earth to Be Cleansed

We can now rejoice! We can shed some light on the profound intent of Moshe Rabeinu. Why did he order such an unusual phenomenon—for the earth to open its mouth? Why did it not suffice for Korach and his cohorts to simply die normal deaths?

Based on what we have learned, here is the explanation. Had they died normal, human deaths, they would have been buried immediately afterwards. That would have cleansed their bodies of the perversion and pollution of the nachash. Also, the fortune that Korach stole from Yosef's treasure that he discovered

prematurely—before the specified time—was not meant to be purified in the earth; it is destined to be given to all of Yisrael at the time of the future geulah. Therefore, Moshe Rabeinu devised a clever scheme. He decreed: "**But if Hashem will create a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the abyss ('Sheol').**"

Thus, they would not be cleansed immediately like after a normal burial. Instead, they would suffer in the depths of "Sheol," in the fires of Gehinnom, while still alive. The Gemara (B.B. 74a) teaches us that every thirty days, they are churned up in Gehinnom like meat in a cauldron, and they can be heard proclaiming: "משה ותורתו אמת"—**Moshe and his Torah are emes.** This will continue until they are fortunate to be purified along with all of their possessions—the possessions that originated from the treasure Yosef buried in the ground for Yisrael le'asid la'vo. The Arizal in Sha'ar HaPesukim finds an allusion to this ultimate tikun in the passuk (Tehillim 92, 13): "צדיק כתמוֹר"—**a tzaddik will flourish like a date-tree.** The last letters of these three words spell קרה, indicating that Korach will achieve tikun with the arrival of the future geulah—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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