



## 5784 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreiber Parashat Korach / פרשת קורח

### Every Jew is Holy: the Fundamental Error of Korach

In modern day Jewish discourse, it is a given that every Jew is holy. The inalienable sanctity of every member of *Klal Yisrael* is a fundamental baseline for how we interact with and talk about other Jews. The *Gemara* (*Moed Katan* 25a) states that if one is present during *yetziat neshama*, the departing of a Jewish soul from this world, he is obligated to rend his garment. The *Gemara* compares this to one who witnesses a *Sefer Torah* burning in front of him. The *Nefesh HaChayim* explains (4:11) that a Jewish soul's sanctity is the same quality as that of a Torah scroll. Hence, the only appropriate response over witnessing the loss of a Jewish soul is tearing *keriah*. Rav Soloveitchik tz'l was fond of noting that the sanctity of a Torah scroll does not manifest in the parchment on its own. It is rather infused into the letters by the Jewish scribe who creates it. The *neshama* of the *sofer* possesses the sanctity of a *sefer Torah*, enabling him to imbue the Torah with his own innate sanctity.

But strangely, the only person to seemingly express this essential concept in the Torah is non other than our antagonist in this week's *sidra*. "כי כל העדה כלם קדושים", For the entire congregation are all holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" assert *Korach* and his followers. They seem to have a point. Shouldn't any Jew be capable of performing the *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol* in the Holy of Holies? Where did they go wrong?

Many point out a subtle grammatical anomaly in *Korach's* claim that reveals his fundamental error. The rebels declare כלם קדושים כל העדה, the entire congregation, all of them **are holy**. The more natural formulation should have been כל העדה קדושה, the entire congregation **is holy**. For *Korach* and his followers, *Klal Yisrael* is a collection of incredibly holy individuals, all of whom can achieve great spiritual heights independently. But he was wrong. A Jew is not holy. *Klal Yisrael is holy*. A Jew's sanctity stems from his or her indispensable role in the context of *Knesset Yisrael*. A singular letter is meaningless and erasable. But when placed into the context of a *Sefer Torah* it becomes indispensable and sublime. Every Jewish soul possesses the sanctity of a Torah scroll because of its essential place in the broader *Klal* of *Knesset Yisrael*.

How ironic then that the rebels sought the office of the High Priest for themselves. They sowed division and *machloket* to achieve higher spiritual roles for themselves. In contrast, one of *Aharon HaKohen's* most incredible qualities was engendering *shalom* between different Jews. He was beloved by all and *meurav im habriyot*, together with the masses. He is the paradigm for all of his descendants who would eventually take up his mantle in the holy city of Jerusalem.

At first glance, it seems strange that the most rarefied individual who enters into the holiest place on earth should be so convivial and accessible to the common Jew in the marketplace. But as we have learned over the past few weeks, it is specifically the person with access to the *Kodesh HaKadoshim* who should understand best how interconnected all Jews are. With the ability to glimpse into the highest spiritual realms through the heavenly gates above the אבן השתיה (the Foundation Stone that rested beneath the



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*Aron HaKodesh*), the *Kohen Gadol* realizes the principle “all of *Yisrael* are like one body” on the deepest of levels. The ideal *Kohen Gadol* can only represent *Klal Yisrael* when he recognizes that his פרטי “sanctity” flows only from the כלל.

As the *Kohen Gadol* dwelled in Jerusalem and meditated in the hollowed sanctums of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the illusory appearance of Jewish separateness would slowly peel away. Thrice a year he would witness the throngs of Jews ascending to Jerusalem, becoming like one man with one heart as they yearned to reconnect to their Source. The *Kohen Gadol* permanently dwells under the Canopy of Peace in Jerusalem. Naturally, his very presence engenders a sense of shared destiny and *achdut*. No wonder *Aharon* was so effective at bringing about peace between different Jews. When speaking to *Aharon*, a Jew had no desire to conflict with anyone else in the *Klal*. כי כל העדה קדושה.

