YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Geulat Yisrael**

**Rav Moshe Taragin**

**Shiur #07: *Chassidut* and the State of Israel**

Korach was a roguish demagogue who fomented an angry mob against Moshe’s authority. Demagogues typically spew ridiculous claims, baseless accusations, and exaggerations in riling up their followers. For demagoguery to be successful, however, it must contain at least a kernel of truth or some accurate claims. Otherwise, it loses all its credibility – even in the eyes of its most ardent supporters.

Among all of Korach’s nonsensical statements, one deeply resonates as true: “The entire nation is holy and is vested with Divine presence” (*Bamidbar* 16:3). Of course, he manipulated this truth, demanding in consequence of it that every Jew serve jointly in the *Mishkan*. His propaganda ignored the important concept of religious "specialization." Every Jew is holy, but the *Mishkan* requires very specific prerequisites, which not every ordinary person can maintain. Likewise, every commoner is holy, but only certain people like Moshe can achieve prophecy and leadership. Nonetheless, there is a core of truth to Korach’s basic claim.

Thousands of years later, Korach’s message served as a cornerstone of the Chassidic revolution. In general, all human beings are created in the image of God and are imbued with Divine qualities such as free will, consciousness, emotions, intellect, and cognitive speech. Beyond these gifts provided to every human being, Jews were endowed with unique national traits such as courage and defiance (*am k’shei oref*), ability to process supernatural information such as prophecy, and enduring compassion. Empowered with freedom of choice, a human being can take advantage of these traits or squander them. A sinful life wastes these talents and tarnishes our Divine image and our Jewish identity.

Based on kabbalistic ideas, *Chassidut* introduced a bold new concept: Jews aren’t just crafted in the image of God; rather, every Jew is imbued with a part of God Himself. The metaphor that captures this “Divine imbuing” is the description of Hashem "breathing" into Adam (*vayipach be-apav*). Speaking streams air through our larynx, but respiration draws air from our "core"; by exhaling into Adam, Hashem instilled a part of Himself into Adam and subsequently into every Jew.

This Divine "infusion" yields an important principle, sometimes referred to as "*segulat yisrael.*" Being vested with a part of the Divine essence grants a Jew inalienable virtue. No matter how errant or deviant a Jew’s behavior, he remains inherently and intrinsically sacred. This was a radical concept in Jewish thought and a departure from previous views about non-religious Jews. Traditionally, “wayward Jews” who exhibited religious delinquency were embraced because of their “*teshuva* potential.” As candidates for *teshuva* and for potential repair, even sinful Jews were incorporated into the Jewish community and the Jewish formula.

*Chassidut* asserted that even *before* turning their hearts back to God, and even without full halakhic compliance, every Jew possessed latent sanctity. Any sins or transgressions were merely extrinsic. One who sins can be likened to a glittering stone falling into dirt. The jewel hasn’t lost its basic glow; its shine is merely concealed, temporarily and externally, by the dirt. *Chassidut* identified the intrinsic and irremovable sanctity of every Jew, thereby creating a concept of Jewish inclusion. For various ideological and historical reasons, *Chassidut* has undergone dramatic changes since its inception nearly 370 years ago. Today’s *Chassidut* communities, are, by and large, far more insular than the images of a community articulated by the movement's founders. However, the intellectual basis of *Chassidut* is still pivoted upon Korach's legitimate claim about God resting within each Jew.

The modern State of Israel has reimagined a new version of Korach’s claim. Life in Israel includes Jews who do not adhere, by and large, to the classic system of Halakha. Yet every Jew in the State of Israel is a partner in crafting the final arc of Jewish history and in our return to our homeland. The state provides a framework to incorporate Jews who no longer practice the rituals and ceremonies of Halakha. As deeply religious Jews, we are certainly saddened by Jews who deviate from Halakha, and we certainly dream of a day in which every Jew will turn back to God and not only believe in Him but also obey His commandments. However, until that day, we live in Israel together with millions of Jews who reflect Korach's valid claim.

Every Jew possesses latent sanctity. Sadly, historical pressures have expunged classic halakhic behavior from so many. However, many non-Orthodox Jews in Israel continue to demonstrate extraordinary commitment to our land, our people, and our history. This is a modern glimmer of the sanctity which every Jew possesses.

We await a day in which this glimmer will become a more radiant glow. Until that day, a "glimmer" will have to do.