

Dvar Torah for Parshat Korach

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Based on Likutey Moharan I, Lesson #24:2

“Let Korach and his entire party...offer ketoret (incense)...each one took his fire pan...and offered ketoret...Moshe then said to Aharon, ‘Take the fire pan...offer ketoret and take it quickly to the community to atone for them” (Numbers 16:16, 18; ibid. 17:11).

Kelipot (literally, shells, husks) is a generic name which chassidic works give to the evil forces that weaken people’s mitzvah performance and diminish the honor of God and His Torah. Ketoret, the special incense that was offered twice daily in the Holy Temple, has a unique power to counter kelipot, even the darnedest of them.

One of the most pernicious kelipot is overreaching, wanting more than you can have, more than is good for you. This is true not only in material concerns, but even in spiritual ones. For example, if you’ve been given the honor of being a Levite, with the privilege of serving in the Temple, don’t insist on being a kohen (priest) who wears a fancy uniform and offers the sacrifices. One of two things happens when we overreach. Either we get what we desired and grow too big for our britches, or we don’t get what we want and come to grief.

For the time being we lack the Holy Temple. Are we at the mercy of kelipot? God forbid, no! Is there something that can substitute for the ketoret? Yes! Rebbe Nachman teaches us that simcha shel mitzvah, performing mitzvahs with joy, has the same effect. The Arizal teaches (Shaar HaKavanot, Derushei Tefilat HaBoker p. 85) that the eleven spices of the ketoret canceled and nullified the eleven “crowns” of the other side—that which makes them seem fragrant and alive. Genuine life, that which is sacred, is freed from working for the

kelipot. In this way, ketoret brings joy (Proverbs 27:9).

Each mitzvah we do makes use of some piece of the physical world.

Until a Jew interacts with it, that piece was “extra,” not-yet-used in the service of God. It was still in the clutches of the Other Side, ready to be used for a non-purpose, a goal which leads to grief.

The simcha (happiness and joy) we invest in doing a mitzvah cancels the potential sadness that would result from misusing that piece of the world. The secret of creating within ourselves simcha shel mitzvah comes (in part) from realizing the privilege we have to be “Levites serving in the Temple”—ordinary Jews—even if we are not yet a “kohen”—a total tzaddik.

Happily doing a mitzvah may not seem like such a big deal, but the Arizal said that he attained his great success in Jewishness as a result of performing the mitzvahs with great simcha.

May we have full faith in the genuine tzaddikim, emulate (not mimic!) them, always side with them and never revolt against them. Amen!

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

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