

Look Within – Parshat Korakh

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח – *And Korakh separated himself...*

וַיִּקְמוּ לְפָנָי מִנְּשֵׂה וְאַנְשֵׁים מִבְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאָתַיִם וְנָשִׂאִי עֲדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד אֲנָשֵׁי־שָׁמַיִם:
And they rose up against Moses with two hundred and fifty men, leaders of the community who are called to assembly, men of renown...

וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב־לָכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כֹּהֲנִים קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם יְהוָה וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל־קִהְלֵי יְהוָה:
And they gathered against Moses and Aaron and said to them. “You make much of yourselves! For all the community – all of them are holy, and the Divine is among them all! Why do you exalt yourselves above the community of Hashem?”

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל עַל־פָּנָיו – *And Moses heard and fell on his face...*

Parshat Korakh tells of Korakh’s rebellion against Moses and Aaron. On a metaphorical level, the leadership of Moses and Aaron represent our capacity to be in alignment with the Divine – meaning, living from the realization that all things are part of One Reality, One unfolding. From this point of view, there is no tension between oneself and the situation within which one finds oneself, because both “self” and “situation” are arising within (and not separate from) the space of consciousness that we are; there is unity with the moment.

Ego, on the other hand, is living from the sense of oneself as separate from one’s situation; ego is the sense of “me” and “other.” This is Korakh – the incarnation of ego. Ego thrives on conflict, because conflict reinforces the sense of oneself as separate; conflict is food and water for the ego. We can see this in the opening words:

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח – *Vayikakh Korakh – And Korakh took...*

This is usually translated as “Korakh separated himself,” but literally it means that Korakh “took.” Took what? Took his feeling of existence by creating conflict. On the outer level, this takes the form of rebelling against authority and trying to seize power for himself. The passage then goes on to illustrate the three primary strategies that the ego employs to accomplish its craving for the illusion of existence:

First, Korakh makes an argument against Moses and Aaron that is essentially true:

כָּל־הֵם קְדוֹשִׁים – *kulam kedoshim – all of them are holy!*

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Instead of trying to say that Moses and Aaron are bad leaders and that he would be a better leader, which would be more straightforward but debatable, Korakh instead says something that can't really be argued: *everyone is holy!*

I have heard similar arguments about traditional practice: “Why do we need a special holy day in the week – aren't all the days holy?”

Or, at the time of this writing, another common argument:

“Why do you say ‘black lives matter’ – don't ALL lives matter?”

On the surface, we cannot judge the merit of Korakh on the basis of his argument, because it is a true argument. Nor can we judge the validity of Shabbat as a holy day, or justify the saying that some lives matter, when clearly all lives matter. We can only judge by going beneath the surface of the logic and into the intention behind the logic; we must look at the *motivation behind the words*.

In the story, the truth of Korakh's motivation is ultimately revealed; he is not concerned with the holiness of the people, but with his own self-enhancement:

בִּקְרֹן יִדְעַ יי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְאֶת־הַקְּדוֹשׁ וְהַקְּרִיב אֵלָיו...

“In the morning, The Divine will make known who is in alignment with the Divine, who is holy and close to the Divine...”

Boker v'yoda Hashem – In the morning, the Divine will make known – meaning, Reality Itself ultimately reveals the truth of things. We may not know where a person's heart is. When someone says, “All lives matter” – we do not necessarily know if they are truly concerned (in that moment) with “all lives,” or if they are really only concerned with enhancement of ego through the creation of conflict with the “other,” either intentionally or unconsciously, as the product of feeling “triggered.”

In today's discourse, it is very common for conversations to remain on the level of egos attacking other egos and egos defending themselves... which is not really conversation. But, while we can't necessarily know the motivation of the one attacking us, *we can know our own motivation:*

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה מִנִּפְלַי עַל־פָּנָיו – *Vayish'ma Mosheh vayipol al panav – And Moses heard and fell on his face...*

The word for “his face,” *panav*, can also mean presence, or awareness. So, *vayipol al panav*, “fell upon his face” can mean to cause your awareness to “fall” into your body, to

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be the presence that perceives any triggered emotions within. As we turn attention inward to be aware of our own egos, we avoid the second strategy – pointing the finger at the other guy’s ego, thus taking attention away from your own:

לְמַדְרֵעַ תִּתְנַשְׂאוּ עַל־קַהֲלָה – *Umadu’a titnas’u al k’hal? Why do you exalt yourselves over the community of Hashem?*

Korakh’s accusation against Moses and Aaron is actually a projection of himself; his own ego feels disempowered and craves enhancement, but that can only happen if his true motivation is hidden. So, he throws the spotlight on the ones he is attacking. This brings us to the third strategy of ego, securing validation from others:

נְשִׂאֵי עֵדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד אַנְשֵׁי־שֵׁם – *n’si’ei eidah, kriy’ei mo’ed, anshei shem – leaders of the community who are called to assembly, men of renown...*

Validation from others hides the profound insecurity of ego and stuffs it full with self-confidence. But Moses does the opposite. After examining himself by “listening” and “falling on his face,” he stays with the uncertainty, confident that the truth will be revealed in time:

בִּקְרֹן יִיָּדַע יי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְאֶת־הַקְּדוֹשׁ וְהַקְּרִיב אֵלָיו...
“In the morning, The Divine will make known who is in alignment with the Divine, who is holy and close to the Divine...

Similarly, we too can give the benefit of the doubt to those who seem to oppose us. We can look within and discover where ego may be secretly operating, and in that awareness, transcend the ego’s clutches and connect with the life that matters most – the deepest dimension of who we are, beyond ego, beyond all argument. Because, ultimately, the ego’s self “propping up” is bound to collapse:

וַתִּפְתַּח הָאָרֶץ אֶת־פִּיהָ וַתִּבְלַע אֹתָם...
And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them...

Meaning, all of the illusions of ego are eventually revealed for what they are. The question is, can we debunk the illusory pull of ego within ourselves?

When I was about three years old, I was at a swimming pool. I had just seen a kid running, and I thought that wasn’t allowed, so I called up to the lifeguard, “Are we allowed to run around the pool?”

“No, no running allowed around the pool.”

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“Okay!” I said, and immediately proceeded to run off. In a split second, the lifeguard’s whistle was in his mouth and he let off a short blast that pierced my soul: “Don’t *you* run!” he said.

More on Korakh...

The Waves – Parshat Korakh

One of the radical teachings of Hassidism, once regarded by some Rabbinic authorities as heretical, is that we all have equal and immediate access to the Divine, regardless of book learning and even regardless of purity in thought and action. That’s because the Hassidic understanding is that the Divine is not something separate from anything, but is rather the basic Reality of Everything – similar to the relationship between the waves and the ocean. The waves have form and duration; they have individual “identity” in a sense, yet they are never separate from the vast and formless ocean.

Similarly, all things are like waves in the great Ocean of Being, and all we need do to connect with *Hashem* is shift our attention from the waves – the world of time and thinking – to the world of the Ocean – the realm of the Timeless Present.

One of the disciples of Rabbi Reb Pinchas of Koretz wasn’t convinced: “I am not really a holy person; I don’t see how I could possibly ever know *Hashem* with all the wicked things I’ve done.”

Reb Pinchas responded with a parable: “Once there was a prince who liked to go on journeys, so he had many little cottages scattered throughout the land. When he would travel, he would stay in those cottages, among the common folk. Those cottages were very different and far more modest than his palace, but they were in no way inferior, because they served a different function; what the palace could not do, the cottages could, and vice versa.

“It is the same with people: when a supposedly wicked person turns their heart to the Divine and connects in prayer or in good deed, the Divine rejoices in a way that is not possible with the *tzaddikim*; that’s why it’s important for everyone to understand that they have a unique mission, regardless of how unscholarly or unsaintly they may regard themselves.”

The palace and the cottage are different forms of “home.”

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Home is a wonderful metaphor for connection with the Divine, because the Divine is literally “at home” everywhere – just as the ocean is “at home” within every wave. Home should be (*b'ezrat Hashem*) a place of restfulness and security; just like the state of inner connectedness that comes from Presence. But also, the home is a place we leave frequently, only to return again. If we were trapped in our home, the home would be like a prison; we would be “under house arrest.” Appreciation for being at home is partially dependent on regularly visiting other places.

Similarly, we can leave our “home” in the present moment to travel through landscapes of thought and feeling. If thought and feeling function as temporary abodes for serving the betterment of life, they are like the “cottages of the prince” so to speak... as long as we don't get trapped! We don't want to get “taken hostage” by the mind and lose sight of our true home, the palace of Presence.

וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב-לָכֶם כִּי כָל-הָעֵדָה כְּלָמָּם קִדְשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם יְהוָה וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל-קְהֵל יְהוָה:

They gathered against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Divine is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?”

This week's reading, *Parshat Korakh*, describes a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. The protestors have a good point – yes, everyone is holy. This is what the mind whispers to us: “These thoughts are important and holy too!” – which is true! But, visit them and dwell in them as if you were royalty, traveling and visiting your country house; don't get lost in them! Remember the Palace of Presence, remember your true home.

But how do you do that?

In the *haftorah*, the prophet Samuel rebukes the people for rejecting *Hashem* as their King and requesting a human king, king Saul. The people feel remorse and beg for mercy. But Samuel reassures them:

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל-הָעָם אַל-תִּירְאוּ אִתְּם עָשִׂיתֶם אֵת כָּל-הַרְעָה הַזֹּאת אֲדָּ אֶל-תְּסוּרוּ מֵאַחֲרַי יְהוָה וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֶת-יְהוָה בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם:

But Samuel said to the people, “Have no fear. You have, indeed, done all those wicked things. Do not, however, turn away, but serve the Divine with all your heart.

The point is, it's okay to have a human king. It's okay – it's necessary and good in fact – to engage in the world, to enjoy the world. It's okay to travel in the paths of thought and feeling. But, if you find you have become lost and fearful that you won't find your way home, have no fear! Know the ocean is always beneath the waves. *Al tasuru – don't turn*

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away! Turn your attention toward the Divine as the Ever-Present Reality of this moment.

Rabbi Yisrael, the Maggid of Koznitz, used to visit the city of Apt every year on his father's *yartzeit* to visit his grave. For years, he would teach the community on those visits. One year, on such a visit, they asked him when he would come and preach in the synagogue.

"I don't think I will preach this year," he replied. "I don't see any evidence that my preaching has done any good." The people were dumbfounded, and didn't know what to say.

Later, a crowd gathered around the inn where the Maggid was staying. They wanted to convince him to come and speak, but weren't sure how. Then, a young craftsman went into the inn and knocked on the Maggid's door. The Maggid answered.

"You say that your preaching hasn't had any effect," said the craftsman. "But that's not true. Last year you spoke about the practice of *Sh'viti Hashem L'negdi Tamid* – *I place the Divine before me constantly*. Ever since then, I always see the Divine before me in whatever I am doing, and in whatever is happening; It appears to me like white fire on black fire."

"Hmm," replied the Maggid, "Okay then, I'll come and preach."

The Torment of Desire – Parshat Korakh

Parshat Korakh begins, "*Vayikakh Korakh- Korakh separated himself...*"

This is referring to how *Korakh* "separates himself" by rebelling against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of unfairly wielding their power. *Korakh's* argument is pretty convincing. He says:

"This entire assembly is holy and the Divine is among them- why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of the Divine?"

Now, the word for "he separated" is *vayikakh*, which literally means "he took"- hinting at the selfish motive behind his challenge to Moses. Just like when you feel desire for something, like a sugary treat for example, and there's the urge to reach for it and take it, so too *Korakh* was grabbing at what he wanted. Only his desire object wasn't food, but status and control. And just as the body can have physical cravings, so the ego has identity

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cravings: I want control, I want recognition, and so on, and that ego craving can be much more powerful than bodily cravings in some cases.

Next, it says:

Vayishma Moshe, vayipol al panav- Moses heard, and fell on his face.

Why did he fall on his face?

There's a story that once an opponent of the Hassidic movement came to the Alter Rebbe- Reb Sheur Zalman of Liadi- to attack him with accusations of arrogance:

“You claim to be a holy man- a leader of Hassidim- but look how you sit alone in your study, separate from the people... and with an attendant at your door, only admitting people according to your command- how fancy of you! Isn't that arrogance? Who do you think you are anyway?”

The *tzaddik* put down his head, resting it in his arms, as one does during the penitential *Takhanun* prayer.

After a few minutes, he lifted his head and spoke-

“The expression the Torah uses for ‘leaders of the people’ is ‘*roshei alfei Yisrael- heads of the thousands of Israel,*’ from which we learn that our leaders are known as ‘heads.’

“Now it is true, the head and the body are joined together, and neither can exist without the other. Nevertheless, they're clothed separately and differently. Why is this?

“Because the head must be distinct from the body, just as the ‘heads’ of any generation must be distinct from the people.”

The questioner was impressed with the answer and went on his way.

But the Rebbe's little son (who would eventually be known as Reb Dov Bear of Lubavich), had a different question for his father:

“Abba, in order to give that answer, there was no need to rest your head in your arms. Why didn't you give him the answer immediately?”

The Alter Rebbe replied-

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“In *Parshat Korakh*, when *Korakh* and his followers accused Moses and Aaron of abusing their power as leaders, we read that *Korakh* accused them with these words-

“*Umadua titnasu- And why do you exalt yourselves?*”

“Then we read, *Vayishma Moshe, vayipol al panav- Moses heard, and fell on his face.*”

“Only after he fell on his face, did Moses answer *Korakh*. So we might ask the same question there- why did Moses have to fall on his face first, before giving his answer?

“Because Moses suspected that perhaps there was some truth to the accusation- perhaps there was a bit of ego involved in his leadership, so he had to go inside himself and search inwardly to see if there was some truth there.

“Then, after searching within and purifying himself from any ego (as the Torah says, *V'ha'ish Moshe anav me'od- Moses was exceedingly humble*), he was able to respond with clarity.

“A similar thing happened with me here today.”

The Alter Rebbe’s description of the head in relation to the body- intimately connected, yet separate, transcendent- is not just a metaphor for a leader in relation to the people, but also for consciousness in relation to your thoughts and feelings.

So just as the attendant shields the rebbe from his clamoring hassidim, so you too can be the “attendant” of your own mind, keeping yourself free from thoughts and feelings generated by ego.

But, to do this, you don’t really have to “keep out” any of your thoughts or feelings. All you need to do is be conscious of them. By simply acknowledging the presence of selfish or aggressive thoughts and feelings, they’re no longer controlling “you.” Then, as you continue to stay present, your thoughts and feelings naturally cool down, revealing themselves as nothing more than fleeting moments of experience.

As it says in Psalm 23, *Dishanta vashemen roshi- My head is anointed with oil*. When you stay present, your awareness is like aromatic anointing oil poured over your head, cooling and relaxing your mind and heart. And when that happens, you can experience yourself more and more as consciousness, totally beyond and yet inclusive of your mind and heart. And that consciousness is the opposite of ego. Because while ego is needy and is forever restless, trying to fulfill itself, consciousness is full and complete- *Kosi r'vaya- my cup is full*.

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So on this *Shabbat Korakh*, this Sabbath of Taking, may we fully “take” the only power we truly have- the power to be with what is- to be the space of awareness within which this moment unfolds, and in so doing, become free from the impulses of the mind and heart and realize the inherent peace and wholeness that we are. Good Shabbos!

Who Do You Think You Are? Parshat Korakh

A disciple of the Baal Shem Tov once asked, “Why is it that I usually feel the holiness of the Divine Presence, but occasionally, it vanishes and there is only a sense of remoteness and alienation?”

The Baal Shem explained-

“When parents teach their children to walk, they sometimes hold out their hands so the child can grab on and toddle toward the parent. But at some point, the parent will withdraw their hands and step back, giving the child the chance to toddle without holding on, so that in time they can learn to walk on their own.”

Sometimes, *withdrawing is a form of giving.*

But, that can be challenging. I know this with my own children- the “teacher” in me wants to step in, instruct and correct. Sometimes I have to remind myself to “step back” and let them figure it out on their own.

What is it that makes withdrawing a form of giving? Of course, it’s the intention. To withdraw out of love, to give space to the other, is a form of giving.

But often, withdraw isn’t motivated by love, but by negativity. Then it becomes not a form of giving, but a form of taking.

This week’s reading begins:

“*Vayikakh Korakh-*
“*Korakh separated himself...*”

Korakh “separated himself” by rebelling against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of unfairly wielding power over the children of Israel. *Korakh’s* argument is convincing-

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“For the entire assembly is holy and the Divine is among them- why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of the Divine?”

Interestingly, the words for *“Korakh separated himself”* in Hebrew is literally *“Korakh took”*- a telling idiom, pointing to the selfish motive behind his challenge to Moses.

If you’ve ever complained angrily in a way that only created more negativity, more of the very thing you were complaining against, you’ve experienced separation as a form of taking. It’s a form of arrogance, and arrogance always distorts your ability to see things clearly.

That’s *Korakh*- he has intelligent arguments behind his complaints, but his mind is distorted by arrogance, so he accuses Moses of being arrogant.

How do we purify ourselves of arrogance and see clearly?

An opponent of the Hassidic movement once came to the Alter Rebbe- Reb Sheur Zalman- to attack him with accusations of arrogance:

*“You claim to be a holy man- a leader of *Hassidim*- but look how you sit alone in your study, separate from the people... and with an attendant at your door, shielding you from those who come to see you, and only admitting them one by one according to your command- how fancy of you! Isn’t that arrogance? Who do you think you are?”*

The *tzaddik* put down his head, resting it in his arms, as one does during the penitential *Takhanun* prayer.

After a few minutes, he lifted his head and spoke-

“The expression the Torah uses for ‘leaders of the people’ is ‘roshei alfei Yisrael- heads of the thousands of Israel,’ from which we learn that our leaders are known as ‘heads.’

“Now it is true, the head and the body are joined together, and neither can exist without the other. They have a most essential and intimate connection. Nevertheless, they are clothed separately and differently. Why is this?”

“Because the head must be distinct from the body, just as the ‘heads’ of any generation must be distinct from the people.”

The questioner was impressed with the answer and went on his way.

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But the Rebbe's little son (who would eventually be known as Reb Dov Bear of Lubavich), had a different question for his father:

“Abba, in order to give that answer, there was no need to rest your head in your arms. Why didn't you give him the answer immediately?”

The Alter Rebbe replied-

“In *Parshat Korakh*, when *Korakh* and his followers incited mutiny against Moses and Aaron and accused them of abusing their power as leaders, we read that *Korakh* accused Moses with these words-

“*Umadua titnasu- And why do you raise yourself up above the people of God?*”

“Then we read, *Vayishma Moshe, vayipol al panav- Moses heard, and fell on his face.*”

“Only afterward did Moses give his answer to *Korakh*- that in the morning, *Hashem* would make clear who were the chosen leaders. The same question could be asked there- why did Moses have to fall on his face first, before giving his answer?

“But Moses suspected that perhaps there was some truth to the accusation- perhaps there was a bit of ego involved in his leadership, so he had to go inside himself and search inwardly to see if there was some truth there.

“After searching within and purifying himself from any ego (as the Torah says, *V'ha'ish Moshe anav me'od-* Moses was exceedingly humble'), he was able to respond with clarity.

“A similar thing happened with me here today.”

The *Alter Rebbe's* description of the head in relation to the body- intimately connected, yet separate, transcendent- is not just a metaphor for a leader in relation to the people, but also for consciousness in relation to the thinking mind.

Just as the attendant shields the rebbe from his clamoring *hassidim*, admitting them one by one according to the wishes of the Rebbe, so you too can be the “attendant” of your own mind, admitting your thoughts one by one, as they need to be dealt with. This “attendant” allows your consciousness to remain free and not be besieged by your thoughts.

But, as the “attendant” of your own mind, you don't really have to “keep out” any thoughts or feelings. All you need to do is be aware of them. By simply acknowledging the presence of selfish or aggressive thoughts/feelings, they are no longer “you.” When you are present,

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your thoughts and feelings are nothing more than fleeting moments of experience- and they can no longer control you. Ego vanishes.

This is the deepest separation as a form of giving- giving your attention to your own thoughts and feelings, you separate from them.

When you *give* your thoughts and feelings space to just be, without trying to control them, you become free. And ironically, this kind of separation is simultaneously the deepest intimacy- intimacy with your own being. And in that intimacy, you will come to know directly *who you actually are*- not who you *think* you are!

On this *Shabbat Korakh*, this Sabbath of Taking, may we fully “take” the only power we truly have- the *power to be with what is*- to be the space of awareness within which this moment unfolds.

Good Shabbos!

-b yosef

Portion - Parshat Korakh

Once there was a farmer who lived on his farm with his son. The son grew up helping the farmer with all the chores- cleaning the chicken coup, milking the cows, planting, tending, harvesting and so on. As the son grew up, however, he became disdainful of the farm life. He resented his father for raising him in such a sheltered life, and he wanted to experience more.

As he grew more and more restless, he would get into fights with his father, insulting him and calling him a bumpkin and a hick and so on. Eventually he left the farm and set out for a more urban environment. He became a party animal, living for the nights when he would drink himself into oblivion with his newfound crowd of party animals.

One such night, one of his companions who knew about the son’s origins got out of hand and started insulting him and his father. The son suddenly felt protective of his father’s honor, and threatened to beat the guy up. Some other people restrained him, and said “why don’t you settle it with a drinking contest?” They both agreed.

As the son downed shot after shot, there was something different in the way he was drinking. In the past, he drank for his own pleasure. Now, he was drinking for his father. This gave him more drinking strength than ever, and he easily won the contest.

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The next night, when he went out drinking, he was reminded of what it was like to drink for his father, and how it somehow gave more strength and depth to his drinking, so he tried it again: Before taking a sip, he would say, "Dad, this is for you". From then on, every night he went out, he would dedicate his partying to his father. After some time, he felt something like a fire kindle inside his heart. A great love for his father grew inside him. Sometimes he would sit with the glass of wisky for long periods without drinking anything, just savoring this love that was growing within him.

Eventually, he began to realize that the love within him was infinitely more deep and sweet than the scrap of pleasure he got from the alcohol. He knew he had to return home, but he felt so guilty facing his father.

When he arrived and saw his father, he said, "I left here because I had felt like I was just one of your animals, mindlessly doing your farm work. But now that I've been out in the world, I feel like I am not even as good as your animals, because your animals at least faithfully serve you, while I just run around after my own pleasure. I am less than an animal. But I love you, and I realize I was wrong, and I want to come back."

The father was in tears. "My son, these animals don't serve me on purpose. They follow their instincts, and I know how to work with them so that they serve me and the farm. You, on the other hand, have chosen to some back out of love, and that is the most precious thing to me."

In the story, the son follows his own desires, satisfying himself through drinking. But when he accidentally imbues his drinking with love for his father, the drinking begins to have a new effect. It becomes a path of transformation.

On Shabbat, as we come together to sing and dance and praise in joy, most of us are drinking in the tavern for God. We're doing enjoyment, but dedicating it to God, so it becomes a path of transforming the heart, of awakening the power of love. But in order for that power to become a true transformation, we have to take it back to the farm.

But of course there is something in the way; it is easier to drink for the farmer than to clean the chicken coup for the farmer. So the story is really about the very beginning of the son's spiritual work- the real work begins after the story ends. That's where the transformation of ego happens- when you clean the chicken coup, when you endure the hardships of life and are able to dedicate it to the One. The other day, I lost my kippa, and I was afraid- it's my last one, what am I going to do? Then I realized what a crass materialist I was being. What kind of spirituality is that? Worrying about a hat? So insignificant compared to the real hardships of life, but it affected me. But those to me are the golden spiritual moments- when you get to see your own ego at work- because that is the opportunity to drop it for

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real. Real transformation happens in the flow of actual life, when we offer the whole of our life on the altar of actuality.

In this parasha, Korakh makes a rebellion against Moses with 250 followers, accusing Moses of exalting himself over everyone else, and calling for something more democratic. The midrash asks why this incident comes right after the mitzvah of *tzitzit*- the ritual fringes worn the corners of the one's garment to remind one of the Path. The *tzitzit* are supposed to have a special thread of blue in them. It answers that Korakh came to Moses with a garment made *entirely* of blue and asked Moses, "Does this need *tzitzit*?" Metaphorically, Korakh was saying that he was totally aware of God's presence everywhere, so there was no need for the specific *tzitzit* as a reminder; Korakh was like the garment that was all blue. There was no need for Moses to lead him, Korakh argued, because whatever happens, God is always in control anyway. It's a very spiritual argument, and it is actually true from a spiritual point of view. But he was using a spiritual argument to justify being a farm animal rather than being a son of God. The farm animals do what they do, and the farmer manipulates the situation. But the son comes back to serve out of love and awareness of the farmer, and that's the difference between Moses and Korakh. Korakh's actions did ultimately serve a holy purpose- the story is in the Torah, and is part of the Teaching, but Korakh was motivated by ego. Moses was trying to do his job.

So the point is not using spiritual ideas as argument; the point is our relationship to the present moment. It is being willing to allow this moment to be what it really is anyway, and serving That. This is what it means to serve in *simkha*- in joy- but also in *yirah*- in fearsome awe; because only awe and surrender can the things we resist transform us into hearts that burn with Divine Love. May we merit truly spiritual lives, so that the ecstasy of drinking in the tavern be channeled into cleaning the chicken coup. Shabbat Shalom!