

# Haftarot Unrolled: Korach

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## Not even a donkey

In Parshat Korach, Moshe is confronted by Korach and his mob:

וַיִּקְהֻלוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב לָכֶם כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה' וּמִדּוּעַ  
תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קְהֵל ה':

They congregated upon Moshe and Aharon, and said to them, "Enough! The entire assembly is holy, and Hashem is in their midst! So why do you lord yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?!" (Bamidbar 16:3)

By suggesting that Moshe and Aharon "lord over" the Jewish People, Korach accused them of acting out of self-interest, desire for power, and personal benefit. Similarly, when Moshe tried to settle the conflict and called for a meeting with Korach's partners, Datan and Aviram, they responded as follows:

וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לְקַרְא לְדָתָן וְלֵאבִירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיָּאב וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא נָעִלָה : הַמַּעַט כִּי הֶעֱלִיתֵנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ זֶבֶת  
חֶלֶב וְדָבַשׁ לְהַמִּיתֵנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר כִּי תִשְׁתַּרְרַר עָלֵינוּ גַם הַשְׁתַּרְרָה:

Moshe sent to call Datan and Aviram, sons of Eliav; they said, "We will not come up! Is it not enough that he took us from the land of milk and honey to kill us in the desert, that he should also rule over us?" (Bamidbar 16:13)

Having called Egypt, "a land of milk and honey", they accuse Moshe of being power-hungry, just for asking them to come to meet with him.

In response, Moshe turned to G-d with an unusual prayer:

וַיַּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל ה' אֵל תִּפְּן אֶל מִנְחָתָם לֹא חָמוֹר אָחַד מֵהֶם נִשְׂאתִי וְלֹא הִרְעֵיתִי אֶת  
אָחַד מֵהֶם:

Moshe got very angry. He said to Hashem, "Do not accept their offering! I never took a donkey from them, I never did harm to any one of them!" (Bamidbar 16:15)

Moshe is very upset by their accusations, and defends himself by saying that he never took anything from them, in particular, not a single donkey.

In the Haftarah, we find the prophet Shmuel in a similar situation. After having dedicated his entire life to the Jewish People, literally from the cradle, and having served as arguably their most successful leader in centuries, he is told by the Jewish People that they would like to try a new political structure, "like all the other nations". When handing over the reins to King Shaul, he asks the Jewish People:

הֲנִי עָנוּ בִּי נֶגְדָה וְנֶגְדָה מִשִּׁיחוּ אֶת שׂוֹר מִי לְקַחְתִּי וְחָמוֹר מִי לְקַחְתִּי וְאֶת מִי עָשִׂיתִי אֶת מִי רִצּוֹתִי  
וּמִי לְקַחְתִּי כֶּסֶף וְאֲעֵלִים עֵינֵי בּוֹ

Now answer me before Hashem and before His anointed, whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom did I oppress? Whom did I favor? From whom did I take a bribe, so that I would overlook him?" (Shmuel I 12:3)

Like Moshe, Shmuel also asserts that he never took a donkey from them. Why, of all things that they did not take from the Jewish People, did both Moshe and Shmuel mention donkeys? What made them get so upset?

לא חמור אחד מהם נשאתי מה שהיה דרכי ליטול לא נטלתי מהם בנוהג שבעולם אדם שהוא עושה בהקדש נוטל שכרו מן ההקדש ואני בשעה שהייתי יורד מן מדין למצרים היה דרכי ליטול מהן חמור שבשביל צרכיהם ירדתי ולא נטלתי וכן שמואל הצדיק אמר (שמואל א יב) הנני ענו בי נגד ה' ונגד משיחו את שור מי לקחתי וחמור מי לקחתי ... וכשהייתי חוזר ועושה דיניהם וצרכיהם והולך וסובב כל עיירות ישראל שנא' (שם /שמואל א' ז) והלך מדי שנה בשנה וסובב בית אל דרך העולם בעלי דינין הולכין אצל הדיין ואני הייתי הולך וסובב מעיר לעיר וממקום למקום וחמור שלי

"I did not take a donkey from them": Moshe said, "What should have been mine to take, I did not take from them. It is customary that a person who works for a charity can be paid by that charity, and I, when I left Midian to go to Egypt, I should have taken a donkey because I traveled for their benefit."

Likewise, Shmuel said, "Whose donkey have I taken?" When he used to judge all their cases and see to all their needs, and he would travel around all the towns of Israel. He said, "It is the way of the world for the parties in a court case to go to the judge, and I used to go around from town to town and place to place, on my own donkey." (Bamidbar Rabba 18:10)

Both Shmuel and Moshe dedicated their lives to serving the Jewish People. Neither one gained anything by it; not only did they not collect taxes, not only did they not accept gifts and offerings, but they did not even ask to be compensated for their expenses<sup>1</sup>.

It was not only money that they dedicated to the Jewish People. The donkey that Moshe did not get compensated for was the donkey which he used to leave his home in Midian, upon which he placed his wife and sons to send them back while he was busy taking the Jews of out Egypt. The donkey that Shmuel never got compensated for was the donkey that he used to leave his home and family to travel on behalf of the Jewish People so they would have ready access to a judge and to spiritual leadership. They sacrificed not only their fortune, but also their homes and their family lives<sup>2</sup>.

How ironic that the Jewish People would seek to supplant each of them with a political system that was the opposite of their attitude of self-sacrifice. Moshe was challenged by Korach, whose cry of equality was a thinly veiled bid for power and money. Shmuel was replaced by a monarchy, which would be sustained by taxes that are taken by force.

The Torah tells us that even prophets like Moshe and Shmuel are hurt by rejection. Those who dedicate their entire lives to the Jewish People without expecting anything in return, nevertheless need a modicum of appreciation.

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In memory of my father, Peter Rozenberg, z"l  
לעילוי נשמת אבי מורי פנחס בן נתן נטע ז"ל

<sup>1</sup> The Midrash explains that they were independently wealthy, and even lists wealth among the ideal qualifications for being a prophet.

<sup>2</sup> It is not coincidental that both Moshe and Shmuel had sons who were not fit to take over from them.