

The Name Korach Was the Name of One of the Chieftains of Eisav Causing Korach to Mock the Removal of the Hair and Pursue Excesses

The Chasam Sofer deduces from this that the name **Korach** caused him to tragically forfeit all of the kedushah he was in line to inherit from his holy progenitors. The name Korach, the name of one of Eisav's wicked descendants, carried such a negative impact that it negated the force of kedushah that should have accrued to Korach from his three holy predecessors—Yitzhar, Kehas and Levi. After all, we are taught in the Gemara (Yoma 38b): **לֹא מְסַקִּינָן בְּשֵׁמֵיהֶם**—**we do not use the names of the wicked**. We see the unfortunate consequences that resulted from

Since it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated from a multitude of perspectives—“shivim panim”—we will broaden the scope of the inquiry of the Chasam Sofer. Even if **Korach** was not the name of one of Eisav’s chieftains, the name itself is unflattering and possesses a negative context. This is evident from the following passuk (Devarim 14, 1): “בנים אתם לה’ אלקיכם לא תתגודדו ולא תשימו ‘קרחא’ בין עיניכם:” **“you are children to Hashem, your G-d; you shall**

not cut yourselves, and you shall not make a bald spot (“korchah”) between your eyes for a dead person.

I would like to propose a wonderful explanation based on the following Gemara (Berachos 7b): **”מנא לן דשמא גרים, אמר רבי אלעזר דאמר קרא לכו חזו מפעלות ה' אשר שם שמות בארץ. From where do we know that a person's name influences future occurrences? Rabbi Elazar said: Because the passuk says (Tehillim 46, 9): “Go and see the works of G-d, Who has wrought devastations in the land.” Do not pronounce the word “shamot” (devastations) but rather “sheimot” (names). Hence, they expounded in the Gemara (ibid. 55a): **”בצלאל: Betzalel was named for his wisdom . . . “you were in G-d's shadow, and that is how you knew.”** Similarly, we are taught in the Gemara (Sotah 34b): **”אמר רבי יצחק דבר זה מסורת בידינו מאבותינו, מרגלים על: שם מעשיהם נקראו, ואנו לא עלתה בידינו אלא אחד סתור בן מיכאל, סתור. Rabbi Yitzchak said: This matter is a tradition in our hands from our fathers that the “meraglim” were named in accordance with their deeds. We, however, have retained in our hands only one (of these expositions): Setur ben Michael (Bamidbar 13, 13, the spy from shevet Asher)—Setur, because he denied (“satar”) the deeds of HKB”H; Michael, because he depicted himself (G-d) as a weakling (“mach”).****

We find an amazing passage in the Midrash regarding this matter (Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayah, 449):

”אילו זכו הדורות היה הקב”ה קורא שם לכל אחד ואחד, ומשמו היו יודעים את טיבו ואת מעשיו... אמרו רבותינו כשהיה רבי מאיר רואה אדם, היה למד שמו ומשמו היה יודע את מעשיו, פעם אחת באו אצלו שני תלמידים, והיה שם אחד מהם כידור, אמר רבי מאיר לתלמידיו הזהירו מכידור זה, אמרו לו רבי בן תורה הוא, אמר להם אף על פי כן הזהירו ממנו, אחר ימים הלכו למרחץ והפקידו בגדיהם אצל כידור ונכנסו למרחץ. מה עשה אותו כידור, נטל בגדיהם והלך לו, יצאו ולא מצאוהו, הלכו לבתיהם ולבשו בגדים אחרים. באו לפני רבי מאיר, אמר להם מה ראיתם להחליף בגדיכם, ספרו לו המאורע, אמר להם לא אמרתי לכם הזהירו עצמכם מכידור זה, אמרו לו בבקשה ממך רבינו, מנין היית יודע, אמר משמו שנקרא כידור, שנאמר כי דור תהפוכות המה.”

Had the generations been deemed worthy, HKB”H would have named each and every individual; from

his name, we would have known his character and his deeds . . . Our Rabbis said that when Rabbi Meir saw a person, he would learn his name and from his name he would know his deeds. Once two students came to him; one of them was named Kidur. Rabbi Meir said to his students, “Be wary of this Kidur.” They responded to him, “But Rebbe, he learns Torah.” He answered them, “Even so, beware of him.” Several days later, they went to the bathhouse, entrusted their clothes to Kidur, and went into the bathhouse. What did that Kidur do? He took their clothes and left. When they (the other students) came out and did not find him, they went to their homes and put on different clothes. Then they went to Rabbi Meir. He asked them, “Why did you decide to change your clothes?” They told him what happened. He said to them, “Did I not warn you to guard yourselves from this Kidur?!” They responded to him, “Excuse us, Rabeinu, but how did you know?” He answered, “From the fact that his name is Kidur.” For, it states (Devarim 32, 20): **”כי דור תהפוכות המה”—for they are a generation (“ki-dor”) of perversity.**

A Person Can Opt to Actualize the Positive Aspects of His Name or the Negative Aspects

It is important, however, to understand a fundamental principle. Occasionally, a person's name has negative implications. Notwithstanding, one of our principles of faith teaches us that every person has the choice to do good or bad. This is the message conveyed by the following passuk (ibid. 30, 15): **”ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע”**—see, I have placed before you today **life and good, and death and evil.** Several pesukim later, HKB”H concludes by saying (ibid. 19): **”ובחרת בחיים למען: and you shall choose life, so that you will live—you and your offspring.** Undoubtedly, HKB”H's wants us to opt for the good, even if one's name has negative implications, chas v'shalom. In other words, even in this situation, a person is still capable of overcoming the negative implications of his name and choosing to do what is good and right. This may seem difficult to comprehend. Seeing as a person's name reflects his true nature, how is it possible for him to overcome its negative connotations?

So, let us explain. Every person has two yetzers—a good inclination and a bad inclination. Similarly, one’s name, reflecting one’s true nature and essence, can be expressed for good or for bad. Sometimes the negative, bad aspect is stronger, and sometimes the positive, good aspect is stronger. In either situation, a person is heavenly endowed with the strength to choose the good over the bad.

We will now present sources for this incredible chiddush. We will begin with the sacred words of the divine kabbalist, Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Pano, z"l, in Asarah Ma'amaros. He explains why HKB"H named the first man **Adam**, as it is written (Bereishis 5, 2): **"זכר ונקבה בראם ויכרך: אדם ביום הבראם"**—**male and female He created them. He blessed them and named them Adam on the day that they were created.**

Now, the name **Adam** has two connotations. The first relates to the physical, material world and is related to the word "אדמה" – "**adamah.**" This reflects the fact that man's body was formed from the earth, as it is written (ibid. 2, 7): "וַיִּיצַר ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה"—**and Hashem Elokim formed man of soil from the earth.** The second connotation relates to man's spiritual nature, as it is written (Yeshayah 14, 14): "אֲדַמָּה לְעֵלְיוֹן"—implying that man must strive to emulate HKB"Y—the Most High. An example of this is found in the Yerushalmi (Peiah 1, 1): "אבא שאול אומר אדמה לו, :—**Abba Shaul says: I will emulate Him; just as He is gracious and compassionate, so you should be gracious and compassionate.**

In keeping with this discussion, HKB”H wished to teach us that a person can choose to actualize the name **Adam** in a positive manner or a negative manner. He may follow the advice of his yetzer hara and pursue the mundane, earthly pleasures and desires of Olam HaZeh—reflecting the fact that he was formed from the earth—“**adamah.**” Conversely, he may follow the counsel of his yetzer hatov and aspire to emulate HKB”H by studying Torah and performing good deeds and acts of kindness—reflecting the notion of “**אדמה לעליון**”.

Every Jew Has a Name Reflecting Kedushah and a Name Reflecting Tumah

Our next source points out that this does not apply only to the name **Adam**. In fact, the name of every Jew has two

connotations. The great Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy" a, discusses this in Zera Kodesh (Ki Seitzei) based on a precious teaching from the esteemed Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, zy" a. He comments on the passuk (Devarim 21, 10): "כי תצא למלחמה על אויביך ונתנו ה' אלקיך בידיך ושביית שבינו" — **when you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its people as captives.** Here is a concise translation of his illuminating insight:

The first letters of the words (Shemos 1, 1): וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת: בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל—and these are the names of Bnei Yisrael—are an anagram for שְׁבִי"ו. For, a Jew's name reflects the divine nature of the neshamah within him. Thus, when Yisrael were in galus, the Torah teaches us that “these were the names of Bnei Yisrael” who entered the galus of Mitzrayim. There, the forces of evil prevailed, and their names, reflections of their neshamos, sank in galus, until they were restored by the Almighty. In other words, their names with their inherent qualities were taken captive.

The holy Rav of Rimanov, ztz"l, taught that every Jew has a name of kedushah and contrastingly a name of tumah affiliated with the forces of evil. A tzaddik must address this by requesting that Hashem reveal to him his name that is affiliated with the forces of evil. Then, he will be able to restore that name as well to the realm of kedushah. This is the implication of "ושבית שביו"—retrieving your name from the klipah and returning it to the realm of kedushah.

Let us elaborate. As we have learned, a Jew's name reflects his essence and inner self. Hence, his name reflects two contradictory, opposite natures—one controlled by the yetzer hatov and one by the yetzer hara. For this reason, the esteemed Rabbi of Rimanov, zy" a, advises a Jew to ask Hashem to help him identify the part of his name affiliated with the yetzer hara. Thus, he can overcome its negative, undesirable influence and restore it to the realm of kedushah to better serve Hashem.

So, indeed, the names of the “meraglim” foretold that they were likely to fail in their mission. Nevertheless, it is also clear that they possessed the power and choice to

overcome the negative implications of their names and transform them into names associated with good. For example, we cited above the exposition in the Gemara regarding the name **Setur ben Michael**: **סתור בן מיכאל**. In reality, however, he could have chosen to transform his name and activate its positive side. Then, he would have been able to resist the influence and counsel of the other meraglim. As such, his name would have taken on an opposite meaning: **Setur, because he refuted ("satar") the report of the meraglim. Michael, because he weakened them.** But since he did not resist the persuasive influence of the other spies, the Gemara expounds his name disparagingly, a reflection of the negative aspect of his name.

Notwithstanding, Chazal teach us that it is not advisable to give a child the name of a rasha. This concurs with another teaching in the Gemara (Yoma 38b) expounding on the passuk (Mishlei 10, 7): **—but the name of the wicked ("reshaim") will rot.** **מאי ושם רשעים ירקב, אמר**—**what is the meaning of: "But the name of the wicked will rot"? Rabbi Elazar said: Rust should grow on their names, meaning that we do not use their names.** Rashi explains: **A person should not give his son the name of a wicked person,** i.e., the name of a wicked person should be like an item that accumulates rust, because it is not used. The reason for this practice should be obvious. A rasha tarnished his name by allowing its negative, bad aspect to prevail over its positive, good aspect. Since the same is liable to occur with anyone given that name, we avoid giving that name.

The Descendants of Levi Named Their Son Korach so that He Would Shave Off His Body Hair

Following this line of reasoning, we will proceed to explain why this righteous Levite family chose to name this son specifically **Korach**. They foresaw via their "ruach hakodesh" that HKB"H was destined to instruct Moshe Rabeinu to purify the leviim by shaving their entire bodies to remove all of their body hair. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Bamidbar 8, 5):

"וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, קח את הלויים מתוך בני ישראל וטהרת אותם, וככה תעשה להם לטהרם הזה עליהם מי חטאת והעבירו תער על כל בשרם

וכבסו בגדיהם והיטהרו... והניף אהרן את הלויים תנופה לפני ה' מאת בני ישראל והיו לעבוד את עבודת ה'... והבדלת את הלויים מתוך בני ישראל והיו לי הלויים... כי נתונים נתונים המה לי מתוך בני ישראל תחת פטרת כל רחם בכור כל מבני ישראל לקחתי אותם לי".

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, **"Take the Leviim from among Bnei Yisrael and purify them. So shall you do to them to purify them: Sprinkle upon them water of purification, and let them pass a razor over their entire flesh, and let them immerse their garments and they shall become pure. . . Aharon shall wave the leviim before Hashem from Bnei Yisrael and they shall be to perform the service of Hashem. . . You shall separate the leviim from among Bnei Yisrael, and the leviim shall be mine. . . For given, given are they to Me from among Bnei Yisrael; in place of the first issue of every womb, the firstborn of everyone of Bnei Yisrael, have I taken them to Myself."**

In Yearos Dvash (Part 1, 6), the brilliant Rabbi YehaNasan Eybeschutz, zy"a, explains why HKB"H ordered the leviim to be shaven in this manner. He explains that body hair represents the excesses and physical desires that a Jew should shun and avoid. Here is a summary of his fascinating remarks:

A Jew must distance himself from excesses (overindulgence). This is why it did not suffice for a nazir to merely swear to abstain from wine and the like—to minimize excesses—for thirty days. He must accustom himself to refrain from excessive cravings always. Therefore, at the conclusion of his period as a nazir, he must shave off all the hair on his head to symbolize that he plans to minimize excesses and will only do what is necessary for human survival.

The same applies to the leviim. They were designated to serve Hashem and sing in His house. They were not allotted a portion of their own but were dependent on gifts and donations. They must avoid all excesses. Therefore, when they were sanctified and consecrated to serve in Hashem's house, Moshe shaved off all of their hair to minimize excesses as much as possible. Thus, they would be ready for matters of kedushah and the service of Hashem exclusively.

They taught the same regarding a king (Ta'anis 17a). **He must shave daily, because as a king, he must be take greater care to resist excessive desires. Hence, he was commanded not to accumulate wealth, horses, and wives. Similarly, a kohen-gadol shaved weekly to minimize excesses. Regarding Korach, he was extremely proud of his exceptional riches and possessions—which are only temporary. Hence, he mocked Moshe for shaving the leviim and removing their hair with a razor. Thus, his fate was sealed.**

In Tiferes YehaNasan (Nasso), he applies this rationale to explain the instruction HKB"H gave the kohen regarding a "sotah" (ibid. 5, 18): **"ופרע את ראש האשה"—and uncover the woman's head. It is because hair reflects excesses. Abundant hair is associated with the desire of excesses. Therefore, Eisav, who was very hairy, was gluttonous. In truth, a desire to eat and the like are necessary for the survival of the world. It must, however, be within limits and measured and not excessive.**

This is also consistent with what they expounded (Berachos 61a) **on the passuk** (ibid. 2, 22): **"ויבן ה' אלקים את חַבָּלֶיהָ"—that HKB"H braided Chava's hair—meaning that He tied her hair (into a neat, confined bundle) so that the excesses would not burst outwards. On the other hand, this is why the kohen was instructed to take apart the sotah's braided hair.**

The Negative Aspect of Korach's Name Caused Him to Ridicule the Removal of the Hair

We can now postulate that these righteous levite parents foresaw via their "ruach hakodesh" that this son would have a tendency to pursue the excesses associated with hair. We see from his attitude toward his wealth and riches that this was true. They also foresaw that Moshe Rabeinu was going to order the leviim to shave off all of their body-hair with a razor—to remove any allusion and connection with excesses and overindulgence. Hence, they deliberately named him **Korach** thinking that it would exert a positive influence on him—to remind him constantly that it was his sacred duty to be hairless—free of physical, bodily excesses.

This illuminates for us the insight of the Chasam Sofer. These leviim made an egregious error by giving Korach the name of a known rasha—one of the eleven chieftains of Edom—**Aluf Korach**. This name caused him to elevate the power of the klipah over the power of kedushah. Hence, his name has a derogatory connotation (Sanhedrin 109b): **"קרח שנעשה קרחה בישראל"—he was called Korach, because a bald spot was made in Yisrael on account of him.**

Now, it behooves us to make an important point. Not only did Korach not learn a lesson from the fact that **Korach** was the name of an evil person—that the removal of body-hair reminds a person to abstain from overindulgence and seeking extra kavod—but, on the contrary, it caused him to ridicule Moshe Rabeinu for removing all of the hair on his body with a razor. Here is a pertinent Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 18, 4):

"Korach took"—he took his tallis and went to take advice from his wife. After HKB"H instructed Moshe to take the leviim aside and purify them . . . and to pass a razor over their skin, he immediately did so to Korach. Korach began to wander among the people of Yisrael, and they did not recognize him. They inquired, "Who did this to you?" He said to them, "Moshe did this to me. Not only that, but he took me by my hands and feet, twirled be around, and told me that I was now tahor. Then, he brought his brother Aharon and adorned him like a kallah and placed him in the Ohel Mo'ed." Immediately, those who opposed (hated) Moshe began to incite the people of Yisrael against him.

Ohn ben Peles's Wife Saved Her Husband by Musing Up Her Hair

We can now appreciate the wonders of the Torah. In contrast to Korach's wife—who encouraged him to dispute the rulings and authority of Moshe and Aharon—the wife of Ohn ben Peles saved her husband from the fate of Korach and his assembly. Here is what we are taught in the Gemara (ibid.):

"אמר רב און בן פלת אשתו הצילתו, אמרה ליה מאי נפקא לך מינה, אי מר רבה אנת תלמידא, ואי מר רבה אנת תלמידא. אמר לה מאי אעביד, הואי בעצה ואשתבעי לי בהדיהו. "אמרה ליה ידענא דכולה כנישתא קדישתא נינהו דכתיב כי כל העדה כולם קדושים, אמרה ליה טוב דאנא מצילנא לך.

אשקיתיה חמרא וארזיתיה ואגניתיה גואי. אותבה על בבא וסתרתה למזיה,
כל דאתא חזיה דדר, אדהכי והכי אכלעו להו".

Rav said: Regarding Ohn ben Peles, his wife saved him. She said to him, "What does it matter to you (who wins)? If this master (Moshe) prevails, you will remain a disciple, and if that master (Korach) prevails, you will remain a disciple." You have nothing to gain. He said to her, "What should I do? I participated in their deliberations, and I swore to join them." She said to him, "I know that the entire assembly are all holy, as it is written (Bamidbar 16, 3): "For all the entire assembly, all of them, are holy." (Since they are modest and holy, they will not enter our tent if my hair is uncovered and unkempt.) She said to him, "Return home, for I will save you." She gave him wine to drink and got him drunk and put him to bed inside (their tent). She then sat at the entrance (of the tent) and let down her hair. Everyone (of Korach's assembly) who came (to summon Ohn) saw her (in this immodest state) and stayed away. Meanwhile (until Ohn ben Peles slept off his intoxication), they (Korach's assembly) were swallowed up.

Further on in the Gemara (ibid. 110a), Chazal confirm that as opposed to the wife of Ohn ben Peles, Korach's wife actually provoked his discontent after being shaved and encouraged him to oppose Moshe and Aharon. Thus,

the Gemara concludes: "היינו דכתיב חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה, זו אשתו של קרח"—this is the meaning of that which is written (Mishlei 14, 1): "The wise among women, each builds her house"—this is a reference to the wife of Ohn ben Peles; "but the foolish one tears it down with her hands"—this is a reference to the wife of Korach. The former was wise and constructive and saved her husband's life, whereas the latter was foolish and destructive, precipitating her husband's downfall and demise.

As we learned from the brilliant Rabbi Yehonasan Eybeschütz, zy"l, HKB"l braided and gathered together the hair on Chava's head to teach her "tzniyut"—to exhibit modesty and not to overindulge. This was the rationale for uncovering and mussing up the hair of the "sotah"; it indicated that she did not exhibit "tzniyut." Therefore, the wife of Ohn ben Peles cleverly let her hair down immodestly and mussed it up to ward off Korach's followers searching for her husband. In a sense, she was hinting to them that the aim of **Korach** was not to avoid excesses and overindulgence—symbolized by the removal of hair—but rather to indulge in riches and kavod. She was hinting to them the dangers of following Korach—that he would lead them to their doom. Thus, they understood that her husband, Ohn, would not be joining their rebellion.



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