

The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

Noam Elimelech

Parshas Korach

Introduction

This discourse, attributed to **Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717–1787)**, a foundational figure in Polish Chassidism and author of *Noam Elimelech*, explores a deeply paradoxical truth in Divine providence: that evil and wickedness themselves play a role in revealing the greatness of the righteous. Rabbi Elimelech was a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch and teacher to many great Chassidic leaders. In his teachings, he emphasized the hidden workings of Divine mercy and the elevation of all aspects of life—even apparent darkness—for the sake of the tzaddik’s mission. This discourse reflects that vision with sharp theological insight, drawing from Bereishis and Yeshayahu to illuminate why evil exists in a world created by a benevolent G-d.

And “ויקה קרח” (ויקהפליג) is translated as “and he separated”.

This can be explained by first interpreting the verse: “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters” (Bereishis 1:6). Behold, one must understand why the Holy One, blessed be He, created a world in which there are both righteous and wicked people. For surely Hashem has no desire for the wicked. However, since “there is no righteous man on earth who does only good and never sins” (Koheles 7:20), and in order that there not be, Heaven forbid, any accusation against the righteous — for the tzaddik must rectify the worlds, which is a work of subtlety and spirituality — therefore, through the wicked, the righteousness of the tzaddik becomes evident and visible.

ו"ויקה קרח" תרגומו "וַאֲתַפְּלִיג". נראה לי בהקדים לפרש פסוק "יהי רקיע בתוך המים" כו', דהנה יש להבין על שברא הקב"ה בעולם שיהיו צדיקים ורשעים, והלא אין חפץ הש"י בְּרָשָׁעִים, אֲבָל מַחֲמַת ש"אֵין צָדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ כו'" וְלִמְעַן שֶׁלֹא יִהְיֶה ח"ו קִטְרוֹג עַל הַצָּדִיק, בִּי הַצָּדִיק צָרִיד לְתַקֵּן הָעוֹלָמוֹת שֶׁזֶה הוּא מַעֲשֵׂה דַקּוֹת וְרוֹחֲנִיּוֹת, וְעַל־יְדֵי הָרָשָׁעִים נִכָּר וְנִרְאָה צְדָקַת הַצָּדִיק, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאִמַּר שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם "כִּי תִרֹן כו' בֶּן תִּרֹן הַחֶכֶם מִן הַכְּסִיל" וּפִירְשׁוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים כְּמוֹ שֶׁעַל־יְדֵי חֲשֹׁף נִכְרַת מַעֲלַת הָאוֹר בֶּן עַל־יְדֵי הַכְּסִיל נִכְרַת מַעֲלַת תִּרְוֹן הַחֶכֶם בְּחֻכְמָתוֹ, וּבִרְאוּת הַמְּקַטְרֵג רִשְׁעַת הָרָשָׁעִים נִגָּד צְדָקַת הַצָּדִיק שֶׁבָּחַר בְּחַיִּים בְּבַחֲרֻתוֹ שֶׁנֶּחֱמַן לוֹ הַש"י אֲזַנְסָתָם פִּיּוּ מְלַקְטָרְג עוֹד עָלָיו.

And this is the explanation of the verse “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters”: that the tzaddik, who is called a “firmament” (רָקִיעַ) because of his subtlety and spirituality — as in the phrase “and they hammered out sheets of gold” (Shemos 39:3), which implies refinement — should have the power to rectify through the holy Torah, which is called “water.” “And it shall separate between water and water” — that is, it was necessary that there be a separation between the higher waters and the lower waters, meaning that there be a righteous person, and that man also be given free choice to do the opposite, Heaven forbid.

וְזֶהוּ פִּירוּשׁ הַפְּסוּק "יהי רקיע בתוך המים", ר"ל הַצָּדִיק שֶׁנִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם "רָקִיעַ" עַל שֵׁם הַדַּקּוֹת וְהָרוֹחֲנִיּוֹת מְלִשׁוֹן "וַיִּרְקְעוּ פַחֲי הַזָּהָב", שֶׁיֵּהָא לוֹ כַּח לְתַקֵּן עַל־יְדֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַקְּדוּשָׁה הַנִּקְרָאת "מֵיִם". "וַיִּהְיֶה מִבְּדִיל בֵּין מֵיִם לְמֵיִם" כְּלוֹמַר עַל כֵּן הוּכְרַח לְהִיּוֹת הַבְּדִיל בֵּין מֵיִם לְמֵיִם, וְהִיגִנוּ שֶׁיֵּהָא צָדִיק, וְגַם נִתְּנָה רִשְׁוֹת וּבַחֲרִירָה לְאָדָם לְהִיפֹךְ ח"ו.

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| <p>And even he — meaning the wicked person — also has a share in the Torah, as our Sages said: “The empty ones among you are full of mitzvot like a pomegranate.” And when the accuser sees the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, he can no longer bring accusations against the tzaddik, and the tzaddik is able to fulfill his mission as mentioned above.</p> | <p>ואף גם הוא יש לו חלק בתורה כמו שאמרו "ריקנין שבה מלאים כו'", ובראות המקטרג הבדל שבין הצדיק והרשע אין יכול שוב לקטרג עליו ויוכל הצדיק לפעל פעולתו כנ"ל.</p> |
| <p>And this is the meaning of the verse: “I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Saba in your place” (Yeshayahu 43:3). “Your ransom” (כפרה) comes from the word denial and sin, Heaven forbid. That is, if the tzaddik were to stumble slightly in a minor sin, Heaven forbid, then in contrast to this Hashem placed wicked people in the world — like Egypt and other nations such as Cush and Saba — so that there should be no strength for the accuser to prosecute the tzaddik.</p> | <p>וזהו פירוש הפסוק "ונתתי כפרה מצרים כוש וסבא תחתיה", כפרה הוא מלשון כפירה וחטא ח"ו, והיגיון אם ח"ו הצדיק נכשל קצת בחטא קל כנ"ל, לעומת זה נתן הקב"ה רשעים, כמו למשל מצרים ושאאר אומות כוש וסבא בעולם, כדי שעל-ידי זה לא יהיה כח כוש וסבא בעולם, כדי שעל-ידי זה לא יהיה כח הצדיק למקטרג לקטרג על הצדיק.</p> |
| <p>Therefore it is written “תחתיה” (“in your place”) — meaning that they are subjugated under you. For once the mouth of the accuser is silenced, automatically all the nations are subdued beneath the tzaddik. And this is the meaning of “ויקח קרח” — and the Targum translates it as “ואתפליג,” meaning he made a division and distinction. Through his wickedness, the righteousness of his father — who was a great tzaddik — became evident, and therefore he is referred to by his father’s name. And this is sufficient.</p> | <p>ולכן כתיב "תחתיה" שפירושו שהם כבושים תחתיה, כי כיון שנסתם פי המקטרג ממילא כבושים תחת הצדיק כל האומות. וזהו "ויקח קרח" תרגומו "ואתפליג" דהיינו שעשה חלוקה והבדל, שעל-ידי רשעו נכרה צדקת אביו שהיה צדיק גדול, ולכך מיחסו אחר אביו. וקל.</p> |

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[NOTE Summary:

This teaching begins by interpreting the phrase "וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח" — “and Korach took” — as “and he separated,” based on the Targum. This becomes the gateway to a broader meditation on why G-d created a world with both righteous and wicked people. Rabbi Elimelech explains that the tzaddik’s work is spiritual and delicate, aiming to refine and elevate the subtle layers of creation. But in order for his righteousness to be fully appreciated—by Heaven and by humanity—it must be set in contrast to visible wickedness.

The discourse brings the analogy of light only being noticeable in darkness, and wisdom being made known through the folly of fools. So too, the tzaddik's virtue shines brighter when compared to the sinner’s failings. This is not to endorse wickedness, but to recognize its providential role in neutralizing accusations (mekatrigim) against the tzaddik in Heaven. Referencing the verse "יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם" (“Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters”), he identifies the tzaddik as the “firmament”—a subtle, refined level—working to separate between holy and unholy, using Torah (symbolized by water) to effect repair. To allow this repair, a distinction must exist, hence the “waters above and below” symbolize the righteous and the wicked.

Even more strikingly, Rabbi Elimelech interprets the verse from Yeshayahu, “I have given Egypt as your ransom,” to mean: even if a tzaddik falters slightly, G-d created great wicked nations so that the accuser’s attention is diverted. The tzaddik's small misstep is lost in the sea of broader evil, allowing him to continue his mission unimpeded. Korach, through his rebellion, ironically served this very function: his wickedness highlighted the righteousness of his father, a great tzaddik. This profound teaching reframes sin not as random failure, but as something G-d ultimately uses to advance truth. The tzaddik remains central, but even his obstacles become Divine tools.

Practical Takeaway:

Sometimes, the contrast in our lives—the difficult people, the spiritual darkness, the injustice—serves a mysterious but essential function. Don’t be discouraged by what seems to be evil around you. Focus on your mission. Know that your sincere efforts, even if imperfect, are seen and protected by Heaven. The existence of the wicked, strange as it may seem, can actually reinforce and elevate the righteous path you are walking. Keep choosing holiness, even when it stands in stark contrast to the world around you. That very contrast may be your greatest shield.

Chassidic Story:

Once, a man came to **Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk** crying bitterly. “Rebbe,” he said, “I try to serve G-d, but I see such evil in the world. My neighbors cheat, my relatives mock me, and I constantly feel surrounded by darkness. How can I continue when wickedness seems to thrive?”

Rabbi Elimelech placed his hand on the man’s shoulder and said: “Do you see this candle?” He pointed to a single flame flickering in a darkened room. “Would you notice it if the sun were shining? The candle’s light is

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only seen because of the darkness. So too, your honest heart, your mitzvos, your tears—they shine brighter precisely because of the shadows around you.”

Then he added, echoing the theme of the discourse: “And those shadows are not random. They were placed by Heaven so that no one could accuse your soul of self-righteousness. Every mockery you endure silences a voice in Heaven that would otherwise question your sincerity.”

(Story adapted from *Toldos Adam*, a collection of stories about Rabbi Elimelech) **END NOTE]**

Or it may be said on "וַיִּקַּח קָרַח – וְאַתְּפִלֵּיג," for the creation of man and his soul is hewn from beneath the Throne of Glory. Therefore, his principal dwelling must be in the supernal worlds and to deliver influence from the lower world until the Infinite One, blessed be He. But when a person transgresses a sin, Heaven forbid, he separates himself from the supernal worlds and they have no connection to him at all. And his body and soul remain in this lowly world.

או יומר "וַיִּקַּח קָרַח – וְאַתְּפִלֵּיג", כי בריאת אדם ונשמתו תצובה מתחת כסא הכבוד, לזה צריך להיות עקר דירתו בעולמות עליונים ולתת השפעות מעולם התחתון עד אין-סוף ברוך הוא, וכשאדם עובר עברה חס ושלום, אז הוא מפריד עצמו מהעולמות עליונים ואין להם בו שייכות כלל, ונשאר גופו ונשמתו בעולם השפל הזה.

And this is the Targum “וְאַתְּפִלֵּיג” — meaning he separated himself from the worlds. And this is [the explanation of] “Hashem loves the gates of Zion...” — for the worlds are gates for a person through which he may return via them to the place from which he was hewn and to cause his soul to dwell beneath the Throne of Glory.

וזה תרגמו "וְאַתְּפִלֵּיג", פירוש שהפריד עצמו מהעולמות, וזהו "אהב ה' שערי ציון כו", כי העולמות הם שערים לאדם שיחזיר דרך שם למקום חוצבו, ולהשפין נשמתו תחת כסא הכבוד.

And this is [the meaning of] “Hashem loves the gates of Zion” — these are the gates distinguished in halachah, and they are the worlds into which He places influence and vitality. And when is He said to love them? “More than all the dwellings of Yaakov” — meaning, when the Jewish people dwell beneath the Throne of Glory.

וזהו "אהב ה' שערי ציון" הם השערים המצוינים בהלכה, והם העולמות שנותן בהם השפעה וחיות, ואימתי הוא אוהב אותם? "מכל משכנות יעקב" פירוש בשישראל שוכנים תחת כסא הכבוד.

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[NOTE Summary:

This teaching explains that the soul of man is hewn from beneath the Throne of Glory and is meant to reside in the supernal realms, channeling Divine flow from the lower worlds all the way to the Infinite One. When a person sins, however, he severs himself from those upper worlds, and his soul and body remain stuck in this lowly realm. This is the meaning of the Targum on “וַיִּקַּח קָרַח” — “וַיִּתְּפֵלֵג” that he separated himself from the higher spiritual worlds.

The worlds are described as “gates” — spiritual channels through which the soul may return to its Divine origin beneath the Throne of Glory. Hence the verse: “Hashem loves the gates of Zion” — these are the gates marked in halachah, which provide structure and access to higher realms. G-d’s love for these gates is especially expressed “more than all the dwellings of Yaakov,” meaning when Israel resides in its rightful place beneath the Throne, fulfilling its sacred mission.

Practical Takeaway:

Every sin is not just a personal failure but a spiritual disconnect — a self-imposed exile from the soul’s rightful place near the Divine. Halachah is not merely legalistic structure; it is the architecture of return. By living through the “gates” of halachah, we walk a path that leads the soul back home, restoring its connection to the Infinite. Remember that Torah and mitzvos are not only obligations — they are portals. **END NOTE]**

Or it may be said on “Hashem loves...” based on the verse “How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov...” (Bamidbar 24:5). For the level of “Yaakov” is the lower level, and “Yisrael” is the higher level. And a tent is a temporary structure, whereas a dwelling (mishkan) is a permanent one. And this is [the meaning of] “How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov” — meaning: how good it is when the multitudes of the people establish fixed times for Torah study like a tent, which is a temporary structure. “Your dwellings, O Yisrael” — refers to the complete tzaddik, who establishes himself permanently in the service of the Creator like a fixed dwelling.

או יומר "אהב כו'" על-פי הפסוק "מה טובו אהליך יעקב כו'", דמדרגת "יעקב" היא מדרגה התחתונה ו"ישראל" הוא מדרגה עליונה, ואהל הוא בנן עראי ומשכן הוא הקבוע, וזהו "מה טובו אהליך יעקב" פירוש מה טוב הוא כשהמוני עם קובעים לתורה עתים באהל שהוא בנן עראי, "משכנתיך ישראל" פירוש הצדיק השלם שהוא קובע עצמו בקבע בעבודת הבורא כמשכן הקבוע.

And behold, the way of the tzaddik who serves Hashem with constancy is that it always appears to him as if he has not yet even begun to enter the service of the Creator at all. It seems to him that he stands only at the gate of service. And this is what is meant by “Hashem loves the gates of Zion” — Hashem loves those righteous ones who are distinguished in halachah and who, in their own eyes, are still standing only at the gate.

והנה דרך הצדיק העובד ה' בקבע, נדמה אליו תמיד שצדין לא התחיל כלל לכנס בעבודת הבורא, ודומה לו שאינו עומד אלא על שער העבודה, וזהו שאמר "אהב ה' שערי ציון" שאוהב השם הטוב אותם הצדיקים המצוינים בהלכה והם בעיניהם עומדים על השער צדין.

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| <p>“[More than] all the dwellings of Yaakov” — meaning, more than those who are called by the name “Yaakov” and who believe they have already built a fixed structure in their service, like a permanent mishkan. And this is sufficient.</p> | <p>מִכָּל מִשְׁכָּנוֹת יִעֲקֹב "פִּירוּשׁ מֵאוֹתָם הַנִּקְרָאִים בְּשֵׁם יִעֲקֹב וְהֵם סוֹבְרִים שֶׁבָּרָא עָשׂוּ בַעֲבוּדָתָם בְּנִיזוֹן קְבוּעַ כְּמִשְׁכַּן הַקְּבוּעַ. וְקָל.</p> |
| <p>[NOTE Summary: This teaching contrasts two spiritual levels: Yaakov and Yisrael. “Yaakov” represents a lower state — one who establishes intermittent, temporary moments of holiness, like a tent (אוהל). “Yisrael” represents the higher level — one who builds a permanent dwelling (משכן) in Divine service. The verse “How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov; your dwellings, O Yisrael” praises both, but especially highlights those who engage with Torah either temporarily (like the common people who study in set times) or in permanence (like the tzaddik who lives entirely for G-d).</p> <p>Yet paradoxically, the true tzaddik, despite his consistency and depth, always feels as if he is just standing at the entrance of spiritual service — unworthy, unfinished, unentered. And this humility is what G-d cherishes most. Hence the verse: “Hashem loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Yaakov” — He prefers the humility of those who <i>feel</i> they are still at the gate, even if they are great, over those who believe they have already arrived.</p> <p>Practical Takeaway: Spiritual progress doesn’t mean feeling accomplished. In fact, the more sincere and elevated a person is, the more they sense how much farther they have to go. Don’t be discouraged if you feel unworthy — that feeling itself may be the greatest proof of your closeness to G-d. Embrace the gate, and know that Hashem may love your effort and humility more than someone else’s imagined permanence. END NOTE]</p> | |
| <p>And it may be explained further in another way. “וַיִּקַּח קִרְחָה” — as it is stated in the Midrash: “Why is the Torah of Hashem perfect? Because it restores the soul” (Tehillim Rabbah 19:3). And behold, this Midrash is wondrous — a wonder upon wonder.</p> | <p>וַיֵּשׁ לְפָרֵשׁ עוֹד בְּדֶרֶךְ אַחֵר. "וַיִּקַּח קִרְחָה" דְּאִיתָא בַּמִּדְרָשׁ "לָמָּה תוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה? בְּשִׁבְלִי שְׁהִיא מְשִׁיבַת נַפְשׁ". וְהִנֵּה הַמִּדְרָשׁ הוּא מְפַלֵּא הַפְּלֵא וּפְלֵא.</p> |
| <p>And it appears that the kabbalists wrote that Korach was the reincarnation of Kayin. Therefore, he was lost through the opening of the earth — in order to repair that the earth opened its mouth to receive the blood of Hevel his brother (Bereishis 4:11). And for this reason, Kayin needed to reincarnate into Korach in order to rectify this.</p> | <p>וְנִרְאֶה כִּי הַמְּקוֹבְלִים כָּתְבוּ שֶׁקִּרְחָה הָיָה גִלְגּוּל קַיִן, לְכַפֵּר נְאֻכָּד עַל־יְדֵי פִתְחַת הָאָרֶץ כְּדִי לְתַקֵּן אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה הָאֲדָמָה אֶת פִּיהָ לְקַחַת דָּמֵי הָבֵל אָחִיו, וְלִזְוֶה הַצָּרֶף קַיִן לְהַתְגַּלְגֵּל בְּקִרְחָה לְתַקֵּן זֶה.</p> |
| <p>And why didn’t Kayin repair this matter the first time? Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, created reincarnations in order that His Torah be complete. For if not, the portion “וַיִּקַּח קִרְחָה” would have been missing from the Torah.</p> | <p>וְלָמָּה לֹא תִקַּח קַיִן אֶזְרָא בְּעֶצְמוֹ זֶה הַדְּבָר בְּאוֹתוֹ הַפְּעָם? אֵלֹא שֶׁבָּרָא הַשֵּׁי"ת בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּגִלְגּוּלִים כְּדִי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה תוֹרַתוֹ שְׁלֵמָה, שְׁאֵלְמָלִי כֵּן הָיְתָה חֲסֵרָה פְּרִשְׁתַּי וַיִּקַּח קִרְחָה בְּתוֹרָה.</p> |

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And with this, the words of the Midrash are well explained: “Why is the Torah of Hashem perfect? Because it restores the soul.”

Meaning: because the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world through reincarnations, as mentioned above.

וְכֵן דְּבָרֵי הַמִּדְרָשׁ הֵם מְבוֹאֲרִים הַיָּטֵב "לָמָּה תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה? בְּשִׁבְלִי שֶׁהִיא מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ", פִּירוּשׁ בְּשִׁבְלִי שֶׁהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בָּרָא הָעוֹלָם עַל־יְדֵי גִלְגּוּלִים כֵּן"ל.

[NOTE Summary:

This discourse offers a profound explanation for the purpose of reincarnation through the lens of Korach's rebellion. It begins by citing the Midrashic teaching on the verse “תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ” — “The Torah of Hashem is perfect; it restores the soul.” The Midrash wonders why this phrase emphasizes perfection and soul-restoration.

Rabbi Elimelech reveals that the kabbalists taught Korach was a reincarnation of Kayin. In Bereishis, the earth opened its mouth to take the blood of Hevel — a rupture in cosmic order. To repair this, Kayin was reincarnated as Korach, who was swallowed by the earth. The soul could not fix this breach in its first lifetime; only through another incarnation — in a different context and trial — could it achieve tikkun.

But why would Hashem orchestrate such a scenario? Because reincarnation ensures that the **Torah is complete**. Without the episode of Korach, the Torah would be lacking a critical lesson. Hashem designed the cosmos with soul-cycles not only for justice or correction, but so that His Torah could include every possible narrative and transformation — even the downfall of Korach as an echo of Kayin.

Thus, the Midrash's cryptic statement becomes clear: “Why is the Torah perfect? Because it restores the soul.” It is perfect *because* it integrates the soul's journey across lifetimes, incorporating even its errors, reincarnations, and redemptions into the very text of Torah itself.

Practical Takeaway:

Everything — even our failures — can become part of a higher harmony. The soul's journey is not linear, and Hashem allows multiple lifetimes and events to perfect it. When you feel like you've fallen too far or missed your chance, remember: the Torah's perfection includes even that. G-d didn't just write your successes into His plan — He included your setbacks too, knowing that even through them, your soul is being restored. Keep returning. Your story is still being written into the scroll of eternity.

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Chassidic Story:

It is told that **Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk** once saw a man crying bitterly in shul. When asked why he wept, the man confessed: “I sinned terribly in my youth, and I feel that no matter how much I do now, it cannot be erased. I am stained forever.”

Rabbi Elimelech looked at him deeply and said: “Do you think Hashem only writes the stories of the righteous in His Torah? No. He writes also the Korachs, the Kayins, the golden calves, and the sins — because they are *needed*. Without them, the Torah would be incomplete. Your story, too, is part of the holy scroll being written above.”

And then he added: “Sometimes the greatest souls fall the hardest, not because they are far from Hashem — but because they are destined to show how far one can return.”

(*Source: Adapted from oral traditions surrounding Rabbi Elimelech, see *Ohel Elimelech* and *Toldos Adam*)

END NOTE]

“And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehos, the son of Levi, took...” Rashi explains: “And he did not mention ‘the son of Yaakov,’ for [Yaakov] had requested...” and “Where is his [Yaakov’s] name mentioned regarding Korach? In their genealogical listing upon the platform [of the Levites]” (Rashi on Bamidbar 16:1, based on Midrash Tanchuma). And we must analyze Rashi’s questions: “And where [is it mentioned]?” — what difficulty was there if Yaakov’s name was not mentioned anywhere?

ויקח קרח בן יצחק בן קהת בן לוי. "פירש רש"י
 "ולא הזכיר בן יעקב שביקש כו' והיכן נזכר שמו על
 קרח בהתייחסם על הדוכן". ויש לדקדק על קשיות
 רש"י זכרוננו לברכה "והיכן כו'", מה היה קשה אם לא
 היה נזכר שמו בשום מקום?

And it may be explained that Rashi, of blessed memory, intended with his question to teach us something great. For it was difficult for Rashi in the verse: what do we gain by stating his lineage — “son of Yitzhar, etc.”? Rather, its explanation is that he *took* this lineage for his rebellion and argued on the basis of his yichus (pedigree), and he did not mention the lineage from Yaakov in his dispute — who had requested, etc.

ויש לפרש שרש"י זכרוננו לברכה כיון בקשיתו להורות
 לנו דבר גדול, כי היה קשה לרש"י בפסוק מה לנו
 ליחסו בן יצחק כו', אלא פירושו הוא שלקח את היחס
 הזה למחלוקתו ונלק עליהם מחמת יחוסו, ולא זכר את
 'יחוס של יעקב במחלוקתו שביקש כו'.

And the root of the matter is that the merit of the forefathers is a great thing and stands by a person at the time he wishes to serve Hashem — that he should have assistance from Heaven to perform the mitzvah with perfection. And this is only when he does not take the advantage of his lineage and use it for another purpose; then certainly it stands by him for the service of the Creator.

ושרש הדבר שזכות אבות הוא דבר גדול ועומדת לו
 לאדם בשעה שרוצה לעבוד את ה' שיהא לו סיוע מאת
 השמים לעשות המצוה בשלימות, וזאת אינו אלא
 כשלא לקח מעלת היחס לצד אחר אז בודאי עומדת לו
 לעבודת הבורא.

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| And this is what Rashi explained: “And he did not mention the son of Yaakov” — and since Yaakov’s name was not mentioned in the context of the rebellion, then certainly his name was mentioned regarding the service of the Creator. And where is his name mentioned? Rashi explains: it is mentioned “on the platform” [among the Levi’im]. And understand this well. | וְזֶה שֶׁפִּירֵשׁ רַשִּׁי "וְלֹא הִזְכִּיר בֶּן יַעֲקֹב" וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁלֹא נִזְכָּר שְׁמוֹ עַל הַמַּחְלָקָה, אִזְּכָרַי שֶׁנִּזְכָּר שְׁמוֹ לְעִבּוּדַת הַבּוֹרָא, וְהִיכֵן נִזְכָּר שְׁמוֹ? וּמַפְרֵשׁ שֶׁנִּזְכָּר שְׁמוֹ עַל הַדּוּכָן. וְהִבֵּן. |
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[NOTE Summary:

This teaching probes Rashi’s comment on why the verse “וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח” traces Korach’s lineage only to Levi and not all the way back to Yaakov. Rashi answers that Yaakov *requested* not to be mentioned in connection with Korach’s rebellion, and notes that his name appears only later — “on the platform” (when the Levi’im are counted for Divine service).

But the author asks: why is this such a concern? Why should it matter whether Yaakov’s name appears or not?

The answer reveals a profound idea. Korach leveraged his lineage for personal rebellion. He emphasized his descent from Levi, Kehos, and Yitzhar — all spiritual giants — but omitted Yaakov, whose name stands for humility and peace. This omission was not accidental. Korach used his prestigious yichus as a weapon, distorting its power to challenge Moshe.

Rashi’s “Where is his name mentioned?” is not just a technical curiosity. It teaches that *ancestral merit (zechus avos)* is only activated when a person uses it *for Divine service*, not for ego or conflict. Because Korach exploited his yichus for division, Yaakov’s merit refused to be present. But later, when the Levi’im sing and serve, Yaakov’s name *is* invoked — because that is the purpose for which the merit of forefathers was given: to aid in holiness, not to justify rebellion.

Practical Takeaway:

Having spiritual lineage or background is a gift — but only if used humbly, for the service of Hashem. When we invoke our roots for holiness, to grow in Torah, prayer, or mitzvos, then we activate generations of support. But when used for pride, argument, or self-promotion, even the greatest yichus offers no help. True spiritual strength comes not from where you come from — but from what you do with where you come from.

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Chassidic Story:

A man once came to **Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk** boasting of his yichus: “My grandfather learned with the Baal Shem Tov, and my father studied under the Maggid of Mezritch.” Rabbi Elimelech looked at him and asked softly, “And what have *you* done with that?”

The man stammered. Rabbi Elimelech continued, “You’re like a man holding a great treasure — but using it to polish his shoes. Your ancestors brought light to the world. If you want their merit to help you, you must use it to climb, not to brag.”

Later that night, the man returned in tears, asking how to begin anew. The tzaddik blessed him: “Now your father and grandfather can finally speak on your behalf in Heaven.”

(*Source: Oral traditions cited in *Toldos Adam* and *Ohel Elimelech*) **END NOTE]**