



KORACH/GIMEL TAMUZ

THE UNIVERSE BEGINS WITH ONE PERSON: YOU

Navigating the Great "Universalism vs. Particularism" Debate

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Korach

Korah incites a mutiny, challenging Moses's leadership and the granting of the *kehunah* (priesthood) to Aaron. He is accompanied by Moses's inveterate foes, Dathan and Abiram. Joining them are 250 distinguished members of the community, who offer the sacrosanct *ketoret* (incense) to prove their worthiness for the priesthood. The earth opens up and swallows the mutineers, and a fire consumes the *ketoret* offerers.

A subsequent plague is stopped by Aaron's offering of *ketoret*. Aaron's staff

miraculously blossoms and brings forth almonds to prove that his designation as High Priest is Divinely ordained.

G-d commands that a *terumah* ("uplifting") offering be given to the *Kohanim* (priests) from each crop of grain, wine, and oil; as well as from all firstborn sheep and cattle, and other specified gifts.



What are the merits of particularism and universalism and is there a way to synthesize them?

Korach challenged the very paradigm of Jewish leadership, arguing that all Jews are holy.



TEXT 1A

Numbers 16:3

וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן, וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב
לָכֶם, כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֹּלֵם קִדְשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה',
וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קְהַל ה'.

And they gathered against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You take too much for yourselves. The entire congregation is holy, and G-d is in their midst. Why do you raise yourselves above G-d’s people?”

TEXT 1B

Numbers 16:5-7

ה. וַיִּדְבֹר אֶל קֹרַח וְאֶל כָּל
עֲדָתוֹ לֵאמֹר: בִּקֹּר וַיֵּדַע ה' אֶת
אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וְאֶת הַקְּדוֹשׁ וְהַקָּרִיב
אֵלָיו, וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר בּוֹ
יִקְרִיב אֵלָיו.

ו. זֹאת עֲשׂוּ, קָחוּ לָכֶם מִחֲתוֹת
קֹרַח וְכֹל עֲדָתוֹ.

ז. וַתָּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ וְשִׂימוּ עָלֵיהֶן
קִטְרֶת לְפָנֵי ה' מִחָר, וְהִזָּה
הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' הוּא
הַקְּדוֹשׁ, רַב לָכֶם בְּנֵי לְוִי.

5. Moses spoke to Korah and his company: “In the morning, G-d will make known who belongs to Him and who is holy, and He will draw that person, the one who He will choose, near to Him.

6. “This is what you must do: Korah and company, take up pans.

7. “Tomorrow, place fire into the pans and incense atop the fire before G-d, and the person that G-d will choose will be the holy one. You took too much upon yourselves, Children of Levi.”

QUESTION

1. Why didn't Moses respond to Korach's argument?
2. Why did Moses postpone the rebellion until the morning?

TEXT 2

*Midrash, Tanchuma,
Korach, Ch. 5*

אָמַר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה: גְּבוּלוֹת חֶלֶק הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ. יְכוּלִין אַתֶּם לְעַרְב יוֹם בְּלַיְלָה?

זָהוּ נְשָׂאֵמַר הַכְּתוּב בַּתְּחִלָּה: "וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי
בֹקֶר", "וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹקִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ"
(בְּרֵאשִׁית א, ד-ה), בְּשִׁבִיל תְּשִׁמִּישׁוּ שֶׁל
עוֹלָם.

וּכְשֶׁם שֶׁהַבְּדִיל בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ, כִּן
הַבְּדִיל אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָאֻמוֹת, שְׁנֵאָמַר:
"וַאֲבָדִיל אֶתְכֶם מִן הָעַמִּים לְהִיּוֹת לִי"
(וַיִּקְרָא כ, כו). וְכִן הַבְּדִיל אֶהְרֹן, שְׁנֵאָמַר:
"וַיַּבְדֵּל אֶהְרֹן לְהַקְדִּישׁוֹ בְּקֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים"
א כג, יג). אִם יְכוּלִים אַתֶּם (דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים
לְעַכְב אוֹתָהּ הַבְּדִילָה שֶׁהַבְּדִיל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה, כִּן תּוּכְלוּ לְבַטֵּל
אֶת זֶה.

לְכֹן אָמַר לָהֶם: "בֹּקֶר וַיִּוָּדַע ה' וְגו'"
(בְּמִדְבָר טז, ה).

Moses told them, "G-d demarcated boundaries in His world. Can you substitute day for night?"

"G-d set the boundaries with, 'And there was evening, and there was morning, and G-d distinguished between the light and the darkness' (Genesis 1:4–5) for the orderly functioning of the world.

"As G-d separated the light from the dark, so did He distinguish the Jews from other nations, as the verse states, 'I will distinguish you from the nations to belong to Me' (Leviticus 20:26). Similarly, G-d distinguished Aaron from all other Jews, as the verse states, 'He distinguished Aaron to consecrate him, holy of holies' (I Chronicles 23:13). As you can't undo the distinction between day and night, so can't you undo this distinction."

This is why Moses told them, "In the morning, G-d will make known . . ." (Numbers 16:5).

ANSWER

In holding off until morning, Moses demonstrated that G-d made the world with set distinctions.

This was Moses's response to the nation: the world is a multiplicity; Korach's argument for equal *outcomes* was misguided.

Universalism vs. Particularism

What is the Torah's
approach?



TEXT 3A

Deuteronomy 29:9

אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם כְּלִכֶּם לְפָנַי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:
רְאֵשֵׁיכֶם שְׂבֵטֵיכֶם, זְקֵנֵיכֶם וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם, כָּל אִישׁ
יִשְׂרָאֵל.

All of you are standing today before your G-d, the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers—every Jewish person.

TEXT 3B

*Midrash, Tanchuma,
Nitzavim, Ch. 2*

אף על פי שמניתי לכם ראשים, זקנים,
ושוטרים - כולכם שווין לפני, שנאמר: "וכל
איש ישראל".

Even though I appointed leaders, elders, and officers over you, you are all equal in My eyes. As the verse says, “. . . every Jewish person.”

TEXT 4

Deuteronomy 32:8

בְּהִנָּחֵל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם, בְּהַפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם,
יָצַב גְּבֻלַת עַמִּים.

When the supernal One gave each nation its lot, when He dispersed the people, He demarcated the boundaries of nations.

TEXT 5A

Genesis 11:1

וַיְהִי כָּל הָאָרֶץ שְׂפָה אֶחָת וּדְבָרִים
אֶחָדִים.

And the entire earth was one
language and uniform words.

TEXT 5B

Genesis 11:2

וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעָם מִקֵּדָם, וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְּקֶעָה בְּאֶרֶץ
שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם.

It came to pass when they traveled from the East that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.

TEXT 5C

Genesis 11:6–8

ו. וַיֹּאמֶר ה': הֵן עַם אֶחָד
וְשׂוּפָה אַחַת לְכָלָם, וְזֹה
הַחֲלֹם לַעֲשׂוֹת . . .

ז. הִבָּה נִרְדָּה וְנִבְלָה שָׁם
שְׂפָתָם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ
אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ.

ח. וַיִּפֶץ ה' אֹתָם מִשָּׁם
עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ,
וַיַּחֲדְלוּ לְבִנּוֹת הָעִיר.

6. And G-d said, “Behold, they are a single people with a common language, and this is what they have commenced to do. . . .

7. “Come, let us descend and confuse their language so that one will not understand the language of their companions.”

8. And G-d scattered them from there upon the face of the entire earth, and they ceased building the city.



The attempt at universalism resulted in disaster, so G-d split humanity into individual subgroups.

TEXT 6

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference (LONDON, U.K.: BLOOMSBURY CONTINUUM, 2003), p. 47

Today we are inclined to see resurgent tribalism as the great danger of our fragmenting world. It is, but it is not the only danger. The paradox is that the very thing we take to be the antithesis of tribalism—universalism—can also be deeply threatening and may be equally inadequate as an account of the human situation.

A global culture is a universal culture, and universal cultures, though they have brought about great good, have also done immense harm. They see as the basis of our humanity the fact that we are all ultimately the same. We are vulnerable. We are embodied creatures. We feel hunger, thirst, fear, pain. We reason, hope, dream, aspire. These things are all true and important. But we are also different. Each landscape, language, culture, community is unique.

Our very dignity as persons is rooted in the fact that none of us—not even genetically identical twins—is exactly like any other. Therefore, none of us is replaceable, substitutable, a mere instance of a type. That is what makes us persons, not merely organisms or machines. If our commonalities are all that ultimately matter, then our differences are distractions to be overcome.

TEXT 7A

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, The
Rebbe's Words to Then-
NYC Mayor David
Dinkins,
www.chabad.org*

[There is a] multitude of nationalities in New York; it is a melting pot for many nations. May all these nations live in good peace and in harmony. And every one of them will strengthen all the nationalities around them.

The Torah's approach to coexistence is not to flatten the differences between communities, but to encourage them.



TEXT 7B

Rabbi lord Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference, pp. 57–58

We are part of a “thick” or context-bound morality which confers on us loyalties and obligations to the members of our community that go beyond mere justice. We have duties to our parents and children, friends and neighbours, and the members of society considered as an extended family: . . . the loving obligations we owe to those with whom we are linked in a covenantal bond. It is precisely these moral intimacies that give life to the families and communities in which we learn the grammar and syntax of reciprocity and altruism.

The universality of moral concern is not something we learn by being universal but by being particular. Because we know what it is to be a parent, loving our children, not children in general, we understand what it is for someone else, somewhere else, to be a parent, loving his or her children, not ours. There is no road to human solidarity that does not begin with moral particularity—by coming to know what it means to be a child, a parent, a neighbour, a friend. We learn to love humanity by loving specific human beings. There is no short-cut.



Without a sense of
self, we are lost
inside the whole.

TEXT 8A

Mishnah, Avot 5:1

בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם . . .
והלא במאמר אחד יכול להבראות.

G-d created the world with ten utterances, . . . though He could have created it with a single utterance.

TEXT 8B

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Shaar Hayichud
Veha'emunah, Ch. 1*

וְאֵף שֶׁלֹּא הוּזְכַר שֵׁם "אֶבֶן"
בְּעֶשְׂרֵה מְאֻמְרוֹת שְׁבַתוֹרָה, אֵף עַל
פִּי כּוֹ, גְּמִשְׁוֹ חַיּוֹת לְאֶבֶן עַל יְדֵי
צִירוּפִים וְחִילוּפֵי אוֹתִיּוֹת . . . עַד
שֶׁמִּשְׁתַּלְּשֵׁל מִעֶשְׂרֵה מְאֻמְרוֹת
וְנִמְשָׁו מֵהֶן צִירוּף שֵׁם "אֶבֶן",
וְהוּא חַיּוֹתוֹ שֶׁל הָאֶבֶן.

וְכֵן בְּכֹל הַנִּבְרָאִים שֶׁבָּעוֹלָם,
הַשְּׂמוֹת שֶׁנִּקְרָאִים בָּהֶם בְּלִשׁוֹן
הַקֹּדֶשׁ הֵן הֵן אוֹתִיּוֹת הַדְּבוּר,
הַמִּשְׁתַּלְּשֵׁלוֹת מִמְדְּרָגָה לְמְדְּרָגָה
מִעֶשְׂרֵה מְאֻמְרוֹת שְׁבַתוֹרָה עַל יְדֵי
חִילוּפִים וְתַמּוּרוֹת הָאוֹתִיּוֹת . . . עַד
שֶׁמִּגִּיעוֹת וּמְתַלְבְּשׁוֹת בְּאוֹתוֹ נִבְרָא
לְהַחַיּוֹתוֹ.

The word “stone” does not appear in the ten utterances that are recorded in the Torah. Nevertheless, the letters [of these utterances form] permutations and substitutions . . . until the word stone is formed. This word constitutes the vivifying force of a stone.

The same is true of all created things. The names by which they are called in the Hebrew tongue are comprised of letters that evolved from the ten utterances. They descended through various stages by way of substitutions and transpositions . . . until they evolved into a specific life force that is channeled into that creation to animate it.

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 18, pp. 204-205*

תכלית ושלמות הבריאה איז דורך דעם וואס יעדער נברא פירט אויס זיין תפקיד צוליב וועלכן ער איז באשאפן געווארן אין זיין באשטימטער הגדרה והגבלה.

ווען א נברא פירט ניט דורך זיין ענין ותפקיד לפי ענינו והגדרתו, נאר טוט די עבודה וואס איז באשטימט געווארן פאר א צווייטן נברא, איז ער גורם א בלבול אין די סדרי בראשית.

G-d's creation is complete and purposeful when we each use our unique strengths to fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

When we fail to fulfill the task for which we were designed and instead fulfill a task that was assigned to another, we disturb the order of creation.



G-d designed each of us with unique qualities because He gave each of us a unique mission.

When we fail to fulfill that mission, we disrupt G-d's plan for creation.

TEXT 10

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference, pp. 50–51; 60

The Hebrew Bible . . . starts by telling a story about humanity as a whole. Its first eleven chapters are about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Babel and its tower—archetypes of humanity as a whole. . . . But by any conventional standard, the order of these stories is precisely wrong. They *begin* with universal humanity and only then proceed to the particular: one man, Abraham, one woman, Sarah, and one people, their descendants.

By reversing the normal order, and charting, instead, a journey from the universal to the particular, the Bible represents the great anti-Platonic narrative in Western civilization. Against Plato and his followers, the Bible argues that universalism is the first, not the last, phase in the growth of the moral imagination. . . .

We can now state what Judaism represents in the history of Western thought. The story of the covenantal people begins with two journeys: Abraham and Sarah's from Mesopotamia, and Moses and the Israelites' from Egypt. Mesopotamia in the days of Abraham and Egypt in the age of Moses were the supreme economic and political powers of their time. Judaism has historically been a living alternative to empires, because imperialism and its latter-day successors, totalitarianism and fundamentalism, are attempts to impose a single regime on a plural world, to reduce men to Man, cultures to a single culture, to eliminate diversity in the name of a single sociopolitical order.

QUESTION

Why does the Torah seem to support universalism, calling us all equal in G-d's eyes?

What about the pitfalls of particularism?

TEXT 11

*Midrash, Tanchuma,
Korach, Ch. 5*

וְקֹרַח שִׁפְקָם הֲיָה, מָה רָאָה לְשִׁטּוֹת הַזֶּה?

Korah was a wise man. What made him justify such folly?

TEXT 12A

Talmud, Tamid 32a

אמר להם: אידין מתקרי חכים?

אמרו ליה: איזהו חכם? הרואה את הנולד.

He asked them, “Who is wise?”

They replied, “Who is wise? One who sees what is born.”

“כח מה”

Ko'ach Mah

Pure wisdom is
the ability to see
that we are
nullified within
the word of G-d.



TEXT 12B

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Tanya, Likutei
Amarim, ch. 43*

"איזהו חכם? הרוֹאֶה אֶת הַנוֹלָד."
פִּירוּשׁ, שְׁרוּאָה כָּל דְּבַר אֵיךְ נוֹלָד
וְנִתְהַוָּה מֵאֵין לִישׁ בְּדִבְרֵי ה' וְרוּחַ
פִּיו יִתְבַּרְךָ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב: "וַיְבָרֵךְ
פִּיו כָּל צְבָאָם" (תְּהִלִּים ל"ג, ו).

וְאֵי לְזֹאת, הֲרֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל
צְבָאָם בְּטֵלִים בְּמַצִּיאוֹת מִמֶּנּוּ בְּדִבְרֵי
ה' וְרוּחַ פִּיו, וְכֵלָא מִמֶּנּוּ חֲשִׁיבִי,
וְאֵין נְאֻפָס מִמֶּנּוּ, כְּבֵיטוּל אֹר וְזֵיו
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּגוֹף הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עֲצָמָה.

וְאַל יוֹצִיא אָדָם עֲצָמוֹ מֵהַכֶּלֶל, שֶׁגַם
גּוּפוֹ וְנַפְשׁוֹ וְרוּחוֹ וְנִשְׁמָתוֹ בְּטֵלִים
בְּמַצִּיאוֹת בְּדִבְרֵי ה'.

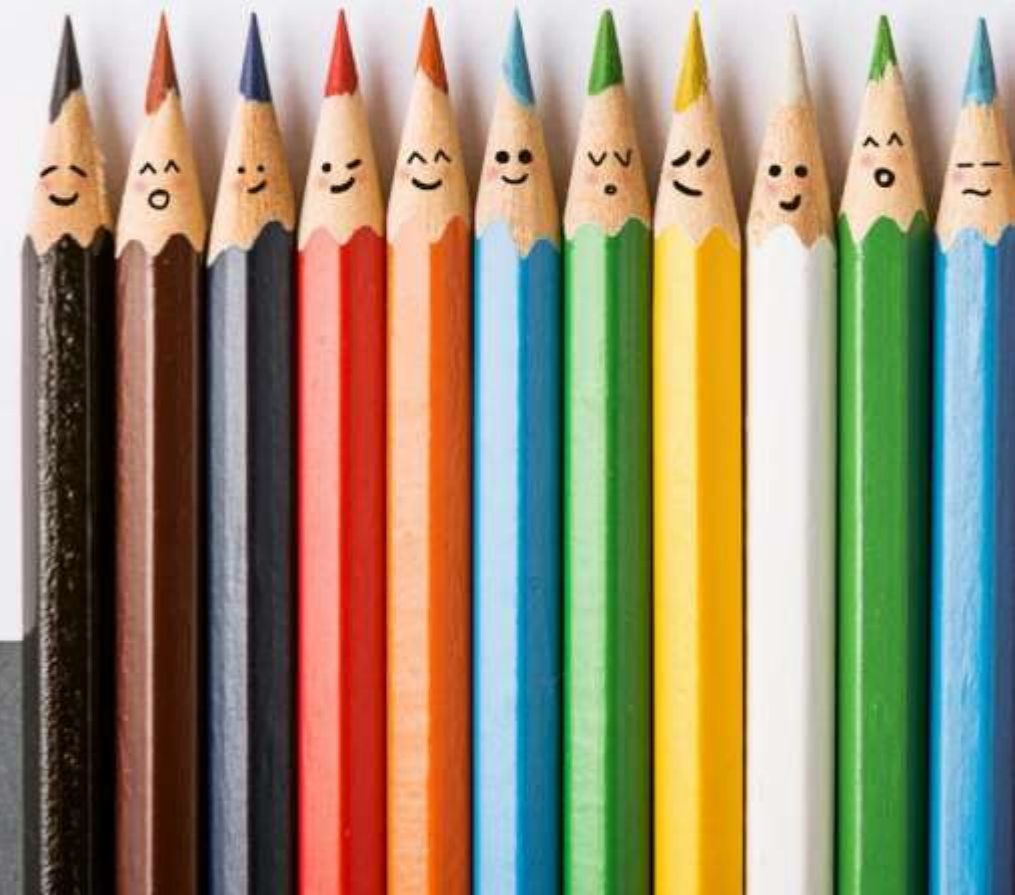
“Who is wise? One who sees what is born.” This means that the wise see how each thing was born—brought into existence from a state of nothingness—by the word of G-d. As the passage states, “And with the breath of His mouth, all their hosts [were created]” (Psalms 33:6).

It follows that the heavens, earth, and all their hosts are utterly null within G-d’s word and the breath of His mouth. They are literally nothing at all, like the sun’s ray that is nullified within the brightness of the sun.

We should not exclude ourselves from this principle. For we, too—our body, life force, spirit, and soul—are utterly nullified within the word of G-d.

Despite our inherent oneness, G-d created humanity as a diverse multiplicity.

Therefore, we need a leader.



TEXT 13

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 18, pp. 208–209*

ער האט געזען דעם ענין השלום והאחדות ווי דאס איז בשרשו, וואו ס'איז ניטא קיין חילוקים, נאר בלויז אחדות הפשוטה, וואס דאס וועט נתגלה ווערן לעתיד לבוא אויך אין דעם שלום ואחדות אין וועלט. און ווי עס שטייט וועגן דעם זמן פון לעתיד לבוא "ולא ילמדו איש את רעהו גו' כי כולם ידעו אותי" (ירמיה לא, לג).

דאס איז אבער געווען א "שטות", ווארום אזא אחדות אמיתית ופשוטה קען זיין בלויז בשרשו (און לעתיד לבוא). מה שאין כן דא למטה אין זמן פון "היום לעשותם", איז אזא הנהגה (ניט נאר ניט קיין ענין פון אחדות ושלום, נאר אדרבה) היפך השלום — מחלוקת.

Korah saw the state of peace and inherent unity that we enjoy at our point of origin [within G-d] where there are no differences, only pure oneness. This inherent [Divine] oneness will be manifest in the peace and unity that the world will enjoy in the era of Mashiach. As the verse states with respect to that era, "One will no longer teach the other, . . . for all will know me" (Jeremiah 31:33).

However, [to assume that this state of oneness can be our norm today] was foolish because genuine absolute oneness can only exist in our [Divine] point of origin (and in the era of Mashiach). In the current era, when we must function as servants of G-d here in the lower sphere, Korah's suggestion would not result in unity and peace. On the contrary, it would result in divisiveness—the opposite of peace.



The world started out
with universalism and
will circle back to it
when Moshiach comes.

Korach's wisdom was
not for his time.

ANSWER

- When we stand before G-d, all are one.
- When we are in our differentiated state, we celebrate our unique, individual differences.

For the time being, particularism is the correct approach.



Presently, we must respect our differences and embrace a society comprised of unique, individual contributions.

KEY POINTS

1. Globalism and particularism each have strengths and drawbacks. The Torah adopts a hybrid model that utilizes the best of both.
2. When we allow the free nurture of our individual unique strengths, we can each make unique contributions that strengthen the overall society.
3. G-d created us each differently, each with our own nature and signature life force, because He wants us each to fulfill our uniquely assigned mission. Stamping out our unique individuality disturbs G-d's plan for creation.

KEY POINTS

4. At the same time, our generic state of existence is oneness with G-d and with each other. This is why history began as a global village and will circle back to this mentality in the era of Mashiach.
5. Until we reach that state, we must acknowledge our real-world nature and embrace the mindset of particularism while guarding against its pitfalls.

