

תפארת ישראל The Splendor of Israel Chapter 18

Introduction

This profound and philosophical discourse by **Rabbi Yehuda Loewe of Prague (the Maharal)** explores the rebellion of Korach as a window into the nature of truth, reality, and Torah. The Maharal (c. 1520–1609), chief rabbi of Prague and one of the most influential thinkers in Jewish philosophy, was a master of synthesizing Aggadah, halacha, metaphysics, and mystical symbolism. A student of deep logic and tradition, he is most famous for his works such as *Gur Aryeh*, *Tiferet Yisrael*, and *Netzach Yisrael*. His teachings continue to influence both the yeshiva world and modern Jewish philosophy.

In this discourse, the Maharal establishes a rigorous ontological framework in which the **truth of the Torah is equated with necessary existence**—something that cannot not be. Korach and his followers, by denying this absolute truth, rendered themselves incompatible with existence itself, and their punishment—being swallowed alive—was not merely punitive, but metaphysical: **they were erased from being**. Through brilliant interpretations of midrash and Talmud, the Maharal argues that the events surrounding Korach's rebellion unveil the Torah's supreme and immutable truth, a truth that even Gehinnom reaffirms.

סוֹפּוֹ שֶׁל קֹרַח וַעְדָתוֹ מוֹרֶה עַל אֲמִתּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה The end of Korach and his assembly demonstrates the truth of the Torah.		
A person who is a physical being and is in the physical world must clarify a matter in accordance with the fact that he is a physical man, in order to acquire knowledge as is fitting for a human being.	הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר הוּא בַּעַל חֹמֶר וְהוּא בַּשְׁמִי צָרִידְּ לְבָרֵר לוֹ הַדָּבָר כְּפִי מַה שֶׁהוּא אָדָם בַּשְּׁמִי, כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּקְנָה הַיְדִיעָה כְּפִי אֲשֶׁר רָאוּי לָאָדָם.	
And therefore, in order that all should know the existence of Hashem, may He be blessed, the Holy One, blessed be He, performed all the miracles and wonders and signs in Egypt—as it is explained in the verse—in order that the matter should be known through physical sight, for this is appropriate for man, who is in the physical.	וּלְכָךְ כְּדֵי שֶׁיֵּדְעוּ הַכּּל מְצִיאוּת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, עָשָׂה הַקָּדוֹשׁ־בָּרוּךְ־הוּא כָּל הַנִּסִים וְהַנְּפְלָאוֹת וְהַמּוֹפְתִים בְּמִצְרִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמְבֹאָר מִן הַכָּתוּב, כְּדֵי שֶׁיוּדַע הַדָּבָר בִּרְאוּת הָעַיִן הַגַּשְׁמִי, אֲשֶׁר זָהוּ רָאוּי לָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר הוּא בַּשְׁמִי.	
As it is written (Shemos 7:3): "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that I may multiply My signs."	וּכְדָכְתִיב (שְׁמוֹת ז, ג): "וַאֲנִי אַקְשֶׁה אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה וֹןגוֹ' לְמַעַן רַבּוֹת מוֹפְתַי.	
And so too, the sanctification of the Mishkan, so that all would know its sanctity—He said (ibid. 29:43): "And it shall be sanctified by My glory," and our Sages of blessed memory said (Zevachim 115b): 'Do not read "by My glory" (bi'khvodi), but rather "by My honored ones" (bimkhubodai)'—these are Nadav	וְכֵן קְדֶשַׁת הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְמַעַן שֶׁיֵּדְעוּ הַכֹּל קְדֶשָׁתוֹ, אָמַר (שָׁם כט, מג): "וְנִקְדָּשׁ בִּכְבוֹדִי", וְאֶמְרוּ זִכְרוֹנָם לִבְרָכָה (זְבָחִים קטו, ב): 'אַל תִּקְרִי "בִּכְבוֹדִי", אֶלָּא בִּמְכַבָּדַי' – אֵלוּ נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּ, שֶׁיַּעֲשׂוּ חֵטְא וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ הַבִּיִת עַל יָדָם.	

and Avihu, who sinned so that the House should be sanctified through them.	
And it was not their house, for He, may He be blessed, Who dwells in this House, is separate from all beings—and this is the sanctity of the House.	וְלֹא הָיָה שֶׁלָּ[הַם] הַבַּיִת, שֶׁהוּא יִתְבָּרַךְּ הַשׁוֹכֵן בַּבַּיִת הַנָּה נִבְדָּל מִכָּל הַנִּמְצָאִים, וְזֶהוּ קְדַשַׁת הַבַּיִת.
And it appears that even to the righteous He does not unite with them, and He has no attachment with them—and this is His sanctity.	ְוָזֶה נִרְאֶה, כִּי אַף לַצַדִּיקִים אֵינוֹ מִתְאַחֵד עִמֶּהֶם, וְאֵין לוֹ צָרוּף עַמָּהֶם, וְזֶהוּ קְדָשָׁתוֹ.
For if He were attached to existing beings, there is no doubt He would be attached to His beloved and those who honor Him.	שָׁאָם הָיָה מְצֹרָף לַנִּמְצָאִים, אֵין סָפֵק שֶׁיִּהְיֶה צָרוּף אֶל אוֹהֲבָיו מְכַבַּּדָיו.
And if He were joined to them, He would not carry out judgment upon them.	וְאָם הָיָה מְצֹרָף אֲלֵיהֶם, לֹא הָיָה עוֹשֶׂה דִּין בָּהֶם.
For the judgment He performs upon the righteous shows that He, may He be blessed, is completely separate—even from His beloved.	כִּי הַדִּין אֲשֶׁר עוֹשֶׂה בַּצַדִּיק מוֹרֶה זֶה כִּי הוּא יִתְבָּרַךְּ נִבְדֶּל לְגַמְרֵי אַף מֵאוֹהֲבָיו.
And likewise, when Hashem gave the Torah through Moshe, still there remained in the physical heart of man a doubt about Torah from Heaven.	ְוְכֵן כַּאֲשֶׁר נָתַן הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ הַתּוֹרָה עַל־יְדֵי מֹשֶׁה, עוֹד הָיָה בְּלֵב הָאָדָם הַגַּשְׁמִי סָפֵּק בְּתוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם,
Therefore, through Korach and his assembly, Torah from Heaven became clarified and purified, such that everyone knew this matter with complete clarity.	וּלְפִיכָהְ עַל־יְדֵי לַרַח וַעֲדָתוֹ נִתְלַבֵּן וְנַצְרֵף תּוֹרָה מָן הַשָּׁמֵיִם, שֶׁיָּדְעוּ הַכּּל דָּבָר זֶה בְּבֵרוּר גָּמוּר.
For this was the sin of Korach and his assembly: that they denied Torah from Heaven, as the verse proves.	פִּי דָּבָר זֶה הָיָה חֵטְא קֹרַח וַעֲדָתוֹ, שֶׁהָיוּ כּוֹפְרִים בְּתוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמוֹכִיחַ הַכָּתוּב.
And therefore, the punishment of Korach and his assembly was that they were swallowed alive into the grave (Bamidbar 16:33).	וּלְפִיכָךְ הָיָה עֹנֶשׁ קֹרַח וַעֲדָתוֹ שֶׁנִּבְלְעוּ חַיִּים שְׁאֹלָה (בְּמִדְבֵּר טז, לג.).
And this is because the Torah is a "Torah of Truth" (Malachi 2:6).	ן וָזֶה כִּי הַתּוֹרָה הִיא "תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת" (מַלְאָכִי ב, ו).
Not like other things—for although they may be true, such as if one says, "Reuven is in this house," and it is true that he is in the house, nevertheless, this is not called absolute truth—because it is possible that he would not be in the house.	לֹא כְּמוֹ שְׁאָר דְּבָרִים, כִּי עִם שֶׁהֵם אֶמֶת, כְּמוֹ אִם יֹאמֵר אֶחָד: רְאוּבֵן הוּא בְּבַיִת זֶה', וְהָאֱמֶת שֶׁהוּא בַּבַּיִת, מִכָּל מָקוֹם לֹא נִקְרָא דָּבָר זֶה שֶׁהוּא אֱמֶת, מְצַר כִּי אָפְשֶׁר שָׁלֹא יִהְיָה בַּבַּיִת.

And even if it is true, it is incidental. And when a person says "Reuven is not in the house," it is false—but only incidentally so, because it was possible he could have been in the house.	וְעַם שֶׁהוּא אֱמֶת, דָּבֶר זֶה הוּא בְּמִקְרָה. וְכַאֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הָאָדָם: רְאוּבֵן אֵינֶנּוּ בַּבַּיִת' הוּא שֶׁקֶר, אֲבָל הוּא שֶׁקֶר בְּמִקְרָה, כִּי הָיָה אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִהְיֶה בַּבַּיִת.
But the truth that is essential truth—that is the Torah of Moshe, which is essential truth.	אֲבָל הָאֱמֶת שֶׁהִיא אֶמֶת בְּעֶצֶם, הִיא תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה, שֶׁהִיא אֶמֶת בְּעֶצֶם.
For all its statements are necessary, and it is not possible for them to be otherwise.	שֶׁכָּל דְּבָרֶיהָ הֵם מַכְרָחִים, וְאִי אֶפְשָׁר בְּעִנְיָן אַחֵר.
For example, when the Torah says: "Aharon is a Kohen" (Vayikra, chapter 5)—this is essential truth, because it is necessary that it be so, and it cannot be otherwise.	ןזֶה כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר אֶמְרָה תּוֹרָה אַהָרֹן הוּא כֹּהֵן (וַיִּקְרָא פָּרֶק ה), וְדָבָר זֶה אֶמֶת בְּעֶצֶם, לְפִי שֶׁהוּא הָכְרַחִי שֶׁכָּךְ יִהְיָה, שָׁאִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִהְיָה בְּעִנְיָן אַחֵר.
Therefore, this reality is essential, and it is necessary that it be so, and not otherwise. And so too, all the words of Torah are such that their reality is necessary—just as was explained in the previous chapter.	לְכָךְ מְצִיאוּת זָה הָעֶצֶם וְהוּא הָכְרַחִי שֶׁיִהְיָה כָּךְ, וְלֹא בְּעִנְיָן אַחֵר, וְכֵן כָּל דִּבְרֵי תּוֹרָה הֵם כָּךְ שֶׁמְצִיאוּתָם הָכְרַחִי, וּכְמוֹ שֶׁהִתְבָּצֵר בַּכָּרֶק שֶׁלְפְנֵי זָה.
And in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:7): "In the morning Hashem will make known" (Bamidbar 16:5), Moshe said: Hashem assigned boundaries in His world—can you make day and night?	וּבַמִּדְרָשׁ (בְּמִדְבַּר־רַבָּה יח, ז): "בֹּקֶר וְיָדַע ה'" (בְּמִדְבֵּר טו, ה), אָמַר מֹשֶה: גְּבוּלוֹת חָלֵק הַקָּדוֹשׁ־בָּרוּדְּ־הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, יְכוֹלִים אַתֶּם לַעֲשׁוֹת יוֹם וְלַיְלָה
But it is written (Bereishis 1:4): "And G-d separated between the light and the darkness."	וְהַכְּתִיב (בְּרֵאשִׁית א, ד): "וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ.
And so too: "He separated Aharon to sanctify him as Holy of Holies" (Divrei HaYamim I 23:13). Therefore, it says: "In the morning Hashem will make known."	וְכֵן "הָבְדִּיל אַהָרוֹ לְהַקְדִּישׁוֹ קְדָשׁ קָדָשִׁים" (דְּבְרֵי ""הַיָּמִים־א כג, ינג). לְכָךְּ אָמַר: "בֹּקֶר וְיָדַע ה".
The meaning is: just like morning cannot be changed, so too all these matters we have spoken.	פָּרוּשׁ דָּבָר זֶה, כְּמוֹ בֹּקֶר שֶׁאֵין לְשַׁנּוֹת אוֹתוֹ. וְהֵן הֵן הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְנוּ.
For all words of Torah are necessary to be as they are, and there is no such thing as coincidence.	כִּי כָּל דִּבְרֵי תּוֹרָה הֵם מַכְרָחִים לִהְיוֹת, וְאֵין מְצִיאוּת בְּמִקְרָה.
Just as the order of the world is essential and not by chance, and this is something all recognize—that the world's existence is not random—so too are all the words of Torah.	כְּמוֹ שֶׁפֵּדֶר הָעוֹלֶם בְּעֶצֶם וְאֵינוֹ בְּמִקְרֵה, שֶׁדָּבָר זֶה הַכּּל מוֹרִים שָׁאֵין הָעוֹלֶם מְצִיאוּתוֹ בְּמִקְרֵה, כָּךְ הֵם כָּל דְּבְרֵי תּוֹרָה
And when they opposed something whose existence is necessary, it is impossible for such a person to exist—because when something is necessary in existence, the thing that opposes it is necessarily nonexistent, since its opposite is necessary.	ְוְכַאֲשֶׁר הָיוּ חוֹלְקִים עַל דָּבָר שָׁמְצִיאוּתוֹ -הָכְרַחִי, אִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִהְיֶה אָדָם כָּזֶה נִמְצָא. כִּי הַמַּכְרָח בַּמְצִיאוּת, הַדָּבָר שֶׁהוּא כְּנֶגְדּוֹ הוּא מַכְרָח שָׁלֹא יִהְיֶה נִמְצָא, אַחַר שֶׁהֶפְכּוֹ מַכְרָח.

Therefore, when they opposed the Torah, whose every statement is necessary in existence, their opposition necessarily had no existence at all.	וּלְכָךְ כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיוּ חוֹלְקִים עַל הַתּוֹרָה, שֶׁכָּל דְּבָרֶיהָ מַכְרָחִים בַּמְצִיאוּת, הַמִּתְנַבֵּד לָזֶה מַכְרָח שֶׁאֵין לוֹ מָצִיאוּת כְּלָל.
And therefore it is written (Bamidbar 16:33): "And they were lost from among the congregation, and they descended, they and all that belonged to them, alive into Sheol," meaning they necessarily had to become totally nonexistent, and descended alive into Sheol, which is total destruction.	וּלְכָךְ כְּתִיב (בְּמִדְבֵּר טז, לג): "וַיֹּאבְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל וַיֵּרְדוּ הֵם וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם חַיִּים שְׁאֹלָה", שֶׁהִיוּ מַכְרָחִים לִהְיוֹת בִּלְתִּי נִמְצָאִים כְּלָל, וְיָרְדוּ חַיִּים שִׁאֹלָה, שֶׁהוּא הָאֲבַדּוֹן.
For had they descended as dead, that would not demonstrate that existence was utterly unbefitting for them—since they would have received natural death like all others, and would have had natural life.	וְאָלּוּ יָרְדוּ מַתִּים, לֹא נִקְרָא זֶה שֶׁאֵין רָאוּי לָהֶם הַמְצִיאוּת כְּלָל, אַחַר שֶׁהָיוּ מְקַבְּלִים מִיתָה טִבְעִית בְּדָרֶךְ כָּל הָאָרֶץ, וְהָיָה לָהֶם חַיִּים טִבְעַיִים.
But Moshe said (Bamidbar 16:29): "If these die like all men," and they would have the existence fitting for existing beings, "then Hashem did not send me" to give the Torah.	אֲבָל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר (בְּמִרְבֵּר טז, כט): "אָם כְּמוֹת כָּל אָדָם יְמֵתוּן", וְיִהָיֶה לָהֶם הַמְצִיאוּת אֲשֶׁר רָאוּי לַנִּמְצָאִים, "לֹא ה' שָׁלָחָנִי" לָתֵת הַתּוֹרָה.
For the Torah, whose existence is necessary, cannot have its necessity contradicted by someone who remains in existence.	כִּי הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁהַמְצִיאוּת שֶׁלָּה מַכְרָח, אֵין רָאוּי לְהִתְקַיֵּם הַחוֹלֵק עַל הַמֶּכְרָח.
And this matter is extremely clear.	וָדָבָר זֶה בָּרוּר מְאֹד.
And in the chapter "HaSefinah" (Bava Basra 74a): A certain Arab said to him, "Come, I will show you the swallowed ones of Korach." He went and saw two cracks, from which smoke came forth.	וּבְפֶּרֶק הַסְפִינָה (בָּבָא בָתְרָא עד, א): 'אָמַר לֵיהּ הַהוּא טַיֶּיעָא: תָּא וְאַחָנֵי לָךּ בְּלוּעֵי דְּקֹרַח. אָזַלִּי וַחְזַאי תְּרֵי בִּזְעֵי, נְפַק מְנַיְהוּ קוּטְרָא.
He took a tuft of wool, soaked it in water, placed it on the tip of a spear, and inserted it there. When he removed it, it was scorched.	שְׁקַל גְּבָבָא דְעַמְרָא וּמָשִׁי מַיָּא, וְאַנָּחִי בְּרֵישָׁא דְרוֹמְתָּא, וְעָיִילֵי לְהָתָם. וְכִי אַפֵּיק הַוָה מְחָרֵיךְ.
He said to him: What did you hear? He said: I heard them saying, "Moshe is true and his Torah is true, and they (i.e., Korach's group) are liars."	:אֲמֵר לֵיה: אַבֵּית מַאי שָׁמְעֵת, וּשְׁמָעִית דַּהָווֹ אֶמְרִי משֶׁה אֶמֶת וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֶמֶת וְהֵן בַּדָּאִין.
He said to him: Every thirty days they are turned over in Gehinnom like meat in a pot and proclaim thus: "Moshe is true, and his Torah is true, and they are liars." Until here.	אֲמֵר לֵיה: כָּל תְּלָתִין יוֹמִין מְהַדְּרֵי לְהוּ בֵּיהִנֵּם כְּבָשָׂר בְּקַלֵּחַת, וְאָמָרִי הָכִי: מֹשֶׁה אֱמֶת וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֶמֶת וְהֵן בַּדָּאִין', עַד כָּאן
The explanation is this: for those who oppose the Torah—which is intellectual truth—existence is not fitting for them, as we have said.	בַּאוּר זֶה, כִּי לַחוֹלְקִים עַל הַתּוֹרָה, שֶׁהִיא שַׂכָּל אָמֶת, אֵין רָאוּי לָהֶם מְצִיאוּת כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַרְנוּ.
Therefore they said, "That Arab said to him"—the intellect is called 'Arab' (traveler).	וּלְכָך אָמְרוּ דַּאֲמַר לֵיה הַהוּא טַיִּיעָא. קָרָא הַשָּׂכֶל טַיָּיעָא'.

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For intellect is that which investigates matters, and roams the world in its length and breadth.	וְזֶה כִּי הַשָּׁכֶל הוּא הַחוֹקֵר עַל הַדְּבָרִים, וּמְשׁוֹטֵט בָּעוֹלָם לְאָרְכּוֹ וּלְרָחָבּוֹ.
And even in abstract things it investigates and contemplates them.	וְאַף בַּדְּבָרִים הַנִּבְדָּלִים הוּא חוֹקֵר וְעוֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם.
And this is the concept of the "traveler," for the Arab is a merchant Ishmaelite who travels and circles all the land, in its length and breadth.	ָןזָהוּ עַנְיַן הַמַּיָּעָא, כִּי הַטַיֶּיעָא הוּא סוֹחֵר יִשְׁמְעֵאל, שָהוּא סוֹחֵר וּמְסַבֵּב כָּל הָאָרֶץ לְאָרְכָּה וּלְרָחְבָּה,
Therefore the intellect is called "traveler," for the traveler is also a merchant who circles and encompasses the land and acquires wares.	וּלְכָךּ נִקְרָא הַשָּׂכָל טַיִּיעָא, כִּי הַמַּיִּיעָא גַּם־כֵּן סוֹחֵר סוֹבֵב וּמַקִּיף הָאָרֶץ, וְקוֹנָה הַפְּחוֹרָה.
And what the merchant acquires is called a "purchase"; so too the intellect acquires intelligibles, and they are its acquisitions.	וְנְקְרֵא מַה שֶׁקוֹנֶה הַסּוֹחֵר 'לָקַח', כָּדְּ הַשִּׂכְלִי הוּא שֶׁקוֹנֶה הַמֶּשְׂכָּלוֹת, וְהֵם קִנְיָן שֶׁלּוֹ.
Therefore it says of wisdom (Mishlei 4:2): "For I have given you a good purchase—My Torah do not forsake."	וּלְכָךְ נֶאֱמַר עַל הַחָּכְמָה (מִשְׁלֵי ד, ב): "כִּי לָקַח טוֹב "נָתַמִּי לָכֶם תּוֹרָתִי אַל מַעֲזְבוּ
And in the first chapter of Kiddushin (32b) they expounded: "And you shall honor the presence of the elder" (Vayikra 19:32)—'elder' means one who has acquired wisdom.	וּבְפֶּרֶק קַמָּא דְקִדּוּשִׁין (לב, ב) דְּרְשׁוּ: "וְהָדַרְתָּ פְּנֵי זָקַן" (וַיִּקְרָא יט, לב) אֵין זָקַן אֶלָּא מִי שֶׁקָנָה חָכְמָה'.
Or alternatively: that the name "wise" is due to the acquisition of wisdom, and this is very significant.	אִי נָמֵי כִּי שֵׁם 'חָכָם' עַל שֵׁם קִנְיָן הַחָּכְמָה, וְהוּא הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד.
Therefore, the essential name fitting for intellect is the name "traveler," for he is a merchant, returning over the things he acquires.	וּלְפִיכָּךְ שֵׁם הָעֶצְמִי הָרָאוּי אֶל הַשָּׂכֶל הוּא שֵׁם טֵיֵיעָא', שֶׁהוּא סוֹחֵר, חוֹזֵר עַל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁקוֹנָה'.
And he said, "Come, and I will show you the swallowed ones of Korach." The explanation is not that he showed him with physical sight—because the matter is not at all like that.	וְאָמַר: תָּא וְאַחְנֵי לָךְ בְּלוּעֵי קְרַח'. אֵין הַפֵּרוּשׁ שֶׁהֶרְאָה לוֹ בִּרְאִיָּה חוּשִׁית בַּשְׁמִית. שֶׁאֵין הַדְּבָר כָּךְּ בְּלָלִ
Rather, the intellect shows him all things with intellectual sight, not physical.	רַק שֶׁהַשֵּׂכֶל מַרְאָה לוֹ הַכֹּל בִּרְאִיָּה שִׁכְלִית, לֹא גַשְׁמִית
And he said, "He saw two cracks, and smoke came out from them." The meaning is: that the beginning of Gehinnom's foundation is drawn from the second day of creation.	ָוְאָמֵר: חָזָא תְּרֵי בִּזְעֵי וְנָפַיק קוּטְרָא מִנַּיְהוּ'. פֵירוּשׁ, כִּי הַתְּחָלַת יְסוֹד הַגֵּיהִנֶּם נִמְשֶׁךְּ מִן מַדְרֵגָה הַשְּׁנִיָּה.
And this was explained by the sages in their wisdom by what they said (Bereishis Rabbah 4:6): that this is why it does not say "for it was good" on the second day of creation—because Gehinnom was created on it.	וְדָבָר זֶה בֵּאֲרוּ חֲכָמִים בְּחָכְמָתָם בַּמָּה שֶׁאָמְרוּ (בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה ד, ו) כִּי לְכָךְ לֹא נָאֱמַר 'כִּי טוֹב' בַּשֵׁנִי שֶׁל בְּרִיאַת עוֹלָם שֶׁבּוֹ אָבָרָא גֵיהִנָּם.

And this is because Gehinnom has no perfection—because if it had perfection, the wicked who are not themselves perfect would not enter there.	ְוֶזֶה כִּי הַגֵּיהִנָּם אֵין בּוֹ שְׁלֵמוּת. שָׁאִלּוּ הָיָה בּוֹ שְׁלֵמוּת, לֹא בָּאוּ שָׁם הָרְשָׁעִים שֶׁאֵינָם שְׁלֵמִים בְּעַצְמָם.
Every number in the world has completeness—except for the number two.	וְכָל מִסְפָּר בָּעוֹלָם יֵשׁ בּוֹ שְׁלֵמוּת, חוּץ מִמְּסְפַּר שְׁנַיִם.
For one is complete in itself, as there is no division in one. And that which has no division is complete. This is explained.	וְזֶהוּ כִּי הָאֶחָד הוּא שָׁלֵם בְּעַצְמוֹ, שֶׁאֵין בְּאֶחָד חָלּוּק כְּלָל. וְדָבָר שָׁאֵין בּוֹ חָלּוּק, הָרֵי הוּא שָׁלֵם, וְדָבָר זָה מְבֹאָר.
But two is not at all complete—because you cannot connect end to end by means of two lines. Completeness is when the end connects back to the beginning, so that nothing can be added.	וְהַשְּׁנַיִם אֵין בּוֹ שְׁלֵמוּת כְּלָל, כִּי אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְחַבֵּר קָצֶה אֶל קָצֶה עַל־יְדֵי שְׁנֵי קֵוִים, שֶׁזֶּה נִקְרָא שְׁלֵמוּת כַּאֲשֶׁר תִּתְחַבֵּר הָרֹאשׁ בַּסּוֹף, שֶׁאָז הוּא שָׁלֵם, בַּעֲבוּר שָׁלֹא תּוּכַל לְהוֹסִיף עָלָיו דָּבָר.
But with three lines, completeness is formed—as when the end joins the beginning like this \triangle —and all the more so with numbers greater than this.	אָבָל בִּשְׁלשָׁה קַוִּים נַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלֵם, שֶׁתְּחַבֵּר הַסּוֹף בָּרֹאשׁ כָּזָה △, וּמִכָּל שֶׁכֵּן לְמַעְלָה מִמִּסְפָּר זָה.
But with two, you cannot connect end to beginning to make it complete—and thus there remains a defect.	אֲבָל שְׁנַיִם לֹא תּוּכַל לְחַבֵּר הַסּוֹף בָּרֹאשׁ שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לְשָׁלֵם, וְנִמְצָא פְּגַם כָּזֶה >.
Therefore, two lacks perfection. And from this imperfection, Gehinnom derives—because it is inherently incomplete.	לְפִיכָךְ הַשָּׁנַיִם חֲסַר שְׁלֵמוּת, וּמְזֶּה נִמְשֶׁךְ הַגֵּיהִנָּם, שָׁהוּא הַבִּלְתִּי שָׁלֵם.
And there is no doubt about this explanation for one who knows the secrets of wisdom.	ןאֵין סָפֵק בְּפֵרוּשׁ זֶה לְמִי שֶׁיוֹדֵעַ בְּסִתְרֵי הַחָּכְמָה.
And for this reason, it was not said on the second day "that it was good," because "good" is only said about something that is complete.	וּבִשְׁבִיל כָּךְּ לֹא נֶאֱמֵר בַּשֵׁנִי כִּי טוֹב', שָׁלֹא נֶאֱמֵר כִּי טוֹב' רַק עַל דָּבָר הַשָּׁלֵם.
And a thing that is not complete is not good.	וְדָבֶר שָׁאֵינוֹ מַשְׁלָם אֵינוֹ טוֹב.
Therefore, even the task of the waters began on the second day, but was not completed—because this is the nature of secondness, which has no completion, for one who understands this.	וּלְכָהְ אַף מְלָאכֶת הַמַּיִם הָתְחִיל בְּיוֹם שֵׁנִי, וְלֹא הַשְׁלַם. כִּי זָהוּ עִנְיַן הַשְּׁנִיוּת, שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ הַשְׁלָמָה לְמִי שָׁיָבִין אֶת זָה.
And therefore, they also said (Bereishis Rabbah 5:6): that this is why it does not say "that it was good" on the second day, because the waters were created then and were not completed.	וּלְכָךְ אָמְרוּ גַּם־כֵּן (בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה ה, ו) כִּי לְכָךְ לֹא נָאֱמַר כִּי טוֹב' בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי, לְכִּי שֶׁנִּבְרָאוּ בּוֹ הַמַּיִם, וָלֹא נִגְמָרוּ
Because something is only good when it is complete.	כִּי אֵין הַדָּבָר טוֹב, רַק כַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא שֶׁלֵם.
And therefore he said: "He saw two cracks," because Gehinnom is from the secondness, which has no completion at all.	וּלְכָּךְ אָמַר רַחֲזֵי תְּרֵי בִּזְעֵי, כִּי הַגִּיהִנּוֹם הוּא מִן הַשְּׁנִיוּת, שָׁאֵין בּוֹ הַשְּׁלָמָה כְּלָל.

And he said: "Smoke came out from them." That is to say: for these people, Gehinnom is entirely fitting for them, absolutely.	וְאָמֵר: הִנְפַּק קוּטְרָא מִנַּיְהוּ. בָּא לוֹמַר כִּי לְאֵלוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים רָאוּי לָהֶם הַגֵּיהִנֵּם לְגַמְרֵי מִכֹּל וְכֹל.
Not like other transgressions—even if one sins, Gehinnom is not completely assigned to him like this, for whom Gehinnom is fully fitting.	לֹא כְּמוֹ שְׁאָר עֲבַרוֹת, אַף אָם חָטָא, אֵין הַגִּיהָנּוֹם מִתְיַחֵם לוֹ לְגַמְרֵי כְּמוֹ זֶה, שֶׁרָאוּי לוֹ הַגֵּיהִנֵּם לְגַמְרֵי.
And therefore he said: "Smoke rose from there," and "he took the wool," etc.—all of this to show that the very essence of Gehinnom is fitting for them.	וּלְכָךּ אָמַר: דְּעָלָה קוּטְרָא מִשָּׁם וּשְׁקַל גְּבָבָא וְכוּ'. הַכּּל לְהוֹרוֹת כִּי עֶצֶם הַגֵּיהִנּוֹם רָאוּי לָהֶם.
And that which he said, "Smoke came out from them"—meaning, smoke is drawn from the fire of Gehinnom.	וּמַה שֶׁאָמַר: דְּנָפִיק קוּטָרָא מִנַּיְהוּ, פֵּרוּשׁ עָשָׁן נִמְשַׁךְּ מָן הָאֵשׁ שֶׁל גֵּיהִנֵּם.
And he called Gehinnom, which acts upon the wicked, "fire," because fire has force and great power.	וְקָרֶא הַגֵּיהִנּוֹם שֶׁפּוֹעֵל בָּרְשָׁעִים – אֵשׁ', מִפְּנֵי כִּי הָאֵשׁ יֵשׁ לוֹ תִּקָף וְגָדוֹל כֹּחוֹ.
And so too Gehinnom, which is the judgment of the wicked, has strength and force.	ָרְכֶךְ הַגֵּיהִנּוֹם שֶׁהוּא דִּין רְשָׁעִים, יֵשׁ לוֹ חֹזֶק וְתֹּקֶף.
Therefore, Gehinnom—which is the judgment of the wicked—is called "fire."	וּלְכָךְ הַגִּיהִנֵּם, שֶׁהוּא דִּין רְשָׁעִים, נִקְרָא אֵשׁ'.
And its effect is called "smoke" as well, because smoke moves about due to the intensity of the fire.	ְהַתּוֹלֶדָה קָרָא 'עָשָׁן' גַּם־כֵּן, לְפִי שֶׁהָעָשָׁן מִתְיַלֵּף מִן חֹזֶק הָאֵשׁ גַּם־כֵּן,
And there is no doubt that Gehinnom, which is the judgment of the wicked, extends its influence into this world, for the judgment of Gehinnom rules also in this world in several ways.	וְאֵין סָפֵק כִּי הַגֵּיהָנּוֹם שֶׁהוּא דִּין הָרְשָׁעִים, מִתְפַּשֵּׁט כֹחוֹ בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, כִּי שׁוֹלֵט דִּין הַגֵּיהִנּוֹם אַף בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּכַמָּה דְּבָרִים.
And this is what he said: "Smoke came out from them."	ָן זֶה שָׁאָמַר: דְּעָלָה קוּטָרָא מִנַּיָהוּ. וְזֶה שֶׁאָמַר: דְּעָלָה קוּטָרָא מִנַּיְהוּ.
And none of these things are in Heaven at all, rather everything is intellectual.	ָןאֵין כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלוּ בַּשֶּׁמַיִם כְּלָל, רַק הַכּּל מַשְׂבָּל.
And so too what he said: "He took the wool," etc.—everything is an intellectual matter.	ָןכַן מַה שֶׁאָמַר: דְּשְׁקַל נְבָבָא וְכוּ', הַכּּל עִנְיָן מַשְׂכָּל.
For it is a clear matter that Gehinnom, which is the strong judgment of the wicked, is against existence.	כִּי דָּבֶר בָּרוּר הוּא כִּי הַגֵּיהִנֵּם, שֶׁהוּא חָזָק דִּין הָרְשָׁעִים, הוּא נֶגֶד הַמְּצִיאוּת.
And this is the concept of Gehinnom: that it is the undoing and destruction of existence.	ָן זֶהוּ עִנְיַן הַגֵּיהָנֵּם, שֶׁהוּא הֶפְקֵד וְאִיבּוּד לַנִּמְצָאִים.
And therefore he said: "It scorched" whoever reached there.	וּלְפִיכָהְ אָמַר דִּמְחָרֵיךְ הַמַּגִּיעַ לְשָׁם.
And because for these wicked individuals Gehinnom is especially fitting, more than for all others who descend to	וּמִפְּנֵי כִּי לְאֵלוּ הָרְשָׁעִים רָאוּי הַגֵּיהִנֵּם בִּפְּרָט, יוֹתֵר מָבֶּל יוֹרְדֵי שָׁאוֹלָה, לַטַעַם אֲשֶׁר הִתְבָּאֵר לְמַעְלָה מִפְּנֵי

She'ol, for the reason explained above—because they opposed the Torah, which is the true intellect that obligates—	שֶׁהָיוּ חוֹלְקִים עַל הַתּוֹרָה, שֶׁהוּא הַשָּׂכֶל הָאֲמִתִּי הַמְחַיָּב.
Therefore, total nonexistence is fitting for them, with no further addition possible.	וְכָדְּ רָאוּי לָהֶם הַהֶּעְדַּר לְגַמְרֵי עַד שֶׁאֵין לְהוֹסִיף עַל זָה.
For the Torah is an existence that necessitates, while Gehinnom is complete absence.	פִי הַתּוֹרָה הִיא מְצִיאוּת מְחַיֵּב, וְהַבֵּיהוּם הָעֲדֵר גָּמוּר.
And therefore it says: that he heard them saying: "Moshe and his Torah are true, and they are liars," for the judgment of Gehinnom operated on them completely.	וּלְכָּדְּ אָמַר: דְּשָׁמַע שֶׁהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים: מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֶמֶת, וְהֵם בַּדָּאִים'. כִּי דִּין הַגִּיהִנּוֹם הָיָה פּוֹעֵל בָּהֶם לָגַמְרֵי,
And this is what clarifies the truth, and therefore the judgment of Gehinnom—i.e., nonexistence—operated on them.	וְדָבָר זֶה הוּא מְבָרֵר הָאֱמֶת, וּלְכָךְ הָיָה פּוֹעֵל בָּהֶם דִּין הַבֵּיהִוּם, שָׁהוּא הָעָדַּר.
And the reason this action of Gehinnom operated on them is because they opposed the truth, which obligates necessary existence.	וּבִשְׁבִיל פּעַל זָה שֶׁהָיָה הַגֵּיהִנֵּם פּוֹעֵל בָּהֶם, בִּשְׁבִיל שֶׁהָיוּ חוֹלְקִים עַל הָאֱמֶת שֶׁהוּא מְחַיֵּב מַכְרָח לִהְיוֹת ,נִמְצָא
Until the Torah is a necessary existence—therefore Gehinnom, its opposite, which is total nonexistence, operated on them.	עַד שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה הִיא מְחָיַב הַמְּצִיאוּת, לָכֵן הָיָה פּוֹעֵל בָּהֶם הַגֵּיהִנּוֹם, שֶׁהוּא הַפֶּךְ זֶה, שֶׁהוּא הַהָּעְדַּר הַגָּמוּר.
And this clarifies the truth of the Torah, until they would say: "Moshe and his Torah are true."	וְזֶהוּ מְבָרֵר אֲמָתַת הַתּוֹרָה, עַד שֶׁהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים: מֹשֶׁה 'וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת'.
And he said: "Every thirty days, Gehinnom flips them like meat in a pot," and they say thus.	וְאָמַר כִּי כָּל תְּלָתִין יוֹמִין מְהַפַּךְ לְהוּ גֵּיהִנֵּם כְּבָשֶׂר בְּקַלַּחַת, וְאָמָרִי הָכִי.
And the explanation of this matter is: thirty days are associated with return, because in thirty days the moon revolves its entire circuit and returns to encircle again as at first.	וּבָאוּר עִנְיָן זָה, כִּי שְׁלשִׁים יוֹם מְסַגָּלִים לַחֲזָרָה. וְזָהוּ כִּי בִּשְׁלשִׁים יוֹם מְסַבֵּב הַיָּרַחַ כָּל גַּלְגַּלוֹ, וְחוֹזֵר לָהַקִּיף כְּמוֹ בָּרָאשׁוֹנָה.
And you will not find a cycle or revolution of a sphere in less than this—for all other spheres have a longer time for their circuit.	וְלֹא תִּמְצָא הַהָּקֵף וַחֲזָרַת גַּלְגַּל בְּפָחוֹת. כִּי שְׁאָר גַּלְגַלִים יֵשׁ לָהֶם זְמֵן יוֹתֵר לְהַקָּפָתָם.
And since these wicked are fitting for Gehinnom not for a limited reason, therefore it says that Gehinnom is renewed for them every thirty days.	וּמִפְּנֵי כִּי אֵלוּ רְשָׁעִים רְאוּיִים לְגֵיהָנָּם לֹא מִצַּד מָה, וְכָךְּ אָמַר כִּי מִתְחַדֵּשׁ לָהֶם הַגֵּיהָנֵם כָּל שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם.
That is, the full force of Gehinnom acts upon them, not just a portion of it.	פֵרוּשׁ, שֶׁפּוֹעֵל בָּהֶם כָּל הַגִּיהִנּוֹם, וְלֹא מִקְצָת בֵּיהִנּוֹם.
And this is as we said: that the sons of Korach in particular were fitting for Gehinnom, because they opposed the Torah.	וְזֶה כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַרְנוּ, כִּי רָאוּיִים הָיוּ בְּנֵי קֹרַח בִּפְרָט לְגֵיהִנּוֹם, כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיוּ חוֹלְקִים עַל הַתּוֹרָה.

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And anything that is "whole" has completion, and its completion is when it returns in a cycle—for then it is complete and returns again.	וְכָל דָּבָר שֶׁהוּא פֹּל, יֵשׁ לוֹ הַשְּׁלָמֶה. וְהַשְּׁלָמֶתוֹ הוּא בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא חוֹזֵר חֲלִילָה, כִּי אָז נִשְׁלָם וְחוֹזֵר חֲלִילָה.
But if it does not return cyclically, it has no completion, and if it has no completion, it is not "whole." This is very clear.	וְאָם אֵינוֹ חוֹזֵר חֲלִילָה, אֵין לוֹ הַשְׁלָמָה, וְאָם אֵין לוֹ הַשְׁלָמָה, אֵינוֹ הַכּּלֹ. וְדָבָר זָה מְבֹאָר מְאֹד.
Furthermore, anything that is renewed—like the moon, which renews after thirty days—its renewal is the true essence of its existence.	ןעוֹד כִּי כָּל דָּבָר הַמִּתְחַדֵּשׁ, כְּמוֹ הַיָּרָחַ שֶׁמִּתְחַדֵּשׁ אַחַר שָׁלשִׁים יוֹם, חָדּוּשׁ שָׁלוֹ הוּא אֲמִתַּת עָצֶם הָוָיָתוֹ.
Like a person who is born—birth is the true essence of his existence.	ּכְּמוֹ הָאָדָם שֶׁנּוֹלָד, הַלֵּדָה הִיא אֲמִתַּת הָוָיָתוֹ.
And not like someone who already exists and merely adds onto himself—like a person who grows. That is not the true essence of his being.	וְלֹא כָּךְ כַּצְשֶׁר כְּבָר נִמְצָא וְהוּא מוֹסִיף עָלָיו, כְּגוֹן הָאָדָם שֶׁהוּא מוֹסִיף בְּגִדוּל, אֵין זָה אֲמִתַּת הֲוָיָתוֹ.
And therefore it says: that Gehinnom turns them like meat in a pot every thirty days—because Gehinnom is renewed for them, and that is the true essence of Gehinnom's being as it operates upon them.	וְלָזָה אָמַר דִּמְהַפַּּךְ לֵיה גֵּיהִנֵּם כְּבָשָׁר בְּקַלַּחַת כָּל שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, שֶׁמְּחָדֵשׁ לָהֶם הַבֵּיהִנּוֹם, וְזָהוּ אֲמִתַּת הַוָיַת הַגֵּיהִנָּם שֶׁפּוֹעֵל בָּהֶם.
And they say: "Moshe is true and his Torah is true," because the essence of Gehinnom was operating on them—because they opposed the Torah.	ןאוֹמְרִים: מֹשֶׁה אֱמֶת וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת', כִּי עֶצֶם הַגִּיהָנּוֹם הָיָה כּּוֹעֵל בָּהֶם, בִּשְׁבִיל שֶׁהֵם הָיוּ חוֹלְקִים עַל .הַתּוֹרָה
And they are fitting for the true Gehinnom, as we said—and this proves that Moshe and his Torah are true.	וְרָאוּי לָהֶם אֲמִתַּת הַבֵּיהִנֵּם כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַרְנוּ, וְזֶה מְּבָרֵר כִּי מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת.
And if this is difficult for you—what he said: "every thirty days," yet there are no days in She'ol—that is not a difficulty for one who understands.	וְאָם יִקְשֶׁה לָךְ מַה שֶׁאָמַר: כָּל שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם', וְאֵין שַיָּךְ יָמִים בַּשְּׁאוֹל. אֵין זָה קַשְׁיָא לַמַּבִין,
And this will be explained elsewhere: just as there are actual days for people in the heavens, so too days apply to things that are not in the heavens.	וְיִתְבָּאֵר דָּבָר זָה בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר, שֶׁבְּמוֹ שְׁיֵשׁ יָמִים מַמְּשׁ לְבְנֵי־אָדָם בַּשְׁמִיִּים, כָּךְ שַׁיָּךְ יָמִים לְדְבָרִים בִּלְתִּי בַּשְׁמִיִּם.
And this is not its place—it will be explained elsewhere.	וְאֵין כָּאן מְקוֹמוֹ, וְיִתְבָּאֵר בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר.

NOTE Summary

The Maharal opens by declaring that the fate of Korach and his followers proves the truth of the Torah. Since man is physical, he requires physical demonstrations to grasp metaphysical truths. Thus, Hashem performed

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miracles—such as the plagues in Egypt, the sanctification of the Mishkan through the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, and the swallowing of Korach—to visibly affirm the divine nature of the Torah.

He explains that Torah is not "true" in the conditional, empirical sense—like a statement that happens to correspond to current facts—but truth in its essence: necessary, unchangeable, eternal. For example, when the Torah states that Aharon is the Kohen, this is not a historical contingency—it is metaphysical necessity. To oppose it is to oppose what must be.

Korach's rebellion, then, was not a political revolt, but a denial of metaphysical necessity, a claim that Torah is arbitrary or human. Such a denial cannot coexist with existence. Hence, the punishment was not mere death—it was obliteration: they were swallowed alive. For if Torah is the condition for reality, opposition to it must result in anti-reality—nonbeing.

In a dazzling passage, the Maharal cites the Talmudic tale of the Arab showing Rava the "swallowed ones of Korach." He interprets this not as a literal journey, but as an intellectual vision—a philosophical insight shown by "the traveler," i.e., the intellect which circles and grasps reality like a merchant traversing the world. The "smoke" that rises from the cracks represents the residual spiritual effect of Gehinnom—the intense judgment of nonbeing.

He goes on to link Gehinnom to the second day of creation, where it says "and God did not say it was good"—for only that which is complete is "good." Gehinnom, like the number two, lacks wholeness and unity. It is the absence of integration, the fragment of being, and thus it serves as the fitting destiny for those who denied the wholeness and unity of Torah.

The Maharal returns to the phrase uttered by Korach's followers in Gehinnom: "Moshe is true and his Torah is true, and we are liars." He explains that every thirty days, the judgment of Gehinnom renews itself upon them—just as the moon completes a cycle every thirty days, symbolizing renewal and completeness. But for Korach's followers, this renewal of punishment is not growth, but repeated reassertion of their spiritual nonexistence, their utter misalignment with Torah. The thirty-day cycle becomes a metaphysical loop reaffirming the Torah's absolute truth and their ontological disqualification from existence.

Practical Takeaway

Torah is not merely a set of good ideas or divine suggestions—it is the very framework of reality. To live in alignment with Torah is to live in alignment with what must be, the ultimate truth from which all being flows. Denying Torah—through rebellion, apathy, or relativism—is not just a religious error but a distortion of existence itself.

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Every Jew has a choice: to root themselves in the truth that gives life, or to drift into falsehood, fragmentation, and decay. And the Maharal teaches that even the fires of Gehinnom cry out the truth of Torah—so much so that those who denied it are the ones who proclaim it most loudly in their undoing.

Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov once said: "There are souls who, in the World of Truth, cry out that everything they once denied is now clear to them—but too late. The wise one is he who learns from them now, while his voice still matters in this world."

In a private conversation, **Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz** told his student, "Do not argue with one who denies the truth of Torah. Simply ask them: *If you are right, what have I lost? But if I am right, what have you lost?* And then say, 'Moshe is true and his Torah is true."

Source: Ohr HaGanuz, and She'arit Pinchas, parshas Korach.

END NOTE