

Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

As we move into Tammuz and the first full month of summer, the unrest among B'Nai Yisrael (in Sefer Shemot) builds up. As I mentioned the past two weeks, the rebellion of Korach and his followers (who included many members of Reuben) took place in the week between Miriam's tzaraat and the departure of the Meraglim (Torah Anthology, vol. 13, pp. 333-34). The rebellion involving Korach and Reuben led to the death of more than 15,000 Jews (16:31-32; 16:35; 17:12-14). The loss of so many Jews frightened and horrified the Jews (17:27-28) – even before the Meraglim returned with their false report. When the people were afraid to enter the land, God ordered that all adults (aged 20 or older) of the generation of the Exodus, other than Caleb and Yehoshua, would die before the people entered the promised land.

The rebellion of Korach and many members of Reuben is a classic case of an argument for the sake of power and evil rather than for the sake of truth and Hashem. Korach, from the family of Kohat (Moshe's family and thus his closest cousins), had the most holy task of all of the families of Levi – carrying the holy vessels from this Mishkan whenever the camp changed locations (ch. 4). Korach, however, felt that he was as worthy as Moshe to be the spiritual leader of the Jews. He wanted to be the Kohen Gadol, not a Levi subject to immediate death if he went past the curtain covering the Holy of Holies, or if he gazed on the holy items when they were not protected inside cloth died with techelet (the holy blue dye). Korach recruited men from Reuben who resented losing the leadership position of the first born (because of Yaakov's anger at Reuben's sin with his wife).

The battles of Korach and B'Nai Reuben seem to be with us today, in the context of political disputes. Each political party seems more focused on finding reasons to blame the other party for shortcomings than on finding solutions to our problems. (I fear being any more specific, because any specific examples will anger many of my readers.) My impression when I was young was that the political parties could often work together toward a common goal – something I believe has broken down in recent decades.

I see lessons from Korach as we seek an appropriate response to the coronavirus situation. Three months of lockdown slowed down transmission of the disease enough to permit the medical community to increase hospital and intensive care capacity enough to handle greatly increased caseloads. The economic and social costs of driving most of the world into deep recession were great. Support for continued lockdown has eroded. Governors have been lifting many restrictions. Many businesses have re-opened, although with substantial reductions in numbers of individuals in working places, whenever possible. As we re-enter a more normal life, full of contact with others, we must recognize that our actions affect others. We must behave for the sake of Shemayim (and greater society) and avoid situations that endanger others.

I see a very Jewish point of view in the way that jurisdictions are lifting restrictions. Governors and local decision makers are focusing on hospital and intensive care capacity – trying to ensure that infections requiring hospitalization do not exceed capacity. Jurisdictions can only safely lift restrictions if they have sufficient medical resources to handle each level of increased risk. There is a heavy focus on individual responsibility to practice safe social interactions – careful hygiene, social distancing, and continued social isolation of high risk individuals. We must do our part to preserve life, especially to protect those with the greatest risks from infection. I interpret much of public anger with rallies and crowded entertainment centers (including beaches, pools, and amusement centers) to arise from those who interact in public without practicing

careful hygiene and social distancing – thereby placing many more people at danger. This sort of behavior follows Korach, not Moshe.

Our synagogues largely seem to be acting for Shemayim. For example, Beth Sholom's daily minyanim have three sections – a limited number davening while wearing masks; more individuals in cars socially distant from each other; and the most vulnerable individuals participating by Zoom from the safety of their homes. Overall, a high percentage of new infections seems to be among young people, and the percentage of cases requiring hospitalization (and leading to death) seems to be falling. Hopefully most Americans and Israelis will follow the example of Moshe rather than that of Korach. If so, hopefully the trend of significantly lower rates of major complications will continue as we all await approved, successful vaccinations that will protect all of us.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, and I disagreed on many specifics of politics since our first discussion in Oakland, CA. During nearly 50 years of close friendship, our disagreements continued – but always civilized and friendly in tone. Our disagreements were more like the disputes of Hillel and Shemmai – a search for better understanding – than those that Korach brought to Moshe. Would that politics could move in that direction!

This week marks three significant yahrtzeits in our family. Yesterday (Thursday, June 25; 3 Tammuz) was the 26th yahrtzeit of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of blessed memory, the Lubavitch Rebbe. Today, 4 Tammuz, is the Yahrtzeit of Leonid Alper, grandfather of our adopted Ukrainian family, whom we met more than 30 years ago when they came to America. Next Tuesday, 8 Tammuz, is the yahrtzeit of my grandfather, David Fisher, after whom Hannah and I named our first son. May these righteous Jews' neshamas each have an alleyah in Shemayim.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Chaya Tova bat Narges, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Korach: Job Placement by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1997

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Once again, this week, Moshe comes under fire. This time he is attacked by his very own cousin, Korach, who claims that partiality and not Heavenly direction resulted in the choosing of Aharon as the Kohen Gadol.

Korach did not come alone. He riled up 250 prominent leaders to vilify Moshe, and question the entire process of appointing both the princely and the priestly leadership.

But Moshe did not cower. He gave them an offer they could not refuse. All 250 men were to try to offer the k'tores, a highly potent combination of spices and fragrances that the kohen offered each day "in that way we will know, who is "the real, (pardon the pun,) McKoyhen."

He spoke to Korach and to his entire assembly, saying, "In the morning G-d will make known the one who is His own and the holy one, and He will draw him close to Himself, and whomever He will choose, He will draw close to Himself

(Numbers 16:5). The double expression is troubling. If He will draw those holy close to himself, then of course those who He chooses will be drawn close to Him. Why the specific repetition of drawing near?

In the mid 1800's, Rabbi Avraham Shmuel of Aishishok served as the Rav of the town of Rassein, a small village near Kownus, Lithuania. A brilliant scholar and the author of the Amudei Aish, the community revered him and afforded him the utmost respect. Unfortunately, the Czar government of that era had different visions for a rabbi and appointed their own lackey, a puppet of the state known as a Rav Mitaam. The Rav Mitaam served as the official liaison to the Russian Government and any official dictate or transaction, having to do with Judaism, went only through the Rav Mitaam. Unfortunately for that Rabbi, the townsfolk knew of his very limited capabilities, and relegated him to a seat in the middle of the congregation near the Bimah as opposed to the traditional place up front near the Holy Ark.

But one week the young designate decided that he had enough. He wanted to be afforded the same dignity as Rabbi Avraham Shmuel. He woke up early that Shabbos and came to shul before anyone arrived. He sat himself down in the seat designated for Rabbi Avraham Shmuel next to the Aron Kodesh (Holy Ark). No one had the nerve to say anything to him for fear of government reprisal.

During that era, immediately before Musaf, all congregations throughout Russia said a special prayer on behalf of the Government and Czar Nikolai. That week the chazan, it is not known whether it was an orchestrated ploy or a lapse in memory, forgot to say the prayer. He was about to continue with the Musaf service when suddenly an elderly Jew, a former cantonist soldier who was captured as a youngster and forced to serve in the Czar's army for many years, jumped up from his seat and charged toward the front of the synagogue. He began raining blows on the official designated rabbi, the Rav Mitaam.

"What kind of Rabbi are you!" he shouted. "How dare you allow the chazan to forget the prayer on behalf of our benevolent leader? I served the Czar faithfully for twenty years and you forget to bless him?!" The congregants joined the fray, some trying to separate the older soldier from the bedazzled rabbi, others getting in the blows they always longed to afford the government appointed rabbi.

It was not long before the police arrived, and arrested the soldier, who was dragged out of the synagogue, yelling and hollering about the lack of honor afforded his Majesty. "After all the years I worked for the czar, I will not allow this poor excuse for a rabbi, to belittle the dignity of His Majesty!" The local policeman could not decide the fate of the soldier who struck a government official, to defend the honor of the Czar.

Finally the case was brought to the Governor General of the region who asked the "rabbi" to defend his inaction. "You see," stammered the Rabbi, I was sitting very far from the bimah and I truly did not hear the chazan skip, the prayer. After all, I was sitting next to the Holy Ark all the way up front!

The decision came down from the governor's office. No more would the official Rabbi be allowed to sit up front. From now on, he must sit amongst the people to make sure that all the prayers are said correctly.

People may feel that they are holy, but at the end of the day, it only matters who Hashem, the One who knows the true spirit of the heart and mindset of the spirit chooses to be close to. Some may run to be near the ark, when in truth, though they may physically situate themselves at the front, they have no spiritual place-setting there.

The story of Korach reminds us of the enduring saga of confused positions and roles that we often find in our community. It is the story of the chazzan who thinks he is the Rabbi, the Rabbi who thinks he is the President, and of course, the President who thinks he is the Creator! It is a parsha that reminds us that though we all have a place in Hashem's heart, our ego should not define our place in the community.

Good Shabbos!

Korach: Truth AND Peace

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015, 2020

Parashat Korach is not just about rebels; it also affords us a look at different models of leadership. Both Moshe and Aharon are attacked. The latter remains markedly silent during the confrontation while Moshe defends both his position and his brother's. Aharon's response, as we will see, comes later and in a different form.

Moshe's response is all about proving who is right and who is wrong. He speaks to, or more accurately, at, Korach but not with him. He summons Datan and Aviram but does not go to them. He makes no attempt to genuinely engage his opposition, to listen to them and try to understand their complaints or their motivations. He points out Korach's hypocrisy, noting that he is not after equality for the people but leadership for himself. And while Moshe may be completely correct in this point, revealing this truth will hardly win Korach – or even the people – over.

Moshe may be rightfully hurt that the people are shifting the blame for their failures and their current predicament onto him, but calling out to God and focusing on the wrongness of that claim rather than the people's reality gets him nowhere. In the end, Moshe demands a showdown with one ultimate winner and one ultimate loser, and the consequences are drastic and deadly: truth wins out, but its price is the complete destruction of the other side.

This is one way of approaching conflict, but it will not necessarily lead to the best results. Here, the focus is on a narrow, abstract truth, not the deeper truth of human beings, human emotions and motivations, societal realities, or interpersonal relationships. An approach such as this can even be quite counter-productive.

What is the aftermath of Moshe's proofs? Are the people satisfied now that they know he was right and Korach was wrong? Quite the contrary: "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moshe and against Aharon, saying, 'You have killed the people of the Lord'" (Bamidbar, 16:41). The people do not see justice in Moshe's actions; his response was too violent, even if he was right. And perhaps the people aren't even sure in the end that Korach was wrong. They still refer to him and his followers as "the people of the Lord." It is hard not to hear an echo of Korach's claim that "All the people are holy and the Lord is in their midst" (16:3). The people were taken with Korach's vision, and they remain sympathetic to it. Moshe might have proven once and for all who was right, but the people-who exist on an emotional and psychological plane-may still feel that Korach was innocent, even right in some ways, and that he was killed unjustly.

Here is where Aharon comes in. On Moshe's direction, Aharon runs into the middle of the people and puts incense on the fire censer, staying the plague that was decimating the people. Rashi notes that the incense has an opposite effect here than it had earlier, bringing life now rather than death. But the point is larger than the effect of the incense, for the incense represents closeness to God. Closeness to God, if approached incorrectly, can lead to death. We saw this earlier with Nadav and Avihu and their wrongly offered incense, and we see it here with the story of the 250 men. But closeness to God can also bring life: "Seek me out and live," says God (Amos, 5:4). Whether this closeness brings life or death has to do with how we approach God, but it also has to do with how God approaches us.

The Rabbis speak of two aspects of the Divine: the side of Judgment and the side of Compassion. When God interacts with us in the mode of Judgment, every misstep is noted and punished accordingly. To use a gendered stereotype, we may think of this as the mode of the stern father. But there is also the mode of the forgiving, understanding mother, the mode of Compassion. Operating in this mode, God looks to find ways to connect, to nurture and give life, rather than focusing on an exact sense of right and wrong or on missteps and failures.

These two modes are paralleled in two types of leadership: that of Moshe and that of Aharon. Moshe's leadership was one of judgment, of right and wrong. Aharon's leadership was one of compassion, of forgiveness and understanding. This is vividly illustrated in God's response to the people's outcry. God tells Moshe to take twelve staves and to place them by the ark, one for each tribe, including Aharon's staff for the tribe of Levi. Moshe does so, and by the next day, Aharon's staff had blossomed and brought forth almonds. This, the Torah tells us, demonstrated that Aharon and his tribe had been chosen.

But how did this miracle accomplish anything more than the previous miracles? On an intellectual plane it added nothing, but on an emotional level, it made its point through beauty and life, not through destruction and death. It showed that leadership – as symbolized by the staff – should be nurturing and life-giving. If attached to its original source of life, the

same stick that can be used as a rod to smite can also be a living branch, the source of flourishing and growth. The miracle of the staff demonstrated to the people and to Moshe that a different type of leadership was possible. Let us not forget that Moshe's sin at the end of the forty years was that he continued to use the staff as a rod, smiting the rock rather than talking to it.

This is not to say that the approach of Aharon can exist by itself. The staff must be both a rod and a branch. In the end, we need both a father's sternness and a mother's compassion. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (6b) addresses this in its discussion of whether a judge should strive for justice (din) or compromise (peshara). It associates the former with Moshe and the latter with Aharon:

Such was Moshes' motto: Let the law pierce the mountain. Aharon, however, loved peace and pursued peace and made peace between man and man, as it is written, "The law of truth was in his mouth, unrighteousness was not found in his lips, he walked with Me in peace and uprightness and did turn many away from iniquity" (Malakhi, 2:6).

Now truth and peace are not always compatible. The famous Midrash tells how Aharon would pursue peace: When two people were fighting, Aharon would approach each one individually, saying, "Your friend wants to make up with you, but he is too embarrassed to come and apologize." This would evoke sympathetic feelings, and the next time they met, the two would embrace and make up. This is the way of peace, but it is not exactly the way of truth: white lies were necessary to achieve the end.

The world needs judgment and compromise, truth and peace. We may have to choose between the two, but the choice is not necessarily either/or. Maharsha already notes that the verse regarding Aharon and peace also states that "the law of truth was in his lips." Peace can be integrated with truth. In halakhic literature this is referred to as peshara krova li'din, a compromise which approximates the just resolution. This integration can come in terms of proportions, some elements of a decision being based on the letter of the law and others on compromise. It might also come in terms of a larger perspective. Truth does not exist solely in terms of abstract realities or the letter of the law; it can also incorporate equity, fairness, the condition of human relationships, and societal well-being. When Aharon said, "Your friend wants to make up with you," he was not lying. He was communicating a deeper, human truth.

Peace by itself, if it fully sacrifices truth, is also a perversion. It was Aharon's desire to find peace that led to his giving into the people at the Sin of the Golden Calf. We must strive for peace as the ultimate goal, but it must be a peace that approximates and integrates truth.

As it is with leadership, so it is with our interpersonal relationships. How many couples waste needless hours and emotional angst, at times even fracturing, over pointless arguments about who is right and who is wrong? What larger truth is achieved by demonstrating that one is right about a trivial detail? On the other hand, never standing for anything and simply giving in all the time leads to resentment and a compromise of one's sense of self. The goal is to seek out the larger truth, one that incorporates not just abstract questions of fact but also the truths of human emotions and human relationships. "'Kindness and Truth have met up' [Tehilim, 85]: This is Moshe and Aharon" (Shemot Rabbah, 5:10).

Korach -- The Propaganda War

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine © 2014, 2020 Teach 613

Korach was an honorable man. He was one of the chosen few designated to carry the holy Aron. Then something went wrong. In this week's Parsha we find him in a showdown with Moshe, the revered man of G-d. Korach tries to oust Aaron from the position of Kohein Gadol. By the time the story is over, Korach is swallowed up into the earth. The message of the Torah is clear: Korach was wrong. The question, however, is: Where did Korach go wrong?

I once heard a fascinating insight into the destructive power of jealousy. At first a person sees that which was given to someone else, and simply wishes that it had been given to him. If these feelings are left unchecked, then the person begins to go beyond wishful thinking. He actually begins to feel that it really should have been given to him. With time, if left unchecked, the feelings progress to a sense that the item or position in question really is his, but the other person took it unfairly. Finally, the person is so offended that someone else has what is rightfully his, that he starts a "righteous" crusade to try to correct the "wrong" which was done to him.

Korach was a very talented and dedicated man. What went wrong is that he was jealous, and did not rein in his jealousy. He wished to have been appointed as the Kohein Gadol instead of Ahron. He allowed his jealousy to progress until he turned his indignation into a "righteous" crusade. In the words of Chazal: "He bought a bad deal for himself." In other words, we all buy things; we all invest; we all sacrifice for causes that we believe in. Korach bought big. But he bought into a bad cause.

Once Korach allowed jealousy to bring him to the point of his crusade, he realized that he needed to promote his cause of "righteousness". So he started a propaganda campaign to delegitimize Moshe's teachings and Moshe's leadership. Towards the end of the story, Moshe declares, "I did not make anything up on my own. I was simply a messenger of Hashem." Clearly the message that Korach was feeding the people- and to which Moshe was responding- was the claim that Moshe was unreliable. The Jewish people knew that Moshe was reliable. They had seen him as G-d's messenger in Egypt, at the Sea, and in the desert, especially at the revelation at Sinai. But by saying the lie enough Korach was able to get a group of people to join his misleading crusade.

Even bad people realize the importance of packaging a cause and promoting it through propaganda. Even if they themselves are comfortable with doing evil, they realize that only if they guise their actions in the cloak of righteousness will the people around them tolerate their behavior. Hitler, for example, first set out to delegitimize his enemies by teaching the masses that his enemies were "subhuman". Then he was able to proceed and eradicate them in the name of the crusade that he created. He was simply acting with nobility to promote "the cause".

Indeed, man has the ability to design and to choose all kinds of causes. Some causes, like training for a specific sport or physical challenge, may be for purposes of clean entertainment, exercise, or testing human endurance. There is no intrinsic greatness in successfully slam dunking, for example, or climbing Mount Everest. Yet, man can legitimately choose a challenge, then pursue it with great dedication, and provide reward or respect for those who strive or succeed in its achievement.

However, it is possible for a person to choose an evil cause, and then through propaganda, promote it so that others should support or at least tolerate it. A person can switch from being a terrorist to being a freedom fighter, for example, simply by repeating a lie enough that people begin to believe it. As a freedom fighter one can somehow justify kidnapping, maiming, and killing. Propaganda claiming how deeply a person has been oppressed can literally change people's perception of reality regarding a person or activity. Western man understands the power of propaganda in influencing the masses to support evil. Julius Streicher, for example, was found guilty of crimes against humanity and executed at Nuremberg in 1946, not for planning the Holocaust or for killing people, but rather for creating the propaganda which made such evil possible.

It is instructive that besides prohibiting theft, murder, and kidnapping, the Torah prohibits jealousy and malicious gossip. "Cursed is one who strikes another in a hidden way," refers to incitement, where the blow cannot be clearly seen, but can be easily traced as being the source of the evil which follows.

The story of Korach is not just about Korach and the targets of his criticism, Moshe and Ahron. The story of Korach is the story of a person who chooses a bad cause and then promotes it with boldness and dedication, so that people who don't pay attention too closely begin to believe the lie. It is a story of the Bible which aims to teach the lesson that despite the propaganda, eventually truth, honesty, and peace will persevere. . . .

May Hashem bless us with safety and peace.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

Criticism or Contempt: Thoughts for Parashat Korah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

This week's Torah portion begins with the words "Vayikah Korah," and Korah took. But the verse never tells us what Korah took!

Our classic commentators offered their explanations. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra opines that Korah “took men” with him in fomenting rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Rashi explains that Korah “took himself to one side” in order to dissent from the current Israelite leadership. Ramban explains that Korah “took counsel with his heart” to rise in rebellion.

Perhaps, though, the Torah is teaching us something else. By not stating what Korah took, the Torah is in effect saying: Korah took....nothing! Korah gave the appearance of taking bold action, but in fact he offered nothing but bluster. He had nothing positive to suggest. Korah is good at complaining, he is an effective demagogue: but he had no actual agenda. The Torah lists his grievances but does not list any of his plans for improving the lot of the Israelites. Korah and the other rebels never disclose how their leadership would be better than that of Moses and Aaron.

The Pirkei Avot (5:21) distinguishes between the types of disputes conducted by Hillel and Shammai and the dispute generated by Korah and his cohorts against Moses and Aaron. The debates of Hillel and Shammai were “in the name of Heaven.” The dispute of Korah was “not in the name of Heaven.” The usual understanding of this passage is that Hillel and Shammai were not arguing for their own personal glory but in order to clarify the halakha. Even when they disagreed on particular rulings, they both accepted the halakhic system and worked within it. On the other hand, Korah and the other rebels were not motivated by an honest search for truth, but by the desire to gain personal power. Their rebellion was not for the sake of Heaven but for their own selfish goals.

We might refine this explanation by considering two words: criticism and contempt. Hillel and Shammai were critical of each other’s views on certain matters. They marshaled arguments to bolster their own views and to refute the views of the other. Criticism aims at undermining the arguments of the opponent, not at discrediting the opponent’s character. People who are critical of each other’s viewpoints can still sit together and offer their cases and refutations. Even if neither side is convinced to change his/her mind, the debate can be civil and respectful.

Contempt is something different. A contemptuous opponent is not interested in engaging in serious discussion or debate, but rather in assassinating his opponent’s character. He does not offer arguments to bolster his views or to refute his opponent’s arguments. Rather, he attacks his opponent’s character. He wants to demonstrate that he is superior and his opponent is inferior. He speaks and acts with contempt. This was the approach of Korah’s cohorts Datan and Aviram toward Moses. They sought to discredit Moses in the eyes of the people, to malign his character and his leadership. They were not interested in a disinterested dialogue with Moses on the best way to lead the Israelites; Datan and Aviram even refused to appear before Moses when he summoned them. They were contemptuous.

When people—individually, communally, nationally—have disagreements, they can engage in serious discussion and dialogue even if the parties are critical of each other’s positions. Each can offer arguments and refutations. Both sides—even if holding very different positions—can still find a common ground and can see themselves as working toward one goal. But when people—individually, communally, nationally—are contemptuous of the other side, then the basis for discussion, debate and reconciliation is undermined. The contemptuous party or parties are not at all interested in dialogue or debate; they are interested in destroying the other party. They see themselves as being superior; they are above discussion or criticism; their opponents are discredited and dehumanized.

And this may be the inner meaning of “Vayikah Korah,” and Korah took....nothing. Korah and his cohorts did not come to criticize Moses and Aaron but to contemptuously displace them. When people offer contempt instead of criticism, they essentially offer nothing of value. They bring nothing to the table except hatred and self-righteousness. Contemptuous people are dangerous and destructive...but ultimately end up by being swallowed up by the forces of truth.

* Jewishideas.org.

Emphasizing the Details: Thoughts for Parashat Korah

By Jake Nussbaum, IJII University Network Member*

Every year, when we read parashat Korah, one of the most glaring questions is what was Korah’s problem? What caused him to start a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon? I believe that based on some answers, we can take a big lesson to see where Korah is in our everyday lives.

Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, the Arizal, was one of the master kabbalists of Tzfat in the 1500s. He pointed out that the Gematria of Korah is the gematria of Moshe minus the Gematria of Hevel. Rabbi Moshe Tendler offered an explanation that this suggests that Korah had all the attributes of Moshe, but was just missing the character trait of Hevel. What was the quality of Hevel that Korah was missing that caused his downfall?

In the tragic story of Kayin and Hevel, both of them offered a sacrifice to Hashem. Hevel gave an animal offering, and Kayin brought produce. Rabbi Tendler says that both of them knew that they needed to bring offerings to Hashem. Kayin thought that since Hashem doesn't gain any actual benefit from an animal sacrifice, and the main aspect of an offering is our intentions, there would be no harm in bringing something other than an animal, and his intentions would be enough. Hevel, however, understood that the proper way to bring an offering is with an animal, so he brought an animal.

So what did Hevel have that Korah didn't? The Midrash Tanhuma says that Korah brought two questions to Moshe to question his Halakhic authority. The first question was if a garment that is fully made of tekhelet would need tzitzit at its corners, and Moshe said yes. Korah and his followers mocked Moshe. If a regular garment only needs one strand of tekhelet to exempt it, why should a fully blue garment still need tzitzit to make itself exempt? The other question was very similar. He asked if a room full of Torah scrolls would need a Mezuzah, to which Moshe once again affirmed that it would. If a little scroll with only two paragraphs of the Torah exempts a room of its obligation, surely a room full of Torah scrolls with thousands of paragraphs should exempt itself!

Korah had the same fatal flaw as Kayin. He rationalized about religious performance. On the other hand, Hevel had the quality of performing a mitzvah with the fullness of heart and fullness of intention.

There is a Midrash that says that Korah started his rebellion after he heard about the Mitzvah of the Red Heifer. What do the two of them have to do with each other?

Next week's Parsha is Hukat. It starts by saying "These are the statutes of the Torah." The next Pasuk immediately goes on to explain the Halakhot of a Para Adumah. Rashi on that Pasuk says that naysayers will come to ask us "what is this commandment and what reason is there to it?" The answer is simply, some commandments are not meant for us to understand.

Korah's problem was that he couldn't grapple with the idea that there could be something Hashem commands us that we cannot comprehend. There are some details that we will never be able to figure out. While his questions to Moshe make logical sense, they are wrong when it comes to the ruling system of halakha.

In his famous essay "The Common Sense Rebellion," Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik explains the mindset of someone who only cares for Mitzvot that he or she can understand.

He says:

"The Mitzvah Does not depend on the emotion; rather, it induces the emotion. One's religious inspiration and fervor are generated and guided by the mitzvah, not the reverse. The goal is proper kavvanah and genuine devekut, but these can be religiously authentic only if they follow the properly performed mitzvah. The emotion generated by the mitzvah is circumscribed and disciplined by the Halakhah and its character is not left open to possible distortion by human desires and fantasies. The halakhically defined mitzvah has quantitative dimensions and precise perimeters, and these establish the authenticity of the genuinely Jewish religious experience."

The Rav does not discount the factor of feeling in Mitzvot, rather he says that the main part of the Mitzvah is the performance.

In this essay, the Rav also speaks about "Religious Subjectivism," that posits that religion is based on how it makes the individual feel. An example of this would be saying "I don't understand this Mitzvah, so I won't do it," or "I don't personally connect to that Halakha, so I'll leave it aside." This is obviously a mindset which is antithetical to our tradition, and it is the mindset that caused the downfall of Korah.

May we all merit to have the strength to perform all the Mitzvot, and to feel a strong connection to Hashem through them.

Parshas Korach by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

The morning after Korach and his followers perished, the nation came to Moshe and Aharon and declared that Moshe and Aharon were to blame for the deaths of Korach and his followers. G-d immediately sent the Angel of Death and a plague began to spread through the camp. Moshe sent Aharon with the incense offering. Aharon stood between the living and the dead and stopped the Angel of Death, ending the plague.

Rash"i (17:11) quotes Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi from the Gemara Shabbos (89a) who tells us that Moshe learned the secret of the incense offering from the Angel of Death himself. When Moshe went up on Har Sinai to receive the Torah, the angels protested to G-d. They asked how can the spiritual, lofty Torah be given to the earthly, physical human beings? G-d told Moshe to take hold of His Heavenly Throne and defend himself. Moshe quoted the Ten Commandments and asked the angels if these laws applied to them. Do they have parents to honor or creative work to cease on Shabbos? Do they have business dealings, jealousy, or the evil inclination that they should need to control themselves and not swear in G-d's name, not murder or covet?

Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi concludes that all of the angels were moved at this point to become a close beloved friend of Moshe's and to give Moshe a gift and to teach him of the Torah secrets relevant to each of their missions. Even the Angel of Death, the greatest prosecutor against human beings, was moved and gave Moshe the secret of the incense offering. These angels moments ago had spoken so disparagingly of human beings and of Moshe and the Jewish people. What was it that moved them to befriend Moshe and to share the gifts of the secrets of Torah?

The Chasam Sofer (Shabbos 88b) explains that the angels emotional reaction and sudden love and goodwill towards Moshe was a reaction to Moshe's humility. When G-d told Moshe to grab hold of G-d's Heavenly Throne, G-d was hinting to Moshe that he should explain to the angels that Torah must be applied to every level of creation, and it is only human beings who can connect with every level of creation. We connect from physical earth, below the angels, all the way up to G-d's Throne, above the angels. In his humility, Moshe only explained how we connect with Torah on the physical level of earth beneath the angels. He did not wish to express his ability to reach above the angels up to G-d's throne.

It was this humility which so deeply moved the angels. Although a few moments ago they had viewed Moshe disparagingly as a lowly physical being, when they saw his humility, they saw spiritual grandeur. They recognized in Moshe's humility a greatness so meaningful that they now wished to draw close to Moshe and befriend him. Even the Angel of Death, the archenemy of man, sought to befriend Moshe and gave him a gift.

One of the most powerful lessons of our current experience is the lesson of humility. I continue to find myself awe-struck when I take a moment to reflect on how with one tiny creation – a virus, even less complex than a bacteria - G-d quickly and completely brought the entire world to a grinding halt. Even now, as the greatest minds and institutions across the world collaborate to understand and master this virus, we continue to find ourselves at a loss to fully understand its workings, nor have we yet found a cure or vaccine. Indeed, the Medrash at the end of this week's Parsha (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:22) tells us it is for the sake of our humility that G-d uses His small and insignificant creations to afflict the world. G-d is seeking to provide us with the tools to be able to overcome our pride and develop meaningful humility. Humility is of great significance to G-d.

Humility is a most powerful character trait, which helps us succeed in all areas of life – physical and spiritual. As the Medrash says, Hashem is providing us with a powerful tool to achieve this important trait. There is much to reflect upon. May Hashem guide us to use it all well, and truly develop this important trait.

Rav Kook Torah

Korach: Separation and Connection

This was the battle cry of Korach's rebellion — a complaint that, at first glance, seems perfectly justified. Did not the entire people hear God speak at Sinai? It would seem that Korach was only paraphrasing what God Himself told Moses: "Speak to the entire community of Israel and tell them: you shall be holy, for I, your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). Why indeed should only the Levites and the kohanim serve in the Temple? Why not open up the service of God to the entire nation?

Havdalah and Chibur

In our individual lives, and in society and the nation as a whole, we find two general principles at work. This first is havdalah, meaning 'withdrawal' or 'separation.' The second is chibur, meaning 'connection' or 'belonging.'

These are contradictory traits, yet we need both. This is most evident on the individual level. In order to reflect on our thoughts and feelings, we need privacy. To develop and clarify ideas, we need solitude. To attain our spiritual aspirations, we need to withdraw within our inner selves.

Only by separating from society can we achieve these goals. The distracting company of others robs us of seclusion's lofty gifts. It restricts and diminishes the creative flow from our inner wellspring of purity and joy.

This same principle applies to the nation as a whole. In order for the Jewish people to actualize their spiritual potential, they require havdalah from the other nations — as "a nation that dwells alone" (Num. 23:9).

Similarly, within the Jewish people it is necessary to separate the tribe of Levi — and within Levi, the kohanim — from the rest of the nation. These groups have special obligations and responsibilities, a reflection of their inner character and purpose.

Separation in Order to Connect

Yet separation is not a goal in and of itself. Within the depths of havdalah lies the hidden objective of chibur: being part of the whole and influencing it. The isolated forces will provide a positive impact on the whole, enabling a qualitative advance in holiness. These forces specialize in developing talents and ideas that, as they spread, become a source of blessing for all. As they establish their unique traits and paths, life itself progresses and acquires purpose.

We find this theme of havdalah/chibur on many levels. The human race is separate from all other species of life. Through this havdalah, humanity is able to elevate itself and attain a comprehensive quality that encompasses the elevation of the entire world. The Jewish people are separate from the other nations; this separateness enables them to act as a catalyst to elevate all of humanity, to function as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6).

The tribe of Levi is separated from the rest of the nation through their special responsibilities; this distinction ennobles the members of the tribe to fulfill their unique role. The Levites sanctify themselves and become a blessing for the entire nation. And the kohanim, with their special holiness, are elevated until they draw forth ruach hakodesh (prophetic inspiration) for the benefit of the entire nation, thus actualizing the nation's highest spiritual abilities.

The Correct Order

Now we may understand the source of Korach's error. The Zohar (Mishpatim 95a) teaches:

"The Sitra Achra [literally, the 'Other Side' — the forces of evil] begins with chibur [connection] and ends with pirud [division]. But the Sitra deKedushah ('Side of Holiness') begins with pirud and ends with chibur."

The correct path, the path of holiness, follows the order of first separating and then connecting. In other words, the separation is for the sake of connection. But Korach's philosophy (and similar ideologies, such as communism) took the opposite approach. He sought a simplistic inclusiveness of all, binding all people into one uniform group from the outset. He boastfully claimed to unite all together — "The entire congregation is holy." This approach, however, replaces the splendor of diversity with dull uniformity. In the end, this totalitarian approach leads to disunity, as all parts yearn to break apart in order to express their unique individuality. "The Sitra Achra begins with chibur and ends with pirud."

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Orot HaKodesh vol. II, p. 439.)

Powerful Insights From the Rebbe -- Korach*

Compiled by Mordechai Rubin

This week's Torah reading relates how Korach came to Moses with a protest: "The entire nation is holy and G d is among them. Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of G d?"

Seemingly, Korach's complaint was legitimate. Since the people are all holy, each one of them possesses a spark of G dliness, why should one person be "exalted"?

The resolution to these questions depends on the understanding of leadership. Certainly, the entire nation was holy, but to express that holiness, the people had to be motivated and inspired. That required a leader, a Moses.

A leader empowers people to realize their potential and express it. Without such leadership, even though people possess positive qualities, it is possible that they will fail to manifest them.

Although the people all possessed an essential G dly spark, it was the responsibility of Moses to bring that G dliness into revelation. Certainly, they possessed the potential; but as the Biblical narrative indicates, there were many occasions when they failed to live up to their potential. Moses' leadership motivated them to push forward and express who they really were.

In every generation, we must seek leaders, people who will spark us to utilize the positive qualities which we possess. Following the guidance of a leader enables a person to accomplish more than he could on his own initiative.

Three Natural Miracles

The story of Aaron's blossoming staff is told in our Parshah. In order to reassert Aaron's status after the Korach debacle, G d instructed Moses:

"Take . . . a staff from each of [the tribes'] leaders . . . and write each one's name on his staff. Write the name of Aaron on the staff of Levi . . . and the man whom I shall choose, his staff will blossom .

Moses placed each staff before G d in the Sanctuary. On the next day . . . behold, the staff of Aaron was blossoming: it brought forth blossoms, produced fruit and bore ripe almonds.” (Numbers 17:16–24)

In a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Shabbat Korach 1991, the Rebbe cited the above incident as a classic example of a natural miracle. G d did not simply make almonds appear. Rather, He simulated all stages of growth. It transcended nature, but on nature’s own terms. The Shabbat on which the Rebbe spoke was the 3rd of Tammuz, and the Rebbe gave two more examples of “natural miracles,” both occurring on that date.

On the third of Tammuz of the year 2488 from creation, Joshua was leading the Jewish people into battle. Victory was imminent, but darkness was about to fall. “Sun,” proclaimed Joshua, “be still at Giv’on; moon, at the Ayalon Valley” (Joshua 10:12). The heavenly bodies acquiesced, halting their progress through the sky until Israel’s armies brought the battle to its successful conclusion.

The second natural miracle occurred 3,199 years later—this time in even more natural terms. The 3rd of Tammuz, in the Jewish year 5687, was the day on which the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, was released from the Spalerna prison in Leningrad. This was the day that a new reality supplanted the old. Yet this new reality came into being by wholly “conventional” means, in the gradual and incremental manner that is the hallmark of a natural development.

This is the lesson of the 3rd of Tammuz: we must not be intimidated by the limits of natural norms, but we must also not to disavow them. Instead, we should work within them to broaden and expand them. Rather than seeking to liberate ourselves of the circumstances of nature, we should seek to liberate and elevate the nature of nature itself.

Why Do We Need a King?

Korach’s challenge to Moses’ leadership calls for an understanding of the Jewish concept of authority in general. One of the mitzvot of the Torah is to appoint a king and whenever we recite the Grace After Meals we pray for the restoration of the monarchy and the House of David. Indeed, this will be the function of Mashiach who will be a teacher, but primarily a king, an absolute ruler.

Among the explanations of this concept is that earthly monarchy stems from — and serves as an analogy to and an extension of — our relationship with the King of kings. The purpose of a Jewish monarchy is to teach the people self-nullification to the king in order to intensify their self-nullification to G d. The self-nullification of the people to a mortal king should infuse kabbalas ol, “the acceptance of G d’s yoke,” into every dimension of divine service, deepening the intensity and commitment until it affects our very essence.

Ideally, kingship is invited by the king’s subjects, and not imposed upon them. The analogue to this relationship reflects man’s desire and initiative to tie the essence of his being to G d in homage to Him.

Korach’s Division

The opening words of our Sidra, “And Korach took,” are translated in the Targum as “And Korach divided,” in the book Noam Elimelech, Rabbi Elimelech of Liszensk compares Korach’s dissension to the firmament which G d created on the second day to divide between the higher and lower waters.

What is the analogy? One difference between the priests and the rest of the children of Israel was that the priests were withdrawn from the affairs of the world and entirely taken up with their holy office. Especially the High Priest (against whom Korach’s accusation was primarily intended), of whom it is written that “he shall not depart from the Sanctuary.”

Despite this however, he was not uninvolved with the rest of the people: On the contrary, he exercised his influence over them all, drawing them up to his own level of holiness. This was symbolized by the kindling of the seven branches of the Menorah. Aaron's special attribute was "Great, or everlasting Love"—and he drew the people near to this service.

But Korach did not see this. He saw only the separation between priest and people, he saw that just as the priests had their special role, so too did the people, in enacting G d's will in the practical world. Seen as separate entities, the people had at least as much right to honor and elevation as the priests.

He sought the priesthood, but as an office entirely remote from the people. Hence his accusation, "Why do you elevate yourselves?" In his eyes, the two groups, utterly distinct, each had their special status. In this way Korach was like the firmament: His aim was to divide the people, like the waters, and sever the connection between the Sanctuary and the ordinary world.

A Trek with G d

G d established the authority of Aaron the High Priest by putting the Twelve Tribes to a test: Each tribe was to bring forth a staff representing its leader and leave it in the Tabernacle overnight. By morning, Aaron's staff had miraculously sprouted buds and almonds.

* On the 26th yahrtzeit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, 3 Tammuz, corresponding to June 25, 2020.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Arguments for the Sake of Heaven

The Korach rebellion was not just the worst of the revolts from the wilderness years. It was also different in kind because it was a direct assault on Moses and Aaron. Korach and his fellow rebels in essence accused Moses of nepotism, of failure, and above all of being a fraud – of attributing to God decisions and laws that Moses had devised himself for his own ends. So grave was the attack that it became, for the Sages, a paradigm of the worst kind of disagreement:

Which is an argument for the sake of Heaven? The argument between Hillel and Shammai. Which is an argument not for the sake of Heaven? The argument of Korach and his company. (Mishnah Avot 5:17)

Menahem Meiri (Catalonia, 1249–1306) explains this teaching in the following terms: The argument between Hillel and Shammai: In their debates, one of them would render a decision and the other would argue against it, out of a desire to discover the truth, not out of cantankerousness or a wish to prevail over his fellow. An argument not for the sake of Heaven was that of Korach and his company, for they came to undermine Moses, our master, may he rest in peace, and his position, out of envy and contentiousness and ambition for victory.[1]

The Sages were drawing a fundamental distinction between two kinds of conflict: argument for the sake of truth and argument for the sake of victory.

The passage must be read this way, because of the glaring discrepancy between what the rebels said and what they sought. What they said was that the people did not need leaders. They were all holy. They had all heard the word of God. There should be no distinction of rank, no hierarchy of holiness, within Israel. "Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" (Num. 16:3). Yet from Moses' reply, it is clear that he had heard something altogether different behind their words:

Moses also said to Korach, "Now listen, you Levites! Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near

Himself to do the work at the Lord's Tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near Himself, but now you are trying to get the Priesthood too." (Num. 16:8–10)

It was not that they wanted a community without leaders. It is, rather, that they wanted to be the leaders. The rebels' rhetoric had nothing to do with the pursuit of truth and everything to do with the pursuit of honour, status, and (as they saw it) power. They wanted not to learn but to win. They sought not verity but victory.

We can trace the impact of this in terms of the sequence of events that followed. First, Moses proposed a simple test. Let the rebels bring an offering of incense the next day and God would show whether He accepted or rejected their offering. This is a rational response. Since what was at issue was what God wanted, let God decide. It was a controlled experiment, an empirical test. God would let the people know, in an unambiguous way, who was right. It would establish, once and for all, the truth.

But Moses did not stop there, as he would have done if truth were the only issue involved. As we saw in the quote above, Moses tried to argue Korach out of his dissent, not by addressing his argument but by speaking to the resentment that lay behind it. He told him that he had been given a position of honour. He may not have been a Priest but he was a Levite, and the Levites had special sacred status not shared by the other tribes. He was telling him to be satisfied with the honour he had and not let his ambition overreach itself.

He then turned to Dan and Aviram, the Reubenites. Given the chance, he would have said something different to them since the source of their discontent was different from that of Korach. But they refused to meet with him altogether – another sign that they were not interested in the truth. They had rebelled out of a profound sense of slight that the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son, seemed to have been left out altogether from the allocation of honours.

At this point, the confrontation became yet more intense. For the one and only time in his life, Moses staked his leadership on the occurrence of a miracle: Then Moses said, "By this you shall know that it was the Lord who sent me to do all these things, that they were not of my own devising: If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, then the Lord has not sent me. But if

the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt." (Num. 16:28–30)

No sooner had he finished speaking than "the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them" (Num. 16:32). The rebels "went down alive into the grave" (16:33). One cannot imagine a more dramatic vindication. God had shown, beyond possibility of doubt, that Moses was right and the rebels wrong. Yet this did not end the argument. That is what is extraordinary. Far from being apologetic and repentant, the people returned the next morning still complaining – this time, not about who should lead whom but about the way Moses had chosen to end the dispute: "The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 'You have killed the Lord's people,' they said" (17:6).

You may be right, they implied, and Korach may have been wrong. But is this a way to win an argument? To cause your opponents to be swallowed up alive? This time, God suggested an entirely different way of resolving the dispute. He told Moses to have each of the tribes take a staff and write their name on it, and place them in the Tent of Meeting. On the staff of the tribe of Levi, he should write the name of Aaron. One of the staffs would sprout, and that would signal whom God had chosen. The tribes did so, and the next morning they returned to find that Aaron's staff had budded, blossomed, and produced almonds. That, finally, ended the argument (Num. 17:16–24).

What resolved the dispute, in other words, was not a show of power but something altogether different. We cannot be sure, because the text does not spell this out, but the fact that Aaron's rod produced almond blossoms seems to have had rich symbolism. In the Near East, the almond is the first tree to blossom, its white flowers signalling the end of winter and the emergence of new life. In his first prophetic vision, Jeremiah saw a branch of an almond tree (shaked) and was told by God that this was a sign that He, God, was "watching" (shoked) to see that His word was fulfilled (Jer. 1:11–12).[2] The almond flowers recalled the gold flowers on the Menorah (Ex. 25:31; 37:17), lit daily by Aaron in the

Mazal Tov to all those celebrating June anniversaries.

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Sanctuary. The Hebrew word *tzitz*, used here to mean “blossom,” recalls the *tzitz*, the “frontlet” of pure gold worn as part of Aaron’s headdress, on which were inscribed the words “Holy to the Lord” (Ex. 28:36).[3] The sprouting almond branch was therefore more than a sign. It was a multifaceted symbol of life, light, holiness, and the watchful presence of God.

One could almost say that the almond branch symbolised the priestly will to life as against the rebels’ will to power.[4] The Priest does not rule the people; he blesses them. He is the conduit through which God’s life-giving energies flow.[5] He connects the nation to the Divine Presence. Moses answered Korach in Korach’s terms, by a show of force. God answered in a quite different way, showing that leadership is not self-assertion but self-effacement.

What the entire episode shows is the destructive nature of argument not for the sake of Heaven – that is, argument for the sake of victory. In such a conflict, what is at stake is not truth but power, and the result is that both sides suffer. If you win, I lose. But if I win, I also lose, because in diminishing you, I diminish myself. Even a Moses is brought low, laying himself open to the charge that “you have killed the Lord’s people.” Argument for the sake of power is a lose-lose scenario.

The opposite is the case when the argument is for the sake of truth. If I win, I win. But if I lose I also win – because being defeated by the truth is the only form of defeat that is also a victory.

In a famous passage, the Talmud explains why Jewish law tend to follow the view of the School of Hillel rather than their opponents, the School of Shammai: [The law is in accord with the School of Hillel] because they were kindly and modest, because they studied not only their own rulings but also those of the School of Shammai, and because they taught the words of the School of Shammai before their own. (Eiruvim 13b)

They sought truth, not victory. That is why they listened to the views of their opponents, and indeed taught them before they taught their own traditions. In the eloquent words of a contemporary scientist, Timothy Ferris:

All who genuinely seek to learn, whether atheist or believer, scientist or mystic, are united in having not a faith, but faith itself. Its token is reverence, its habit to respect the eloquence of silence. For God’s hand may be a human hand, if you reach out in loving kindness, and God’s voice your voice, if you but speak the truth.[6]

Judaism has sometimes been called a “culture of argument.”[7] It is the only religious literature known to me whose key texts – the Hebrew Bible, Midrash, Mishnah, Talmud, the

codes of Jewish law, and the compendia of biblical interpretation – are anthologies of arguments. That is the glory of Judaism. The Divine Presence is to be found not in this voice as against that, but in the totality of the conversation.[8]

In an argument for the sake of truth, both sides win, for each is willing to listen to the views of its opponents, and is thereby enlarged. In argument as the collaborative pursuit of truth, the participants use reason, logic, shared texts, and shared reverence for texts. They do not use *ad hominem* arguments, abuse, contempt, or disingenuous appeals to emotion. Each is willing, if refuted, to say, “I was wrong.” There is no triumphalism in victory, no anger or anguish in defeat.

The story of Korach remains the classic example of how argument can be dishonoured. The Schools of Hillel and Shammai remind us that there is another way. “Argument for the sake of Heaven” is one of Judaism’s noblest ideals – conflict resolution by honouring both sides and employing humility in the pursuit of truth.

[1] Meiri, Beit HaBechira ad loc.

[2] See L. Yarden, *The Tree of Light* (London: East and West Library, 1971), 40–42.

[3] There may also be a hint of a connection with the *tzitzit*, the fringes with their thread of blue, that according to the Midrash was the occasion for the Korach revolt.

[4] On the contemporary relevance of this, see Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name* (New York: Schocken, 2015), 252–268.

[5] The phrase that comes to mind is Dylan Thomas’ “The force that through the green fuse drives the flower” (from the poem by the same name). Just as life flows through the tree to produce flowers and fruit, so a Divine life force flows through the Priest to produce blessings among the people.

[6] Timothy Ferris, *The Whole Shebang* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 312.

[7] David Dishon, *The Culture of Argument in Judaism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1984).

[8] I have written more extensively on this in *Future Tense* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2009), 181–206.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“And Korach took...” (Numbers 16:1) Is controversy a positive or a negative phenomenon? Since the ideal of peace is so fundamental to the Jewish ideal – to such an extent that we even greet and bid farewell to each other with the Hebrew word *shalom*, peace – I would expect that controversy would be universally condemned by our classical sources. But apparently there is a way to argue and a way not to argue. The Mishna in Avot (Ethics of the Fathers 5:20) distinguishes between two types of controversy: “A controversy which is for the sake of heaven, like that of Hillel and Shammai, will ultimately continue to exist; a controversy which is not for the sake of heaven, like that of Korach and his cohorts, will not continue to exist.”

In addition to the problematic issue of the positive description of a “controversy for the

Likutei Divrei Torah

sake of heaven,” it is difficult to understand why the Mishna refers to one type of controversy as that of Hillel and Shammai, the two antagonists, and the other as that of Korach and his cohorts, rather than Korach and Moses, which we would have expected.

I believe that the answer to our questions lies in the two legitimate definitions of the Hebrew word for controversy, *machloket*: Does it mean to divide (*lechalek*) or to distinguish (*la’asot chiluk*), to make a separation or a distinction? The former suggests an unbridgeable chasm, a great divide which separates out, nullifies the view of the other, whereas the latter suggests an analysis of each side in order to give a greater understanding of each view and perhaps even in order to eventually arrive at a synthesis or a dialectic, a resolution of both positions!

With this understanding, the initial comment of Rashi on the opening words of this Torah portion, “And Korach took,” becomes indubitably clear. “He took himself to the other side to become separated out from the midst of the congregation.” Since Korach made a great divide between himself and Moses, the Mishna in Avot defines his controversy as that of Korach and his cohorts; he was interested in nullifying rather than in attempting to understand the side of Moses. On the other hand, when the Talmud describes the disputes between Hillel and Shammai, it decides that:

These and those [both schools] are the words of the living God. If so, then why is the law decided in accord with the school of Hillel? Because they are pleasant and accepting, always teaching their view together with the view of the school of Shammai and even citing the position of Shammai before citing their own position. (Eruvin 13b)

According to this view, “these and those [conflicting opinions] are the words of the living God,” the Almighty initially and purposefully left many issues of the Oral Tradition open-ended in order to allow for different opinions, each of which may well be correct when viewed from the perspective of the divine. Indeed the Mishna in Eduyot teaches that the reason our Oral Tradition records the minority as well as the majority opinion is because a later Sanhedrin (Jewish supreme court) can overrule the decision of an earlier Sanhedrin, even though it is not greater than the earlier one in wisdom or in number, as long as there is a minority view recorded on which the later Sanhedrin may rely for its reversal of the earlier decision; and most halakhic decisions rely on a minority decision in cases of stress and emergency (Mishna Eduyot 1:5, Maimonides and Ra’avad ad loc.). In the world of halakha, minority dissenting views are never nullified; these opinions are also part of the religio-legal landscape, and can become the normative law of the majority at another period in time or for a different and

difficult individual situation within the same period.

The Talmud likewise powerfully and poignantly confirms the importance of dissenting views in order to challenge and help clarify the alternate opinion. R. Yochanan and Resh Lakish were brothers-in-law and study partners who debated their conflicting opinions on almost every branch of Talmudic law. When Resh Lakish died, R. Yochanan was left distraught and bereft. R. Elazar b. Pedat, a great scholar, tried to comfort R. Yochanan by substituting for Resh Lakish as his learning companion.

Every opinion that R. Yochanan would offer, R. Elazar would confirm with a Tannaitic source. R. Yochanan lashed out, “Are you like the son of Lakish? Not at all! Previously, whenever I would give an opinion, the son of Lakish would ask twenty-four questions and I would answer him with twenty-four responses; in such a fashion, the legal discussion became enlarged and enhanced. But you only provide me with supporting proofs. Don’t I know that my opinions have merit?” R. Yochanan walked aimlessly, tore his garments and wept without cease. He cried out, “Where are you, son of Lakish, where are you, son of Lakish,” until he lost his mind. The other sages requested divine mercy, and R. Yochanan died. (Bava Metzia 84a)

This fundamental respect for the challenge of alternative opinions – so basic to the Talmudic mind – is rooted in another Mishna (Sanhedrin 37a), which sees the greatness of God in the differences among individuals and the pluralism of ideas. “Unlike an individual who mints coins from one model and every coin is exactly alike, the Holy One blessed be He has fashioned every human being in the likeness of Adam, and yet no human being is exactly like his fellow!... And just as the appearances of human beings are not alike, so are the ideas of human beings not alike.” It is precisely in everyone’s uniqueness that we see the greatness of the Creator.

This great truth was one of the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, who claimed that multiplicity of ideas is actually the key to understanding God’s truth: “Scholars increase peace in the world.” A multiplicity of peace means that all sides and all views must be considered; then it will be clarified how each one of them has its place, each one in accordance with its value, its place, and its specific issue.... Only through a collection of all parts and all details, all of those ideals which appear to be different, and all disparate professional opinions, only by means of these will the light of truth and righteousness be revealed, and the wisdom of the Lord, and His love, and the light of true Torah. (Ein Ayah, end of Berakhot)

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

Two Types of People (Part a) - For the past several months, we have all been struggling with the terrible COVID-19 pandemic. We have heard our share of sad and tragic stories, and many have had to cope with very frightening events. But, on more than one occasion, we have also read about, and sometimes even witnessed, uplifting and inspiring episodes that have helped us cope with the situation constructively.

One such episode was particularly meaningful to me. I first read about it in a news release originating in Italy, a country which was particularly hard hit by the novel coronavirus. It soon became the “story of the day” for much of the media. Like many such stories, it soon evaporated from public consciousness. But I simply cannot forget this story and its powerful lesson.

There is an elderly gentleman in one of Italy’s northern cities who contracted the virus and suffered greatly. His treatment involved the use of a ventilator, to which he was attached for quite some time. Eventually, he was removed from the ventilator and, soon afterwards, was pronounced healthy and was discharged from the hospital. As he was checking out of the hospital, he was presented with a bill for the use of the ventilator. The bill came to several thousand euros.

He stared at the bill and began to cry. The hospital worker was moved by his tears and assured him that some type of arrangement could be made to reduce the exorbitant fee. However, the old man responded, “I’m not concerned about paying so much money. I can afford it.” “Then why are you crying?” asked the worker. The old man replied, “I have been breathing on my own for over eighty years. I never paid a penny for those breaths. Now I am asked to pay for the use of the ventilator which restored my breath to me. If I owe the hospital so much money for a few days of breathing, how much more do I owe the Creator of the Universe for allowing me to breathe all these many years!”

This anecdote affected me so that I remember it upon awakening every morning. Like every observant Jew, the first words out of my mouth each morning are words of thanksgiving to the King of Kings for having compassionately restored my soul to me, shehechezarta bi nishmati bechemla. Since hearing this story, I’ve “edited” the prayer, and I thank the Almighty for having compassionately restored “nishmati u’neshimati”—not just “my soul” but “my soul and my breath.”

The old Italian gentleman left us all with a lesson: We must be grateful each morning that we can breathe effortlessly.

This anecdote motivated me to supplement the old adage that there are “two types of people in

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the world: those who view the cup as half-full versus those who view it as half-empty.” In other words, some people are optimists and some are pessimists.

But the old Italian gentleman went beyond merely saying that the “cup was half-full.” He insisted that the cup was entirely full, “half with water and half with air.” He helped us to realize that even what appears to be of no value—emptiness—is, in reality, of life-giving significance....

Can Everybody Be Somebody?

The Jewish community in the United States of America is pleased and proud to live in a democracy. What is a democracy? It is often described as a society in which all are equal. But this description falls short of the mark. Because obviously we all are not equal. Some of us are stronger, some wiser, some wealthier, than others. We are not equally endowed with talents at birth, nor do we all partake in equal sets of circumstances as we grow and develop.

A more precise and useful definition is this one from the Webster’s dictionary: “Democracy is the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment, or the practice of this principle.” The dictionary makes it quite clear. We are not equal, but we are entitled to equal treatment and to equal opportunities. Whether we take advantage of these opportunities is a matter of personal will, and not a reflection of the justice or injustice of the society at large.

The above definition helps us understand that while we are all equally entitled to be members of a democratic society, we are not all equally qualified to fill all of the roles necessary for that society to function. We are not all qualified to be leaders, we are not all qualified to be teachers, we are not even all qualified to be soldiers.

In the Torah portions which we have been reading the past several weeks, we have been observing a society in the making. Not a democratic society in the contemporary sense, but one which was designed to be fair and equitable and to allow for the fullest possible spiritual expression of every individual within it.

In this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Korach, we learn of the first challenge to this society in formation. Korach, a close relative of Moses and Aaron, challenges their roles as leader and high priest. He also advocates what might be mistaken for a democracy, if we are to understand democracy in the fashion outlined in the first few sentences of this essay.

This is Korach’s understanding of the nature of the Jewish community in the desert: “All of the congregation is holy, and God is in their midst.” Korach is, in the eyes of some, the arch democrat. He sees all in the community as being holy. All are equal in holiness, and all are equal in the eyes of God.

He is thus protesting the hierarchy represented by a tribe of priests, a tribe of Levites, a group of elders. He is calling for radical equality, for utter sameness.

There is a line from Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Gondoliers" which is never far from my mind and lips. It reads:

"When everyone is somebodee,
Then no one's anybody!"

Korach is advocating a society in which everybody is somebody. Can that work?

I will not even attempt to answer that question in terms of political philosophy. But I will venture to speculate about the possibility of a society in which all are equally spiritual, in which everyone is a spiritual somebody.

For you see, much earlier in the Torah, such a society was indeed foreseen. Back in the Torah portion of Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:2), the entire nation was told, "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." We were enjoined to be a "kingdom of priests". Is Korach so far off, then, with his claim that all of the congregation is holy?

It is as an answer to this question that the dictionary definition of democracy is so helpful. We are not all equal; we are certainly not all holy. But we all have the opportunity, the equal opportunity, to become holy through our actions and the way we live our lives.

Sociologists draw a distinction between two types of status, "ascribed" and "achieved". Ascribed status comes with birth. Achieved status must be earned. There is no doubt that ascribed status plays a role in the biblical community, if not in a modern democracy.

Let us translate the biblical term "kedusha" (usually rendered "holiness") as "spirituality," often a more apt definition and certainly a more acceptable one to the contemporary reader. Then, we must argue that "kedusha" must be "achieved", not merely "ascribed".

The "kingdom of priests" ideal is to be the product of our spiritual endeavors; not a hereditary honor. No person, in this sense, is born "spiritual." We are not equally holy from birth. But we all have the equal opportunity to dedicate our lives to the achievement of holiness, to the attainment of spirituality.

Korach is wrong when he proclaims that the entire community is holy. He would have been correct to say that we all can achieve holiness.

Judaism teaches us that although we are all equally endowed with the capacity for holiness, with the potential for spirituality, the achievement of those objectives is not easy. Spirituality is not obtained by a moment on a

mountaintop, or by fleeting inspirational experiences. Spirituality, Jewish spirituality, can only be attained by hard work and painful self-sacrifice.

The leadership positions of Moses and Aaron were earned by the virtue of their life-long dedication to the Jewish people. Korach is indeed wrong when he says that we are all equally capable of supplanting Moses and Aaron. We are all potentially leaders, we all have the opportunity to develop leadership skills, but we are not automatically leaders just because we are part of the community.

The mitzvah back in Parshat Kedoshim does not imply, as Korach does, that we all are kedoshim. Rather, it calls upon us to do what we can to become kedoshim.

And so, this week's Torah portion teaches us an important personal lesson; one of special relevance to those of us who have absorbed a deep belief in democracy. We are not all spiritually equal. There are those of us who are more spiritual, and those who are less so. But we all have equal opportunities and equal possibilities to develop the levels of spirituality, which God himself foresaw when He asked us to become a "kingdom of priests."

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Giving Korach and Followers the Opportunity to Say "We Were Wrong!"

Parshas Korach contains one of the most upsetting incidents in all of Torah—Korach challenges the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu! Despite the fact that Korach started the fight, Moshe Rabbeinu approached them and tried to make peace. This again points to Moshe's greatness. But Korach does not back down, so Moshe Rabbeinu makes the following challenge: "If Hashem will create a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the pit, then you shall know that these men have provoked Hashem!" [Bamidbar 16:30] In other words, Moshe offered a miraculous Divine sign that it was G-d's Will that Moshe be the leader; if the miracle would fail to occur, it would be a sign that Korach is right and that Moshe usurped the leadership role without Divine acquiescence.

Rashi, on the words "If Hashem will create a creation," writes: "To put them to death through a death which no person has died up to this point. What is this 'creation'? The earth will open its mouth and swallow them. Then you shall know that they provoked Hashem and I have spoken the Word of the Almighty."

Up until this point in history, various strange types of death (misos meshunos) have occurred. Unfortunately, Nadav and Avihu died a strange type of death. There were plagues from Heaven. However, these kinds of death were apparently not sufficient here. It seems strange. Would it have been so bad if Moshe

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would have merely said, "Listen, if these people suddenly get stopped in their tracks and drop dead on the spot—that is a sign that Hashem appointed me"? That should have sufficed to convince the people that Moshe was right! Or, what if Moshe would have invoked a fire to come down from Heaven and burn them on the spot? That should have been convincing as well! Snakes coming to bite them would also have been convincing, as well as a host of other types of miraculous punishments.

However, Moshe specifically specified something that never ever happened before, and will never happen again—and that is the earth will open and swallow them alive. Why was that necessary?

Moshe does not just invoke miracles to impress people with G-d's power, as if to say "Watch this trick! I bet you never saw that one before!" Moshe does not do that.

The Margolios HaYam is a Sefer written by Rav Reuven Margolios, who was a prolific author and a great Talmudic scholar. Margolios HaYam is one of the most edifying (Geshmak!) commentaries on Tractate Sanhedrin. There on 109b, he quotes a thought in the name of "the Gaon and Tzadik Rav Yissacher Dov of Belz." (The current Belzer Rebbe bears the same name and is named after this grandfather.) Rav Reuven Margolios writes that he spent Shabbos Parshas Korach 5673 (1913) with the Belzer Rebbe and he heard a thought from Rav Yissacher Dov that he in turn heard from his father explaining why Moshe specifically invoked this miracle:

The Margolios HaYam asks – was Moshe Rabbeinu sadistic? Did he want them, out of personal revenge, to suffer additional suffering before they died, such that it was not sufficient for them merely to drop dead—they needed to slide down into the open earth and feel the terror of being swallowed up like that? The Belzer Rebbe's father said that, on the contrary, Moshe Rabbeinu asked specifically for this punishment out of a sense of mercy and compassion for Korach and his followers. When the earth opened up and swallowed them, they did NOT die then. They were swallowed up and sank into the ground—alive! Suddenly it hit them: Guess what? We are wrong. Moshe was right.

I do not know how long it took for the earth to close back up and for them to suffocate. But they had at least a few seconds to contemplate what happened and to do Teshuva in that interval. Moshe Rabbeinu said, I want them to die, but even if a person is wicked his whole life and the last second of his life he sincerely repents, his Teshuva is accepted! The Belzer Rebbe explained that Moshe requested that their end come this way so that they would have an opportunity during those precious few seconds to recognize their mistake and sincerely repent.

The Gemara in Bava Basra [74a] tells the story of an Arab who found cracks in the ground at the place in the wilderness where Korach and his followers were swallowed up. He heard voices coming from the cracks saying, “Moshe and his Torah are true, and they (themselves) are contrivers.” That happened because they had those seconds before expiring to think through the implication of what happened to them. If they would have keeled over and died or if they would have been instantly smitten by a fire from heaven, they would not have had that opportunity.

This speaks to the great compassion and righteousness of Moshe, the great teacher of Israel. Even towards disrespectful and traitorous rebels, he had mercy and was concerned that they be given an opportunity to repent before receiving their final punishment. This was the approach of the father of the earlier Rav Yissacher Dov Rokeach, Rebbe of Belz.

A Second Analysis of the Reason for Korach's Unique Punishment

The current Tolner Rebbe of Jerusalem, Rav Yitzchok Menachem Weinberg, has a different approach to this question. It is a very interesting approach.

Do you know how Korach got people to buy into his rebellion? Korach was selling one of the most popular theories and political philosophies that has been around since the beginning of time. “For all of the congregation, all of them, are holy!” Equality! Everybody is the same. The Tolner Rebbe said they once called this communism. Korach called it Korachism. The motto of the French revolution was quite similar: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! Equality is the most popular political philosophy that has ever been around. Everybody is equal. Suffrage for women—women getting the vote! Everybody buys into that. Thomas Jefferson: All men are created equal and they have inalienable rights in the pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Lincoln freed the slaves. Nelson Mandela stopped apartheid. You want to get popular? Sell them equality!

The Zohar says that Korach disputed Shabbos. What was his problem with Shabbos? His problem was “Why should Shabbos be special? All days are created equal!” All people are the same; all days of the week are the same; all places are the same; everything is created equal. This is Korachism.

The philosophy of the Ribono shel Olam is otherwise. No. Things are not the same. There are Kohanim, Leviim and Yisraelim. There are Shabbos and there are weekdays. There are holy places and there are profane places. And where does the Ribono shel Olam show that this is His opinion? Do you know where He shows that all creation is about differences—varying components of the world which are all

necessary for existence? He shows it through G-d's earth. The same earth that gives out wheat, gives out bananas. The earth that gives out and supports life (the Talmud says that animals are considered ‘products of the ground’) produces all kinds of life—cows, goats, sheep, lions, tigers, elephants, llamas, and all other animals. Creation testifies that components are necessary in this world. Creation testifies that we need differences in this world. Creation testifies that the world is not monochromatic.

Look outside. There is green; there is blue, there is brown – earth colors. This is creation. The earth testifies that the Ribono shel Olam wants symphony in the world. Just like a symphony has different types of instruments, but together they make beautiful music, that is what the world is all about and that is what people are all about. The Almighty did not create a planet of clones. Diversity is the essence of creation.

The biggest single testament to this is the earth. I put man on the earth, but you can only walk on My earth as long as you believe in My philosophy of the earth. Man must believe in My philosophy that everybody is NOT the same. Things are different and they need to be different. Creation requires differences. As long as you believe in that, you can walk on My earth; but the day you say “everything is equal; one size fits all” you cannot walk on My earth anymore.

The natural consequence of rejecting the philosophy of the earth is “the earth opened its mouth.” Sorry. You cannot walk on my earth anymore. That is why the punishment of Korach had to be “this new creation which the Almighty will create...” You are wrong Korach. There is Shabbos and there are weekdays; there are the locations like the Sanctuary and there are profane locations; there are Jews and Gentiles; and there are Kohanim, Leviim, and Yisraelim. There are different animals, and plants and colors in the world. This is My world—filled with differences. Not everything is equal.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

In conflict there are no absolute winners...

What's the most unfair accusation recorded in the Torah? I believe that the answer is in parashat Korach. On the day after the conclusion of the Korach rebellion, the nation came to Moshe and Aaron and they cried out to them and they said “atem hamitem et am Hashem” – you have killed the people of the Lord.

What was the context? Korach had led his rebellion, and he and his followers numbering some two-hundred and fifty, had laid down the gauntlet. Fascinatingly, Moshe who was ‘anav mi'kol adam’ – more humble than any other person – recognised that this was an occasion

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on which he would need to show his authority. After all, Korach was not just rebelling against Moshe and Aharon – he was rebelling against Hashem, who had chosen them to be the leaders.

Remarkably it was Moshe's idea to challenge them and to say that if they continued to rebel, a miracle would happen. The earth would swallow them up – and that's exactly what happened – indicating that Hashem was with Moshe and Aharon all the way. This was further confirmed when Aharon's rod miraculously produced blossoms and fruit.

So the day after the rebellion, when the dust was starting to settle, surely the people should have come to Moshe and Aharon to ask ‘are you ok? It must have been a terrible ordeal for you! Yasher koach! Well done for the leadership that you have shown! Thank God Korach is not our leader. Thank God he won't be providing an irresponsible spiritual legacy for us’. But there was nothing of that! Instead the people came and they said to Moshe and Aharon: ‘you killed Korach and his followers!’

From here we learn a very important lesson about conflict. In conflict there are no absolute winners. We learn this in parashat ‘Vayishlach’ when Yaakov is just about to meet up with his twin brother Eisav, the Torah tells us “vayira Yaakov meod vayatzer lo”, Yaakov was afraid and he was sorely distressed. Rashi comments he was afraid lest he be killed, he was sorely distressed lest he be forced to kill another.

When there is conflict nobody can sit back and enjoy it. And we further recognise that sometimes in conflict you might be right! You might be doing absolutely the correct thing, you might have the support of Almighty God and yet your reputation might suffer. As a result, people might not properly understand what has happened and they may accuse you of the worst of crimes.

So therefore, from parashat Korach we learn that sometimes, conflict, a ‘machlochet’, is important. Sometimes it's the right thing to do. Sometimes it's a mitzvah! However we should only engage in it when it's really necessary and when it is a last resort.

OTS Dvar Torah

Rabbi Chaim Kanterovich

Leadership, Accountability and Responsibility
At one point or other in our lives, we all feel victimized. We feel taken advantage of, wronged by another person, or perhaps that life is simply not fair. The victim state of mind is extremely potent, and to some it becomes a perpetual condition. The victim always believes that he or she is morally right, is not responsible or accountable for their actions or the consequences, and is entitled to sympathy from everyone else.

The victim mentality is maintained by the individual because ultimately, they are afraid of taking responsibility for their own actions

and desires, and they fear failure. Therefore, they blame others or even institutions for their lack of achievement. "They gathered together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, "It is too great for you! For the entire Assembly-all of them-are holy and Hashem is amongst them; why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?" (Bamidbar 16:3)

Based on these verses, the great Chassidic master Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira (known as the Piaseczno Rebbe and later as the Rav of the Warsaw Ghetto) writes in the year 1930 what I view as a chilling indictment of the pre-war Jewish community.

The greatness of the leadership, Korach says, is completely interdependent on the congregation's level of holiness. Meaning that if the leaders are holy, then the people shall be so too. Holiness is from the top down. However, if we are rebelling and sinning in doing so, the responsibility lies with you Moshe, the leadership. It is a sign that you are not leading as you should! (Derech Hamelech pg. 221)

Not so, argues the Piaseczno Rebbe. To throw responsibility of actions onto the leaders, as if to say that the people have no ability to think for themselves or lack independent decision making skills, is a fundamental error. Korach sinned and he did so all by himself. He and his men must take the consequences and bear responsibility of their actions.

As the saying goes, freedom of speech or action does not mean freedom from consequences. Blaming leadership for the behavior of a person or persons is toxic to achieving holiness.

Yet in his classic "Kol Dodi Dofek," Rav Soloveitchik writes about shared responsibility in describing what he calls the "covenant of fate," and prolifically states: "The identification of the activities of the individual with the deeds of the nation is a fundamental truth of the history of our people" (Pg. 60)

The complex relationship of leaders and followers and who influences whom shall continue throughout history. Yet in this instance at least, Korach fails to take responsibility and in doing so, sets a very dangerous trend. A trend which is seen as not only contagious, but which can be caught by the entirety of the Jewish people.

The accusation towards Moshe that "our failure is your fault" is seen as so severe that Korach and his men shall be remembered throughout time as the cause of strife and dissent.

It is only upon entrance into Eretz Yisrael and the manifestation of the Jewish people as a nation in our homeland, attaching ourselves to the holiness of Eretz Yisrael and in doing so to

Hashem, that our shared destiny begins to become a reality. The first steps to be taken are apparent from Korach himself. Accountability and responsibility for our national identity in addition to our own individual one.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Teruma and Ma'aser: Two Models of Divine Beneficence

The second half of parshas Korach (chapter 18 ff.) outlines the responsibilities of the Kohanim to guard and preserve the sanctity of mishkan. In this task they are to be assisted by the Leviyim. After this outline of responsibilities, the Torah lists the various gifts to be given to the Kohanim, the twenty-four matenos kehuna, followed by the gift given to the Leviyim, namely ma'aser - a tenth of the agricultural produce - and the obligation of the Levi to give a portion of his ma'aser to the kohein, terumas ma'aser. At first glance, all of these "gifts" granted to the Kohanim and the Leviyim, although generally referred to as matanos, are not gifts conceptually but actually are a form of remuneration for their service in the mikdash. This is seemingly verified by the verse concerning ma'aser, "ki sachar hu lachem cheilef avodaschem b'ohel mo'ed - for it is a wage for you in exchange for your service in the Tent of Meeting" (Bamidbar 18:31, see also 18:21).[1]

However, the fact this verse appears only with respect to the ma'aser gift for the Levi and not with respect to any of the gifts given to the Kohanim leads several of the commentaries to note a fundamental difference between the nature of the gifts to the Kohanim and that given to his Levi counterpart. Ohr HaChayim, on the verse "ani chelkecha v'nachaloscho b'toch Bnei Yisroel (18:20), states concerning the matenos kehuna, "there is no item which Israel produces [in which] HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not have a share along with them, but the Kohein takes it [in His stead], with regard to fruits, bread, meat, wine, oil, and all the other twenty-four gifts." This clearly indicates that the gifts are really due to Hashem, and He grants them to the Kohanim. However, concerning ma'aser, Ohr HaChayim writes clearly, "Concerning the Leviyim, He did not state 'ani chelkecha' etc. for the leviyim do not acquire the share of G_d. This is why they too have to give the share of G_d, namely teruma - ma'aser from the ma'aser. This is like common salary to serve the holy one, the kohein, and [in] the Ohel Mo'ed." Later (v. 31), Ohr HaChayim utilizes this distinction to explain why teruma has sanctity and restrictions concerning its eating whereas ma'aser has no such restrictions. In contrast to the priestly gifts which are granted from Hashem's share, kiv'yachol, ma'aser is characterized as unsanctified salary for the Levite's work.

Netziv, in his Ha'ameik Davar (18:31), corroborates Ohr HaChayim's thesis and writes concerning ma'aser: "And you shall eat it in all places - even the portion to be eaten which one might have thought - is given for their

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service and, as a result, one should treat it with a degree of sanctity; therefore, the verse clarifies that it may be eaten even in a cemetery, 'for it is a wage for you' - not like the matenos kehunah, which come as a present from cheilek gavo'a (G_d's portion), rather it is characterized as salary, and, as such, has no sanctity." Netziv with the use of the phrase, "cheilek gavo'a", alludes to several places in the Talmud where the Kohanim are considered as eating from the shulchan gavo'a, the table of the One on High (see Beitza 21a, Kiddushin 52b, and others). Netziv apparently extends this Talmudic concept to kadshei ge'ul, gifts granted the Kohein even outside the mikdash, such as teruma, and perhaps even to those without specific sanctity such as reishis hagez (first wool harvest) and zero'a, lechayayim, and keiva given from each animal slaughtered outside the mikdash.[2]

What emerges from the above duality is that there are two forms of gifts granted by Hashem to the Kohanim and Leviyim; the first type represents eating at the King's table, so to speak, and the second gift is a form of wages for service to be utilized by the public servant. Perhaps these two models can serve as the basis to homiletically derive dual messages for the relationship of Hashem Yisroel to each individual Jew. Certainly every Jew can partake of a korban shelamim or other kadashim kalim, the meat of which is characterized once again as from shulchan Gavo'a (see Beitza 21a). Even ordinary Yisraelim partake of agricultural produce which are imbued with sanctity: ma'aser sheini - the second tithe to be eaten in Jerusalem in a state of tahara - and neta riv'ai - the produce of a tree's fourth year's fruit yield. The Talmud (see Kiddushin 52b, 54b) debates whether these are considered mamon hedyot or mamon gavo'a. Perhaps the latter view (the accepted view of Rabbi Meir) contains an element in common with teruma, namely some aspect of even the ordinary Jew receiving sustenance from Hashem's table. Whereas most bounty one partakes of in this world is not imbued with sanctity, all of our physical blessings, in a sense, come from our Creator's "expense account" which he is granting us to utilize for his service. In the famous words of Rambam (Peirush Hamishnayos, Sanhedrin 10:1 based on Avos 4:2, also see Hilchos Teshuva 9) explains that the meaning of Chazal's statement, "s'char mitzvah mitzvah", is that the purposely of physical "reward" in this world is more physical blessings with which to perform additional mitzvos. An analogy can be drawn to a successful salesman, who utilizes his initial budget to great success for his company. His employer is most likely to grant him a large budget for his next trips in order to net an even greater profit for the company. So too when Hashem sees that we are utilizing His blessings properly, He will often grant us more to do even more. This follows the "ma'aser model", one of salary.

But, at its core, we are all beneficiaries of the "King's table", as represented by the *teruma* model. *Iyov* (35:7) teaches "im tzodakto ma titein lo - if you are righteous, what do you give Him?" Ultimately, all that we do does not affect Hashem at all, and, ultimately, the eternity that we gain is for ourselves. Hashem's blessings to us are never really "earned" in the classic sense. In *Ramchal's* (see *Derech Hashem*) famous explanation of the purpose of *mitzvos*, he explains that Hashem grants us eternal reward in a more perfect way such that we "earn" it in order to be spared the embarrassment of "a handout". But this is only on the surface level. Ultimately, King David declares, "mimcho hakol u'miyadcha no'sa'nu loch", (*Divrei Hayamim* I:29:14) - all comes from our Creator, and it is from His bounty and utilizing all the tools He granted us that we serve Him. The verse states "mi hakdimeini vo'ashalem - who has preceded Me and I shall pay him!" (*Iyov* 41:3). On this, the *Midrash* (*Tanchuma Emor* 7) comments that if a person is feeling that G_d's "owes him" because he wears *tzitzis*, Hashem reminds him that he provided him with the clothing. If one feels he gives massive amounts to charity, G_d reminds him that he provided him with all of the funds. [3] Even our intellect and our very ability to act in the world are all Divinely granted and sustained. Even if, for the most part, it appears that Divine blessings are granted to us in a "ma'aser" style "salary" fashion, fundamentally, we are all like *Kohanim* partaking of the King's table throughout our lives. May we always merit Hashem's blessings, and, even more importantly, recognizing our King and Father's kindness always.

[1]Indeed, *Ketzos HaChoshen* (243:43.) seems to apply the halachic category of *sechirus po'alim* to *teruma*. But see *Miluas* Even there that this might be a borrowed use of this terminology.

[2]Postscript: For a more thorough treatment of the distinction between *matnos kehuna* and *matnos leviyah* including many sources from *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* that do not distinguish between them, see *Minchas Asher al Hatorah* (*Bemidbar* 37).

[3]Also see *Bemidbar Rabba* (14:2) for a different interpretation of this verse which further verifies the *Rambam's* approach mentioned earlier.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

Worth the Price

Moshe sent to call *Dasan* and *Aviram*, the sons of *Eliav*, but they said, "We will not go up. Is it not enough that you have brought us out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert, that you should also exercise authority over us? You have not even brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Even if you gouge out the eyes of those men, we will not go up." (*Bamidbar* 16:12-14)

Moshe sent: From here we learn that one should persist in a dispute, because Moshe sought them out to conciliate them with peaceful words. (*Rashi*)

Can we have a greater example than this?! Moshe Rabbeinu, our main teacher, is under attack, and it's a deeply personal assault. His integrity and the veracity of the entire Torah is being challenged. How will he behave under pressure? He sends an invitation to two of the main instigators, *Dasan* and *Aviram*. Of course, they stiffen in their resolve to oppose Moshe, but we witness Moshe, who is the real target and the true victim, generously reaching out in a conciliatory fashion.

Rashi points out that this is a source for learning that one should not persist in an argument/dispute. The *Chofetz Chaim* noted that sometimes people do have a principled disagreement. That can be healthy when in pursuit of the truth. After a short while though, it becomes personal, and although people are saying, "It's the principle of the matter!" they really mean, "I am too much invested with my ego yield!" So they dig in deeper, as *Dasan* and *Aviram* did and they convince themselves and others they are warriors for a noble cause. That is the anatomy of a *Machlokes*.

It's one of the most well-known notions about our daily behavior at the end of every prayer and *Kaddish*. While backing up, we say, "Oseh Shalom Bimromav, HU yaaseh Shalom aleinu v'al KOL YISRAEL... Make peace on high, He will make peace upon us and upon all of Israel." By backing up at that time we are demonstrating that behavior that will make more certain that peace will be achieved. Yielding to others. It's not always a sign of weakness. It is often a symptom of strength.

The *Chofetz Chaim* recommended that one should set aside *Shalom Gelt*- Peace Money. What's *Shalom Gelt*? Just as when one is traveling it is important to budget enough time so that if something does not work out perfectly there is still time to make flight connections. The same thing can be applied to relationships and money is often a flash point. Sometimes a few dollars can keep the peace.

I had two parents in school that were at war with each other and it even boiled over to the point where I was concerned if they met in hallway together there would be a real explosion. Every good father wants to protect his child. Well one kid came home with magic marker writing all over his blue down winter coat. His father was livid. He called the parents of the child who did the writing demanding an explanation for their child's behavior. The kid claimed that the other boys was bothering him and bullying him and he felt he had to take a stand. So he colored his coat. The other father

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didn't want to believe that his kid was capable of such behavior and he insisted that his kid was being bullied. Then they came to me. I told both parents that I prefer to handle these matters before the parents get involved with each other.

It took me about 12 minutes to meet with both boys, figure out what happened and why, and then to make peace. They walked out of my office like BFF, arm in arm. That was the easy part.

The parents however, "the adults", remained locked in a heated dispute about whose gonna clean the coat!? They were ready to come to blows, literally. Each one stubbornly felt the other owned the problem. Somehow, I remembered this idea of *Shalom Gelt* that the *Chofetz Chaim* spoke about and instead of lecturing about it, I decided to put it into practice. I took the coat that was written on to the cleaners and two days later it came back fresh and clean like brand new. It cost \$7, neither knew who paid for it. The foolish war was over. It was definitely worth the price.

Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

Korah and his Followers – Between Active and Passive By Dov Schwartz*

The reading that deals with *Korah* and his company begins as follows:

- (1) Now *Korah*, son of *Izhar* son of *Kohath* son of *Levi*, took, along with *Dathan* and *Abiram* sons of *Eliab*, and *On* son of *Peleth* —descendants of *Reuben*
- (2) And rose up before *Moses*, together with two hundred and fifty *Israelites*, chieftains of the community, chosen in the assembly, men of repute.
- (3) They amassed against *Moses* and *Aaron* and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the Lord's congregation?"
- (4) When *Moses* heard this, he fell on his face.
- (5) Then he spoke to *Korah* and all his company, saying, "Come morning, the Lord will make known who is His and who is holy, and will grant him access to Himself; He will grant access to the one He has chosen."

When attempting to understand the plain sense of the text and the flow of the biblical narrative, several well-known questions are encountered:

- 1) The first verse lacks an object. It is not clear what *Korah* and his company "took".
- 2) A similar question can be asked with regard to the second verse: what is the meaning of "and rose up" (*va-yakumu*)? Generally when Scripture uses the verb *k-u-m*, it relates to a verb that follows forthwith. For instance, often a verb pertaining to going,

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walking, follows it ("they arose and set off," Gen. 22:19; Josh. 18:8; "he arose to go", Judges 19:5). Here, however, no other verb follows the "rising." The Aramaic translation attributed to Jonathan, for instance, fills in what is missing: "They arose impudently to teach *halakhah* to Moses," as in the well-known homily about them daring to instruct Moses about the matter of blue in the *tallit*. By the plain sense of the text one could argue that verse 3 is the direct continuation of verse 2, meaning that the company rose up and amassed against Moses. If so, we need to clarify why Scripture separated the two actions and emphasizes the rising separately from the amassing.

3) What was meant by Moses' reaction, described in verse 4? Korah's group came to carry on a dialogue with Moses. Ibn Ezra's commentary on verse 2, pertaining to Korah's company, says explicitly: "*Before Moses*—to indicate that they did not rise up clandestinely."

In other words, Korah's company began to hold open dialogue with Moses. But Moses' response was the opposite of dialogue; instead, he fell on his face. It was as if his senses failed him and he could not cope with what was happening. Indeed, plain-sense commentators stress the affinity between falling on one's face and praying or prophecy. Only afterwards, in verse 5, did Moses recover and gather the strength to turn to "Korah and all his company," after which followed a lively dialogue. Still, his initial reaction demands explanation. Had the defender of the Israelites, the one who proclaimed the splitting of the sea, retreated in the face of a group challenging his leadership? Is this behavior characteristic of the leader who on more than one occasion had interceded before the Holy One, blessed be He?

4) The solution presented by Moses was one of magic—the test of the incense pans. The logic of this solution was ostensibly simple. Korah's company were challenging the fact that Moses and Aaron were the chosen, and Moses responded by having the Holy One, blessed be He, show directly whom He had chosen. Rabbi Saadiah Gaon maintains that a prophet proves himself true by means of a departure from the natural order, because in this way it is clear that the Creator of the natural order—who alone is capable of changing it—indeed revealed Himself to him (*Emunot ve-De'ot*, 3, trans. into Hebrew by Rabbi Kapah). Magic borders on the miraculous, and hence Moses proposed this way of resolving the issue. The political aspect of leadership, however, still remains unclear. Could Moses not find a way of resolving the matter through negotiation? Did his talents as a leader not enable him to settle the dispute?

I would like to propose a reading of Scripture that is attentive to human nature. The eminent anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss maintained that ancient man and modern man are the same. Differences of environment and civilization can change man's responses, but in

terms of human essence, man has not changed. In this Lévi-Strauss found justification for studying primitive tribes and making deductions from them about human nature. If that is how humans behave in primitive tribes, then all the more so in the cradle of civilization, in the setting of divine revelation before a select group—the children of Israel—of which the Bible tells us.

Existentialist philosophers speak of two conditions of concrete existence: 1) objective existence, in which a person is pulled along by the generality or the norm, without making an individual statement and leaving his own individual mark; 2) subjective existence, in which a person retains his or her own individuality, honor and personality even in a setting that maintains objective existence. Rabbi Dov Soloveitchik referred to these types of existence in such articles as "*Kol Dodi Dofek*" and "*The Lonely Man of Faith*." If that is indeed how actual existence is, then we can understand what Scripture says of Korah. Rashi interprets: "*And Korah took*—he took himself to one side, to be separated from the community in order to challenge the priesthood." In other words, Korah maintained his individualism. He was not drawn along by obedience to Moses. His was a subjective personality. Some commentators have asked why he deserved to have a weekly reading named after him. Indeed, it is no small feat to face up to a figure who has not been swept along by the generality, who stands on his principles even when they challenge the divine order. Just as the Sages sometimes showed a hint of appreciation for people who remained staunch in their position even when that position did not go along with the generality and with the divine norm, so too it is in Scripture. This notion can also be derived from the plain sense of the text: Korah was able to take charge of himself; he "took himself." He was capable of making his presence and self felt, choosing his own way. The decision made by Korah also radiated to his followers. Hence, in verse 2, we read about Korah's followers "arising," without being coupled with another verb. In other words, they too had an awareness of themselves and their personalities, clearly expressed by the verb of "rising." An entire group experienced authentic existence, to borrow the term used by Heidegger.

The biblical story, however, has a different message to relay. According to the values of the Bible, mastering one's personality and maintaining existential uniqueness are desirable when it comes to human matters. This can be illustrated by the use of such phrases as "take courage" or "be strong," in the sense of readiness, maturity, and even initiative. Sometimes Scripture notes that even the momentum to observe the word of the Holy One, blessed be He, requires a well-formed personality.

But when the Holy One, blessed be He, makes the decisions and determines the situation, what is called for is to withdraw into oneself and be yielding with regard to one's

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own personality. In the face of the Holy One, blessed be He, humans must be passive. The greatness of Moses lay in his ability give up seeing the "face" of Gd and to make do with what Gd allowed him. Aaron, too, was the embodiment of passivity ("And Aaron was silent" [Lev. 10:3]).

Just as it is important to maintain one's personality and sense of self towards other human beings, so too it is important to retreat and efface oneself with respect to Heaven. Therefore, Moses' response as described in verse 4 is the diametrical opposite of Korah and his company. Moses made it clear to them that when facing decisions and commands issuing from the Holy One, blessed be He, these must be accepted wholly. Just as when praying, a person looks expectantly to the Holy One, blessed be He, restraining his own personality and awaiting His decision, and just as the prophet enlists his entire being in anticipation of heavenly inspiration descending on him, so too, the leader in the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be He, accepts the decisions of Gd. Moses, by his unequivocal action of falling down on his face, made it clear to Korah and his followers that passiveness in the face of Gd is the proper way.

Since Korah and his company did not accept Moses' position, even after the latter had plainly expressed his position by way of personal example, Moses had no choice left but to turn to magic. The test of the incense pans was carried out in classical magical fashion. The magician makes some preparation and waits for divine inspiration in response. Thus, even Moses asked that incense pans be prepared and that the Holy One, blessed be He, determine who would be accepted and who would be wiped out. Through this action, human passiveness in the face of the divine reaches a climax. This clearly established whom the Lord chose.

The story of Korah and his company is a narrative about two positions and two different perceptions regarding the nature of man and his relationship to the divine. Scripture shows latent appreciation of Korah's independent stand, but denounces it in the face of the experience of the divine command. The confrontation was one of human leadership versus leadership in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He. Moses was not precipitous in making a show of the divine choice and the destruction of those who challenged it. Earlier, by falling on his face, he had hoped to make it clear that theirs was not the proper way to behave in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He. Moses had hoped that when they saw their great leader dauntlessly falling on his face, they would understand that when the Holy One, blessed be He, makes a decision, that decision is final and absolute. With no other option remaining him, his gesture having been of no avail, Moses was compelled to prove through an act of magic the need to be passive in the face of divine leadership. *Translated by Rachel Rowen*



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date: Jun 25, 2020, 8:31 PM

subject: Stopping Disrespect; Virtual Community Showcase; The Site of Korach's Demise?

How Not to Argue

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Korach was swallowed up by the ground, but his spirit is still alive and well, and in the unlikelyst of places – British and American universities. Korach was the embodiment of what the Sages called, argument not for the sake of heaven. They contrasted this with the schools of Hillel and Shammai, who argued for the sake of heaven.[1] The difference between them, according to Bartenura, is that argument for the sake of heaven is argument for the sake of truth. Argument not for the sake of heaven is argument for the sake of victory and power, and they are two very different things. Korach and his followers came from three different groups. Korach was from the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram came from the tribe of Reuben. And there were 250 leaders from different tribes. Each had a specific grievance.[2] The 250 leaders resented the fact that leadership roles had been taken from them after the sin of the Golden Calf and given instead to the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram felt aggrieved that their tribe – descendants of Jacob's firstborn – had been given no special status. Moses' reply to Korach – "Now you are trying to get the priesthood too ... Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?" – makes it clear that Korach wanted to be a Kohen, and probably wanted to be Kohen Gadol, High Priest, in place of Aaron.

The three groups had nothing in common except this, that they wanted to be leaders. Each of them wanted a more senior or prestigious position than they currently held. In a word, they wanted power. This was an argument not for the sake of heaven.

The text gives us a clear picture of how the rebels understood leadership. Their claim against Moses and Aaron was "Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" Later, Datan and Aviram said to Moses, "And now you also want to lord it over us!"

As a general rule: if you want to understand resentments, listen to what people accuse others of, and you will then know what they themselves want.

So for example, for many centuries various empires accused Jews of wanting to dominate the world. Jews have never wanted to dominate the world. Unlike almost any other long-standing civilisation, they never created or sought to create an empire. But the people who levelled this accusation against Jews belonged to empires which were beginning to crumble. They wanted to dominate the world but knew they could not, so they attributed their desire to Jews (in the psychological process known as splitting-and-projection, the single most important phenomenon in understanding antisemitism).[3] That is when they created antisemitic myths, the classic case being the protocols of the Elders of Zion, invented by writers or propagandists in Czarist Russia during the last stages of its decline. What the rebels wanted was what they attributed to Moses and Aaron, a form of leadership unknown in the Torah and radically incompatible with the value Moses embodied, namely humility. They wanted to "set themselves above" the Lord's assembly and "lord it over" the people. They wanted power.

What then do you do when you seek not truth but power? You attack not the message but the messenger. You attempt to destroy the standing and credibility of those you oppose. You attempt to de-voice your opponents. That is what Korach and his fellow rebels tried to do.

The explicit way in which they did so was to accuse Moses of setting himself above the congregation, of turning leadership into lordship.

They made other claims, as we can infer from Moses' response. He said, "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them," implying that they had accused him of abusing his position for personal gain, misappropriating people's property. He said, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea," implying that they had accused him of making up certain instructions or commands, attributing them to God when they were in fact his own idea.

The most egregious instance is the accusation levelled by Datan and Aviram: "Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness?" This is a forerunner of those concepts of our time: fake news, alternative facts, and post-truth. These were obvious lies, but they knew that if they said them often enough at the right time, someone would believe them.

There was not the slightest attempt to set out the real issues: a leadership structure that left simmering discontent among the Levites, Reubenites and other tribal chiefs; a generation that had lost all hope of reaching the promised land; and whatever else was troubling the people. There were real problems, but the rebels were not interested in truth. They wanted power. Their aim, as far as we can judge from the text, was to discredit Moses, damage his credibility, raise doubts among the people as to whether he really was receiving his instructions from God, and so besmirch his character that he would be unable to lead in the future, or at least be forced to capitulate to the rebels' demands. When you are arguing for the sake of power, truth doesn't come into it at all.

Argument not for the sake of heaven has resurfaced in our time in the form of the "cancel" or "call-out" culture that uses social media to turn people into non-persons when they are deemed to have committed some wrong – sometimes genuinely so (sexual harassment for example), sometimes merely for going against the moral fashion of the moment. Particularly disturbing has been the growing practice of denying or withdrawing a platform at university to someone whose views are deemed to be offensive to some (often minority) group.

So in March 2020, just before universities were shut down because of the Coronavirus crisis, Oxford University Professor Selina Todd was "no-platformed" by the Oxford International Women's Festival, at which she had been due to speak. A leading scholar of women's lives she had been deemed "transphobic," a charge that she denies. At around the same time the UN Women Oxford UK Society cancelled a talk by former Home Secretary Amber Rudd, an hour before it was due to take place.

In 2019 Cambridge University Divinity School rescinded its offer of a visiting fellowship to Canadian Professor of psychology Jordan Peterson. The Cambridge University Students Union commented, "His work and views are not representative of the student body and as such we do not see his visit as a valuable contribution to the University, but one that works in opposition to the principles of the University." In other words, we don't like what he has to say. All three of these, and other such cases in recent years, are shameful and a betrayal of the principles of the University.

They are contemporary instances of arguments not for the sake of heaven. They are about abandoning the search for truth in favour of the pursuit of victory and power. They are about discrediting and devoicing – "cancelling" – an individual. A university is, or should be, the home of argument for the sake of heaven. It is where we go to participate in the collaborative pursuit of truth. We listen to views opposed to our own. We learn to defend our beliefs. Our understanding deepens, and intellectually, we grow. We learn what it means to care for truth. The pursuit of power has its place, but not where knowledge has its home.

That is why the Sages contrasted Korach and his fellow rebels with the schools of Hillel and Shammai:

For three years there was a dispute between the schools of Shammai and Hillel. The former claimed, 'The law is in agreement with our views,' and the latter insisted, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' Then a Voice from heaven (bat kol) announced, 'These and those are the words of the living God, but the law is in accordance with the school of Hillel.'

Since both 'these and those are the words of the living God', why was the school of Hillel entitled to have the law determined in accordance with their rulings? Because they were kind and modest, they studied both their own rulings and those of the school of Shammai, and they were even so humble as to mention the teachings of the school of Shammai before their own.[4] This is a beautiful portrait of the rabbinic ideal: we learn by listening to the views of our opponents, at times even before our own. I believe that what is happening at universities, turning the pursuit of truth into the pursuit of power, demonising and no-platforming those with whom people disagree, is the Korach phenomenon of our time, and very dangerous indeed. An old Latin motto says that to secure justice, audi alteram partem, "Listen to the other side." It is through listening to the other side that we walk the path to truth.

[1] Mishnah Avot 5:17.

[2] This is a composite of the views of Ibn Ezra and Ramban.

[3] See Vamik Volkan, The Need to have Enemies and Allies (1988).

[4] Babylonian Talmud: Eruvin 13b.

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, pleas... Show more

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Rav Hershel Schachter's Piskei Halacha on Coronavirus Shaylas

Husband & Wife Accepting Shabbos at Different Times (2020)

In recent weeks, many individuals who are confined to their homes have begun to accept Shabbos much earlier than the standard candle lighting time, even though they rarely did so in the past. In some situations, the husband accepts Shabbos before the wife has completed her Shabbos preparations. A wife does not have to follow the customs of a husband that are based on individual practices or stringencies. This is in contrast with a custom that is associated with a community (e.g. kitniyos or gebrochts), in which case the wife must follow the custom of the husband. This is because it is not proper

for the husband to be considered a member of one community while the wife associates with a different community, as a married couple ought to be part of the same community. Bringing in Shabbos at a specific early time is a personal acceptance, not a communal custom. Accordingly, if the husband accepts Shabbos before the wife does, then the wife can continue to do melacha until she accepts Shabbos. In addition, she may even do melacha that will benefit the husband during this time. There is, however, a concept of communal tosefes Shabbos. If the community already accepted Shabbos it would be binding on all the individual members of the community.

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Separation Between Men and Women During Tefillah (2020)

<http://torahweb.org/torah/docs/rsch/RavSchachter-Corona-34-May-21-2020.pdf> Davening creates a place of kedushah where the Shechina rests. It is considered a lack of sanctity if men and women daven in the same location. Therefore, when davening outdoors, if the women would like to participate as well, and a mechitzah is not available, there must be a separation of four amos between where the men and the women are standing. Similarly, even when one is davening in their home alone, the men and the women should be four amos apart. This would obviously not be sufficient to satisfy the requirement to have a mechitzah in the shul which demands a bona fide partition.

from: Daily Halacha <return@email.dailyhalacha.com> via

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reply-to: mail@dailyhalacha.com

date: Jun 25, 2020, 3:02 AM

subject: Does Someone Count for a Minyan If He is in a Different Room?

The Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin Memorial Halacha Series

Authored by Rabbi Eli J. Mansour (6/25/2020)

Description: Does Someone Count for a Minyan If He is in a Different Room?

The Shulhan Aruch rules (Orah Haim 55) that ten people form a Halachic Minyan only if they are present together in one room. If nine people are in a room and a tenth is outside in the hallway, or even in the women's section, then they do not form a Minyan, even if the tenth person can see the other nine. The Mishna Berura (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, 1839-1933) rules more leniently, allowing one to count for a Minyan even if he is in a different room, as long as he can see the others. However, we follow the stringent ruling of the Shulhan Aruch, that the ten people must be present in the same room. Ten men in one room form a Minyan even if they cannot see one another.

This Halacha refers only to the question of forming a Minyan, requiring that ten people are present in the same room. If, however, there already are ten men in one room, then people situated outside that room – such as in the hallway, or in the ladies' section – are allowed to answer "Amen" to the Berachot of the Hazzan's repetition of the Amida, and they may respond to Kaddish, Nakdishach and Barechu. Even if one cannot see the Minyan, as long as he hears the Beracha, Kaddish, Nakdishach or Barechu, he may respond. For that matter, if one's home is situated next to a synagogue, and he hears the prayers, he may answer. In fact, according to Hacham David Yosef (in Halacha Berura), even if one hears a live recording of a Minyan, he may answer to all the Berachot and all the prayers. Indeed, there are ill patients who are unable to attend the prayers in the synagogue but listen to the prayers through a live feed, or via telephone, and are then able to answer "Amen" and respond to all the prayers.

It is questionable, however, whether one is credited with Tefila Be'sibur – praying with a Minyan – if he can hear the Minyan but cannot see them. It appears from a responsum of the Radbaz (Rav David Ben Zimra, Egypt, 1479-1573) that he maintained that one is considered to have prayed with a Minyan in such a manner, whereas others disagree, and require one to see the Minyan in order to be considered to have prayed with them.

Summary: Ten men form a Minyan only if they are all in the same room, in which case they can form a Minyan even if they cannot all see each other.

But if even just one of the ten is in a different room, then even if he can see the others, the group cannot form a Minyan. Once ten men are together in one room and form a Minyan, anyone who hears Kaddish, Nakdishach, Barechu or the repetition of the Amida may respond, no matter where he is or whether he can see the Minyan, even if he hears the prayers or Berachot via live feed or telephone. It is uncertain, however, whether one is credited with praying with a Minyan if he cannot see the Minyan.

from: torahweb@torahweb.org

to: weeklydt@torahweb.org

date: Jun 24, 2020, 10:46 AM

subject: **Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Korach: Corruption of the Spiritual**
Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

Korach: Corruption of the Spiritual

At first glance, Korach could be written off as just another troublemaker, a minor politician clamoring for an underserved office. And yet, the use of the Divine service - and especially the ketores - as the tool to rid ourselves of him, and the extraordinary miracles associated with his undoing, clearly point to a much greater assault on Yiddishkeit than merely another disgruntled office-seeker.

The Rambam (in Peirush Hamishnayos- hakdama to perek Chelek) indicates that Korach's assault was on the veracity of the Torah transmission of Moshe. He insinuated that the directive to appoint Aharon to be the kohein gadol was Moshe's own design, not Hashem's directive. This therefore made the entire Torah suspect and as such could potentially destroy all of Torah and Yiddishkeit.

Taking a closer look at Chazal, we find that Korach is guilty of another fundamentally flawed perception of the spiritual world of Torah, which is in effect a total eradication of our understanding of Torah and Mitzvos. Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 18, 3) tell us that Korach mocked Moshe, asking him, "does a garment that is completely techeiles need tzitzis?", to which Moshe of course replied in the affirmative. Korach then mocked, "if a solitary thread of techeiles is enough to fulfill the mitzvah, isn't an entire garment of techeiles enough?" Korach continued, "does a house filled with sifrei Torah need a mezuzah?", to which Moshe replied, "of course." Once again Korach mocked him, "if two paragraphs of Torah are enough to fulfill the obligation of mezuzah, surely an entire house of seforim is good enough!?"

These arguments are powerful. They fall under the category of "reductio ad absurdum", reducing your opponent's argument to a place of ridicule. What, then, was Moshe's counterpoint? The answer is that Korach's position and argumentation was based on a perception of the spiritual world that was severely flawed. He understood the spiritual world as a finite set of "good" that could be totally obtained by one's efforts. Thus once the "garment" is all techeiles and the house is full of seforim, there is no point in doing anything else, just as a person who works hard exclusively in order to afford a home would find it pointless to work further once he has acquired that home.

But that is a very crass perception of the spiritual world, which sees it as one in which one acquires "things", similar to the physical world. The reality, however, is that the spiritual world is a road leading a person to Hashem. Just as Hashem is infinite, so is the road leading to Him, so to speak. The spiritual is not a specific finite acquisition or set of acquisitions, but a road that continuously leading a person towards Hashem. As soon as a person has progressed down the road, another segment of the road opens up, and then still another segment, and so on ad infinitum. Thus each mitzvah is but a "thread" that leads the person to the beyond; a gateway that opens to another palace, and when one has woven an entire garment of this techeiles, and filled an entire room with seforim, there is a thread that leads him still further, and a door that opens to another room, and so on.

This misconception about the spiritual world is what led Korach to dispute the kehunah in the first place. Chazal say that the reason why it is not common for talmidei chachomim to have children who are talmidei chachomim is in order that people not feel that "Torah" is inherited. For physical entities are always inherited; they are "things" and become the

owner's eternally. Not so the world of the spirit. One can have an affinity for ruchniyos but it never becomes anyone's personal possession. Thus Korach's very demand that the kehunah is his disqualified him from that position!

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Korach: Inclusion and Selection

"Korach was a clever fellow - what did he see to get involved in this folly? His mind's eye fooled him. He saw by prophetic vision that a line of great men would descend from him, including the prophet Samuel, who was the equal of Moses and Aaron together." (Midrash Tanchuma 5)

While the Midrash appears to belittle Korach's dispute as foolish, the argument that Korach put forth - "All of the congregation is holy, and God is in their midst" (Num. 16:3) - does not seem silly at all. Is not Korach simply restating what God told the entire nation, "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2)? What was so wrong with his claim? Why did Moses insist that only Aaron and his descendants could serve as priests? Korach's mistake is rooted in the dialectic between two distinct forms of divine providence: inclusion (kirvah), and selection (bechirah). During certain periods, the service of God was inclusive, available to all. At other times, God chose certain persons or places to bear a higher level of sanctity, in order to elevate the rest of the world through them.

The Temple and the Bamot

One example of the historical give-and-take between these two conflicting approaches is the status of bamot, private altars for bringing offerings to God.

Until the Tabernacle was set up in Shiloh, individuals were permitted to offer sacrifices on private altars throughout the country. During the 369 years that the Tabernacle stood in Shiloh, these bamot were prohibited, and all offerings had to be brought to the central service in Shiloh. After the destruction of the Shiloh Tabernacle, the bamot were again permitted. With the selection of the city of Jerusalem and the building of the Temple on Mount Moriah, however, the bamot were banned forever.

When permitted, these private altars could be established in any location.

They allowed all to approach God; even non-priests could offer sacrifices.

The periods when bamot were permitted reflect an inclusive form of divine worship, enabling all to approach God and serve Him.

For the service in the Tabernacle and the Temple, on the other hand, only the descendants of Aaron were allowed to serve. When Shiloh and later Jerusalem were chosen to host the Holy Ark, the divine service was limited to the boundaries of those cities and their holy structures. Unlike the bamot, which were accessible to all, the Tabernacle and the Temple were enclosed buildings, set apart by walls and barriers. The various levels of holiness were spatially restricted. Thus the Talmud (Yoma 54a) teaches that the Shechinah was confined to the space between the two poles of the Holy Ark.

Pillar Service

A second example of the contrast between these two approaches may be seen in the use of a single pillar (matzeivah) to serve God. The pillar was an open form of worship, attracting people to gather around it, without walls or restrictions. This form of Divine service was appropriate for the time of Abraham, who tried to spread the concept of monotheism throughout the world.

In Moses' day, however, serving God through pillars became forbidden (Deut. 16:22). After the election of the Jewish people, it became necessary to first elevate the people of Israel. Only afterwards will the rest of the world attain recognition of God. Divine service thereafter required boundaries - the

walls of the Tabernacle and Temple - in order to cultivate the holiness within.

Prophecy Only in Israel

A similar process took place regarding prophecy. Until the Sinaitic revelation, the phenomenon of prophecy existed in all nations. At Sinai, however, Moses requested that God's Divine Presence only dwell within the people of Israel: "[If You accompany us], I and Your people will be distinguished from every nation on the face of the earth" (Ex. 33:16; see Berachot 7a).

While the boundaries created by the selection of Jerusalem and the Jewish people will always exist, the distinction of Aaron's descendants as kohanim is not permanent. In the future, all of Israel will be elevated to the level of priests. God's declaration to Israel, "You will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to Me" (Ex. 19:6), refers to this future era.

Korach's Vision

As the Midrash explains, Korach was misled by his prophetic vision. He discerned the essential truth, "All of the congregation is holy, and God is in their midst." Yet the time for this vision belongs to the distant future. Korach only saw a private vision - ruach hakodesh - not a universal prophecy meant to be publicized and acted upon.

Moses alluded to the future nature of Korach's vision when he dictated the type of test to be used. The dedications of the kohanim and the Tabernacle involved sin-offerings and burnt-offerings, so it would have been logical to suggest that Korach's men attempt to offer similar offerings. Moses, however, suggested that they offer incense. He hinted that Korach's vision reflected an underlying truth, but one for the distant future, when sin-offerings will no longer be needed to atone for our wrongdoing.

(Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 252-255 ; Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah, Korach (5691/1931))

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Korach - Grinding the Point

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The sojourn in the desert was no walk in the park. True, it was a period of time in which miracles were the norm and the level of spirituality soared, but life next to G-d required a perfect commitment. The actions of the Jewish nation were scrutinized, the eyes of Hashem peering as a strict teacher, correcting and adjusting every wrong move with immediate censure and swift action. We suffered for our mistakes. The Jews wandered for 40 years because of the erroneous reports of the spies. And the many rebellions and uprisings concerning the manna and other matters, including the ever-resounding desire to return to Egypt, were met with swift, decisive retribution.

This week, however, the rebels are rebuked in three totally different ways, each a miracle unto itself. Korach organized a rebellion against Moshe and Ahron. Claiming nepotistic inconsistency, Korach said that Ahron did not deserve the position of Kohen Gadol. After all, he claimed "the entire congregation is holy, (they were all at Sinai). "Why, then," he argued with Moshe, "do you raise yourselves higher than the rest of the congregation of the Lord?" (Numbers 16:3)

But this time the punishment is not the ordinary plague. First, In a display of absolute power and sovereignty, Hashem opens the earth and swallows Korach and the immediate family of rabble-rousers whole and alive!

Then his 250 co-conspirators are consumed by fire as they attempt to offer a ktore (incense) sacrifice. And afterwards, to quell more grumbling, another miracle occurs. Each tribal leader is commanded to place a stick in the ground and miraculously only Ahron's stick begins to bud before their eyes. It grew leaves, flowers, and almonds — a heavenly sign that only Ahron merits the exalted position of Kohen Gadol.

It always bothered me. The opening of the earth is no little feat. Earthquakes of that magnitude did not occur at a moment's notice! Wasn't that event

powerful enough to make the point? Why was there a need to quell the whining and punish the perpetrators with such powerful punishments and magnificent miracles? Shouldn't a heavenly warning have been enough? Rabbi Meshulm Igra of Pressburg was one of Europe's leading scholars in the latter part of the 18th century. As a young man, he was engaged to the daughter of a prominent community leader in the city of Butzatz. A few months before the wedding the young chosson ate a meal at the home of his future father-in-law. Dessert was served together with a hot treat a delicacy that the impoverished Reb Meshulam had never heard of — coffee. The servant brought out a cup of brewed coffee together with sugar and milk. The prospective father-in-law directed his son in law to partake. The young scholar looked quizzically at each of the entities and began to ponder. There were two liquids and sugar. The Talmud teaches that eating precedes drinking. He took a spoon of sugar and ate it. Then he was unsure what to drink first the milk or the black brew. Noting that darkness in the Torah comes before day, he drank the black coffee. Noticing the grinds at the bottom of the cup, he took his spoon and began to eat them. Not wanting to embarrass his soon-to-be father-in-law who had served such a difficult-to-eat dessert, he slowly chewed and swallowed the grinds. His prospective bride stood in shock.

"Father," she cried "I cannot marry a man who does not know how to drink a cup of coffee. He is a total klutz!" The engagement was broken. Years later this same community leader visited the home of Rav Yeshaya Pick the prominent Rav of Breslow. Upon entering the study he noticed the rav engrossed in a letter. He looked totally concerned and distraught. When the man asked what problem was, Rabbi Pick told him that he just received a letter that is filled with the deepest insights. "I have to be totally immersed in Torah thought to begin to comprehend the level of this man's brilliance. In fact," he continued, "I do not think a man of this caliber has emerged in the last fifty years! And," he added, "besides the brilliance, one can note his amazing humility and fine character throughout every word he writes." Then he looked up at the man. "You come from Butzatz. Have you ever heard of a man called Meshulam Igra?"

The man didn't emit a verbal response. He fainted.

When he came to, he recounted the entire story of the engagement and its dissolution, how Rabbi Igra was meant to be his son-in-law but the match was broken over coffee grounds. Rabbi Pick looked up at him and shook his head sadly. "Is that so?" he exclaimed. "You gave up the opportunity for this great man because he did not know how to drink a cup of coffee?"

Then he looked at the man and simply declared, "Faint again!" Perhaps the greatest undoing of our nation throughout its history is the non-appreciation of its great leaders. Among our midst exists diamonds, but they are often treated like raw coal. There is a most popular song, sung in the Yeshiva world on all holidays, "Moshe emes v'Torasos emes. Moshe is true and his Torah is true." The inseparability of the Torah and its teachers, the appreciation of the two as inseparable in their validity is a fundamental in throughout the writings of Maimonides and all the philosophies of Torah Judaism. Without recognizing the greatness of our leaders, we would be lost. Hashem did not the rebellion against Moshe to subside with just one action. It took three very different miracles, the splitting of the earth, the fire that consumed, and the budding of the dry sticks, to reiterate the most important point that sustains us until today. Because if we do not realize from where our strength comes, Hashem will remind us. And He will tell us to faint again! Good Shabbos

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Insights Parshas Korach - Tammuz 5780

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated l'zecher nishmat my dear father-in-law Avraham Yonah ben Nachum HaCohen. Sponsored by Howard Glowinsky. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Might Not Always Right

...then the man whom Hashem will choose, he is the holy one... (16:7)

This week's parsha chronicles Korach's infamous rebellion on the authority of Moshe. Korach, driven by jealousy, was upset that he was passed over for the position of head of the family of Kehas in favor of a younger cousin whom Moshe appointed (see Rashi 16:1). Obviously, Korach couldn't merely complain that he disliked Moshe's appointment to the head of the Kehas family; that would be too transparently self-serving. Instead, he decided to discredit Moshe's authority and show that Moshe had an inappropriate bias. He came with an entire entourage to confront Moshe and Aharon, and charged them with the conspiracy of nepotism. In other words, they claimed that Moshe had decided on his own to appoint his brother Aharon as Kohen Gadol and that this was unfair as many others were just as worthy.

Moshe became very distressed when he heard this. He responded to this charge by devising a test to see who would be worthy of bringing the ketores (incense offering offered by the Kohen Gadol), as this would prove who should rightfully be appointed to the office of the priesthood. Long story short: good guys won, bad guys lost (i.e. Korach and his mutinous cronies die a gruesome death and Aharon retained the title).

Rashi (16:7), rather bluntly, asks a very pointed question: What caused Korach, who was a very clever person, to engage in such a stupidity? Meaning, Korach knew the veracity of Moshe's claim that Aharon had been appointed by Hashem, he knew that he was wrong and that he was putting his life at risk by challenging Moshe. How could Korach, who was actually a very wise man, engage in such folly?

Rashi answers that Korach saw that Shmuel HaNavi would be one of his descendants. According to the Gemara (Ta'anis 5b), Shmuel HaNavi was, in some sense, equal in greatness to both Moshe and Aharon. In addition, he saw that he would have descendants that would serve in the Beis Hamikdosh, all of them having a level of divine prophecy. Bottom line, many great people descended from him. When Moshe said that only one of the people who brought the incense would survive, Korach automatically assumed that it would be him. Alas, he was mistaken; he didn't realize that his children would repent and actually live - it was from them that these great people later emerged.

Rashi ends his comment with a curious remark; "but Moshe did see properly." That is to say, even though Moshe also saw the greatness that would eventually descend from Korach, he knew that it would come from Korach's children. What could Rashi possibly mean to say? Rashi cannot be explaining why Moshe wasn't afraid for Aharon's life; Moshe was confident in the life or death test he devised because he knew that Hashem had asked him to appoint Aharon and that he wasn't guilty of nepotism. What difference does it make that "Moshe did see properly"?

Rashi is telling us that even though Moshe knew that Korach was in the wrong and that he deserved to die for his terrible insubordination and challenge to Moshe's authority, the only reason Moshe felt comfortable in pursuing this course of action was because he knew that Korach's future descendants would be unaffected by Korach's untimely death.

This teaches us an incredible lesson regarding conflict and its consequences: Even when you know you're right and you have the power to enforce your vision of what you deem to be right, you have to take a long and hard look at the consequences of your actions. Being in the right doesn't give you carte blanche to impose that position. Every possible eventuality must be considered before implementing an agenda, even when it's a righteous one. Whether a person is a hard line conservative, or a far left liberal, no agenda should ever be implemented until all the action's consequences are fully considered. After all, Moshe wouldn't execute someone who absolutely deserved to die unless he saw that the future would remain unchanged (see also Shemos 2:12 and Rashi ad loc).

Bikur Cholim

If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem that has sent me (16:30).

A little known fact about this week's parsha is that the Gemara (Nedarim 39b) uses the above statement by Moshe ("and the destiny of all men is visited upon them") as a source for the obligation of bikur cholim - visiting the sick.

Moshe had intended to say that if the mutinous group that challenged his authority should die a natural death (i.e. die on their deathbeds in a natural manner) then they are right and he is wrong; but, if they should die in an unusual manner (e.g. the earth swallows them up) then he is right and they are wrong. However, the Talmud derives from the seemingly superfluous comment "and the destiny of all men is visited upon them" a source for the obligation of bikur cholim.

In other words, Moshe was adding to the test of their "natural death" whether or not people would come to visit them while they lay on their deathbeds. From this, the Gemara derives the obligation of visiting the ill.

This teaching, extrapolated from the text, is difficult to understand; what possible reason could Moshe have to add this as a critical component of what constitutes a natural death? What does visiting the sick have to do with this conflict? Additionally, we find a different Gemara (Sotah 14a) that derives the obligation of bikur cholim from the fact that Hashem visited Avraham Avinu on the third day after his circumcision. As the Gemara (ad loc) points out, we are obligated to follow in the path that Hashem has laid out for us; just as Hashem visited the sick so must we. What possible reason do we need to add yet another source for bikur cholim?

There are two types of visits to the sick, each with its own responsibility. The first type is similar to when Hashem went to visit with Avraham Avinu and was there to help support him while Avraham was in pain recovering from his bris. There is an element to visiting the ill to help them recover, whether in easing the burden of their suffering or, as the Talmud (Nedarim 39b) states, that a person who visits removes one sixtieth of the illness. This was the type of bikur cholim that Hashem engaged in when visiting Avraham Avinu and that we are obligated to emulate: Helping to relieve an ill person's pain and easing their recovery.

However, there is another kind of affliction, the kind that one does not recover from. A patient who is terminally ill requires a totally different type of bikur cholim. Their suffering transcends physical pain; they suffer the pain of nonexistence. One who is terminally ill is painfully aware that he is not going to recover and will shortly leave this world. Most people spend their entire lives blissfully ignoring the fact that at some point they will no longer be on this earth. A person who is terminally ill begins to confront this reality in a very real way.

The only way to really begin to ease their pain is to give meaning to their life. A person who is dying needs to know that their life made a difference. In other words, they need to know that their existence made an impact and that there is something remaining even after they're gone. The responsibility of this bikur cholim is to convey to the ailing that your own life has been changed by their existence. The way to do this is to give them a feeling of how much you feel connected to them and appreciate them, and even though they will soon pass from this world, their existence mattered in a very real way.

This second type of bikur cholim is what Moshe is referring to in this week's parsha. Korach intended to create a division within the Jewish people. In fact, the first Rashi in this week's parsha clearly states that Korach wished to separate himself off to one side. This division, or machlokes, becomes the quintessential machlokes that is not for the sake of heaven (Avos 5:20). This is why Moshe had so precisely added the criteria of being visited on their deathbeds to those collaborating with Korach. Meaning, if people would go to visit with them and express how connected they felt to them before they passed, then Moshe was obviously wrong because in that case their cause had been just and not caused a permanent rift or machlokes....

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Korach 5780-2020

Achieving the Good Life by Picking the Right Mate

(updated and revised from parashat Korach 5761-2001)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this coming week's parasha, parashat Korach, we read of Korach's great rebellion against Moses. Korach, who is a first cousin to Moses and Aaron, and a fellow Levite, accuses Moses and Aaron of usurping authority that does not belong to them, and of not sharing the power of leadership with other members of the People of Israel.

In Numbers 16:1, the Torah records the start of the rebellion: וַיִּקְהָל קֹרַח...וְדָתָן וְאַבִּירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיָּאב, וְאֵוֹן בֶּן פִּלֵּת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן. Korach, gathered together with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliav, and On the son of Pelet, the descendants of Reuben, and stood before Moses with 250 men of the children of Israel, leaders of the assembly...men of renown.

Confronting Moses and Aaron, they said to them (Numbers 16:3): כִּי רַב לָכֶם, הֲשֵׁם? It is too much for you (Moses and Aaron)! After all, the entire assembly is holy, and G-d is among them. So, why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of G-d? Moses tries to reason with Korach, to no avail. He challenges Korach and his supporters to a Divine test, instructing them to bring censurers full of k'toret—incense, and that tomorrow G-d will show the People of Israel whom He chooses. Moses tries to forestall the rebellion by approaching Dathan and Abiram for reconciliation, but they refuse even to meet with him. Numbers 16:14, records the response of Dathan and Abiram: הֲעֵינִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה? "Do you expect to gouge out the eyes of those men?" There's nothing to talk about!

Eventually, the earth opens and swallows Korach, Dathan and Abiram, and fire comes out of heaven and devours the 250 men who brought the improper incense offering.

When reviewing the narrative concerning the deaths of Korach and his cohorts, the rabbis ask, "What happened to On, the son of Pelet? Why is his name not mentioned among the rebellious victims who were killed?"

The rabbis of the Midrash point out that two women played key roles in the rebellion of Korach—one played a destructive role, the other a constructive role. The Midrash maintains that Mrs. Korach egged her husband on, saying to him: "How long are you going to allow your cousin Moses to ridicule you, and remain silent? He's consolidating all the power and wealth for himself, and you're a nothing!" After hearing her laments over and over, Korach resolves to do something. He eventually confronts Moses, which leads to the terrible rebellion, and concludes with Korach's horrifying demise.

To balance this not very "politically correct" description of Mrs. Korach, the rabbis maintain that On the son of Pelet is saved by his wife. Apparently, Mrs. On had overheard Korach cajoling her husband into rebelling and trying to persuade On to join the ranks of the disenchanted. After all, said Korach, "You On, are a member of the tribe of Reuben, the first born of Jacob. You are entitled to power and glory as well." According to the Midrash, when Mrs. On hears this, she tells her husband: "On, darling, what will you gain from this rebellion against Moses? Should Moses emerge victorious, you'll still be a nothing. If Korach emerges victorious you'll be subservient to Korach. You're in a Catch 22. Stay out of it!"

On eventually agrees with his wife, but was concerned that Korach and his cohorts would come to drag him to the rebellion. Mrs. On tells her husband not to fear; she would handle the matter.

When Mrs. On saw the emissaries of Korach approaching her home to collect her husband, she quickly gave On some wine to drink, and he fell asleep. Mrs. On positioned herself at the door of the tent, her hair immodestly uncovered, coiffing herself in public. When Korach and his

assembly saw Mrs. On in her immodest state, they turned away, leaving On alone.

According to a further Midrashic tradition, when the earth opened to swallow Korach's cohorts, the bed on which On slept began to tremble, and the earth began to open to swallow On. On's wife pleaded with G-d saying, "O Lord of the Universe, my husband made a solemn vow to never again take part in dissensions. You Who lives and endures for all eternity can punish him hereafter if ever he proves false to his vow." G-d heeds her plea, and On is saved. Eventually, On receives personal forgiveness from Moses. From then on the Midrash tells us that On is called "On the Penitent, the son of Pelet" which means miracle. An interesting tradition has it that On was actually the brother of Dathan and Abiram.

How fascinating that the Torah underscores that a person's fate is often determined by the mate he or she chooses.

The parasha also warns how the friends one chooses can also determine a person's fate. Rashi notes on Numbers 16:1 how Dathan and Abiram were pulled in to Korach's rebellion because they were Korach's neighbors. The noteworthy words of the Midrash Rabbah bear repetition: אִי לְרָשָׁע אֵי לְשֹׂכְנוֹ—Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbor.

In the early stages of courting, it's so difficult to predict the ultimate ideals and the intimate perspectives a potential spouse may have. Try as we may to determine what those intimate values are, it is often impossible to confirm. Even after marriage, husbands and wives, at times, find themselves pulling in different directions. One may be more spiritual, while the other more material. One may be more cerebral, while the other more athletic. One may be more outgoing, the other more shy. But, it is inevitable that after years of living together, husbands and wives influence one another. The ultimate question is, which of the traits and values will dominate? Sometimes only the negative traits dominate, while at other times the positive values prevail. Obviously, marriages need שְׂמִינָה דְּשָׁמַיָּא, much Divine intervention and blessings from Above.

The verse in the Book of Psalms, 34:15 made famous by the Chofetz Chaim is instructive: סוּר מִרָע וּנְעֻשָׂה טוֹב, Turn from evil and do good. Some people lack the strength or the fortitude to confront evil. Perhaps that's what happened to On the son of Pelet and his wife. Instead, they chose subterfuge merely to avoid evil, with favorable results—salvation for them and their progeny.

Clearly, much of life depends on mazal, (good luck and fortune). Nevertheless, people are often in a position to determine and insure their own good fortune. Choose friends and mates carefully. Avoid situations that are going to result in ethical compromise. Have faith in G-d, and always strive to be the best you can be.

May you be blessed.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Korach

פִּרְשַׁת קֹרַח תש"פ

כִּי כָל הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים

For the entire congregation – all of them – are holy. (16:3)

Korach crossed the line when he debated Moshe *Rabbeinu*. One does not impugn the integrity of the *gadol/gedolim*, Torah giants, of their generation. His statement, "The entire congregation, all of them, are holy," is the basic argument of those who reject the Torah leaders, claiming that they are as well-versed in Torah as the *gedolim*. They do not require a teacher or a leader. *Horav Moshe Feinstein*, ז"ל (who was the *posek ha'dor*, undisputed *halachic* arbiter of his generation), explains that without the *mesorah*, tradition, of the great men of the generation, one can easily err – just as Korach erred – concerning the laws of *tzitzis* and *mezuzah*. Likewise, we observe the apostasy of Eliezer ben Poirah, who maintained that *Sefer Torah*

munachas b'keren zaviis, “the *Sefer Torah* is lying in a corner, and whoever chooses to learn may come and learn” (*Kiddushin* 66a).

The *Tzadukim* took this position when they denied the Torah’s Divine Authorship. *Rav Moshe* asserts that one who believes that the Torah is “lying in a corner” and anyone who wishes to learn from it (or any volume of *Talmud* and its commentators) without the direction and guidance of Torah authorities, is a *kofer*, apostate. Sadly, various forms of apostasy exist. Those who have studied “little,” find support for their fallacious views in some rabbinic maxim, which, consistent with their limited knowledge, they have misunderstood. Indeed, even the generation of the wilderness, a generation that heard the first two *Dibros*, Commandments, of the Ten Commandments, required Moshe and Aharon and all of the Elders to teach, explain and guide them.

Regrettably, many individuals who have defamed the term Orthodoxy (which really should be called Torah Judaism), suggesting that it is not monolithic, thus allowing for diverse opinions concerning the *halachah*. It might be true that in the Orthodox camp people maintain various approaches to manners of service, but all adhere to the *Shulchan Aruch* and are guided by the words of the *gedolei Yisrael*. To suggest that *halachic* decisions for a particular community is the sole domain of its *rav*, the local authority, regardless of the *p'sak* of the *gadol ha'dor*, borders on apostasy. They do not ascribe to the time-honored *halachic* rubric of *daas Torah*, the wisdom of the Torah, as expounded by the sages whose lives represent Torah dictate at its most stringent level. Diversity does not exist in *halachah* if an approach is antithetical to the *Shulchan Aruch*. I could go on to chronicle the flawed, misinformed opinions of those who have decided that *halachah* is insufficient for living an ideal life. I will sum up, however, with one quote from their thesis on modernity in Judaism: “For *Chareidi* Orthodoxy, the *halachah* dictates the ethic, rather than the other way around.” They view *halachah* as being the product of their perception of what they consider to be ethical. They have no place for Hashem in their definition of an ideal life.

We have blamed Korach for being the progenitor of *machlokes*, controversy, *she'lo l'shem Shomayim*, not for the sake of Heaven. After all is said and done, however, Korach was an unabashed *kofer*, apostate. He did not believe in Hashem, and he sought to impugn the integrity of Moshe and Aharon’s leadership in order to promote his self-serving purpose. *Machlokes*; sowing the seeds of hatred; fomenting feelings of dissent; manipulating Jewish pride for personal gain, were all part of his gambit to tarnish Judaism. Korach lost; his followers in each ensuing generation have also lost because ultimately, they have contended, not with Jewish leadership, but with Hashem.

The *Yalkut Shemoni* relates Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s reaction to Korach’s apostasy. Korach claimed, “Moshe is not a prophet; Aharon is not *Kohen Gadol*; the Torah was not given from Heaven.” When Moshe heard this heresy emanating from Korach’s mouth, he said to Hashem, “I (might) be *mevater*, concede/ overlook/ defer concerning my humiliation and that of (my brother) Aharon, but on the *bizayon*, denigration of the Torah, I will not be *mevater*.” With these words, Korach’s fate was sealed. One is not permitted to accept the Torah’s disgrace at the hands of such a renegade.

To give the reader an idea of the meaning of *kavod haTorah*, the honor (that should be) given to the Torah of *Gedolei hador*, the Torah giants of a generation, I will relate a few vignettes. The venerable *Netziv*, *zl*, once fell to the ground as he was carrying a *Sefer Torah*. *Horav Yitzchak Volozhiner*, *zl*, immediately told those standing there, “Pick up the *Netziv* first!” *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein*, *Shlita*, upon quoting this story, remarked concerning the powerful lesson regarding *kavod haTorah* that we derive from it. The *Talmud* (*Makkos* 22b) declares, “How foolish are the Babylonians who rise up for a Torah scroll, but fail to do so for a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar.” This is why *Rav Yitzchak Volozhiner* instructed the students to first pick up the *Netziv*, the *gadol hador*, and only then to pick up the *Sefer Torah*.

Horav Eliezer Ben David, *Shlita*, supplements this with an explanation. A *Sefer Torah* is written on parchment derived from the skin/hide of an animal. Thus, it becomes sanctified when the *sofer*, scribe, has the proper *kavanos*, intentions, while he is writing on it. A *talmid chacham*’s Torah is inscribed

upon his body, so that his entire body becomes holy. Perhaps we might add that a Torah scroll’s letters are written on the parchment. A *talmid chacham*’s Torah permeates his entire essence, literally making him a *shtik*, the essence of, Torah.

When *Horav Mordechai Benet*, *zl*, visited the city of Pressburg, Hungary, where the *Chasam Sofer* was *Rav*, he went into the *shul* at night to learn. While he was studying Torah, he fell asleep from physical exhaustion. After a while, he rolled off the bench and slept on the floor. The following morning, the worshippers entered the sanctuary to find *Rav Mordechai Benet* sleeping on the floor. The *Chasam Sofer* immediately decreed a fast day on the community consistent with the *halachah* that requires the community to fast when a *Sefer Torah*, *chas v'shalom*, falls to the ground.

Horav Avraham Tzvi Ungar, *zl*, author of the *Machne Avraham*, was *Rav* in Kapu-Var, Hungary, a city whose Jewish community primarily consisted of observant Jews. Some secular Jews, whose self-loathing manifest itself in extreme animus towards their observant brothers, also lived there. One secular Jew in particular vilified Orthodoxy beyond a level of which one would believe a Jew capable. He owned a fabric store, situated in the central part of town which served all members of the community. He had a loathsome habit of opening his store on *Shabbos*, specifically when the observant Jews were leaving *shul*. To add insult to injury, he stood in the doorway of his store, smoking a cigarette, and when the worshippers passed his store, he would smile and offer them a loud, “*Gut Shabbos!*”

On the first day of *Pesach*, when the worshippers left *shul* accompanied by their *Rav*, he called out, with derision, “Ungar! Come here!” The *Rav* was startled, but not wanting to create a scene, he turned his head toward the man. How shocked he was to see this man standing in his storefront holding a sandwich consisting of two slices of bread with a piece of *matzah* between them. Seeing this, the *Rav* almost passed out. This was beyond *chutzpah*. He was not denigrating the *Rav*, he was disgracing G-d! The *Rav* just stared at him. Suddenly, the man gave a scream and fell to the ground, the victim of a sudden stroke.

That year, the first day of *Pesach* had fallen on Thursday. Thus, the deceased could not be buried until Sunday. For three days he lay on the floor of his house. The community was shaken. For those three days, they could speak about nothing other than the man’s *chillul Hashem*, disgracing Hashem’s Name, and the swift Heavenly punishment that was meted out. Indeed, as a result of this clear, Heavenly response, Hashem’s Name was publicly sanctified in an unprecedented manner that would forever alter the lax attitude towards *Shabbos* observance.

To the surprise of the members of the community, the *Rav* participated in the funeral. Furthermore, he ascended to the podium to render a eulogy. He later explained his actions. While the man had led a lifestyle that was antithetical to Torah, in the end, his sudden passing catalyzed an extraordinary *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*, inspiring an entire community suddenly to come to terms with the reality that Hashem guides the world and that no action (good or bad) will go unrequited. As such, this man had become a vehicle for *Kiddush Hashem*. He deserved to be eulogized.

Just because a person publicly acts in a manner which is perceived as *kefirah*, apostasy, it does not necessarily bespeak his true feelings. Many an apostate is filled with self-loathing, which he expresses in negative terms towards Judaism. Is he really a *kofer*? *Horav Nachman Bulman*, *zl*, was an extraordinary *Rav*, a *talmid chacham* whose devotion to Torah and its dissemination, through both the oral and written word, not only earned him the respect, admiration and love of thousands, but he also succeeded in altering the spiritual panorama of America, and later *Eretz Yisrael*. In the 1950’s, it was difficult to find a truly Orthodox *shul* outside of the tri-state area. As a young rabbi, *Rav Bulman* was fortunate to find such a position in Danville, Virginia. While the community was not exactly Orthodox, they elected to maintain the *shul* on a level which they thought was Orthodox. It took time, but, with tenacity and perseverance, *Rav Bulman* succeeded in transforming the community.

Rav Bulman put up with stubborn synagogue heads and disgruntled members, a phenomenon that was not uncommon on the slowly emerging Orthodox landscape. Danville had one “in-house” *apikores*, self-proclaimed heretic, who even had a Ph.D. in philosophy. He made it a point to interject constantly into Rav Bulman’s Sunday morning Torah class with his usual dose of *kefirah*. *Shul* on *Shabbos*, prayer at any time, was an anathema to him, or so he claimed.

This man, like so many like him, suffered from ambivalent stirrings concerning the religion of his youth. He would come to *shul* for *Neilah*, the closing prayer of the *Yom Kippur* service, and make a public spectacle of reading a newspaper (in *shul*, rather than take a *machzor*, prayer book, and *daven*). He did not have the paper, however, for reading purposes, but to block the tears that were flowing down his face! To “save face,” he would say to Rav Bulman, on his way out of *shul*, “The old-fashioned *davening* is so tear-jerking. I believe they have something similar to this by the gentiles.” This goes to show that not all *kofrim*, apostates, are created equal, and not all are the way they present themselves.

ואני הנה נתתי לך את משמרת תרומתי לכל קדשי בני ישראל

And I – behold! I have given you the safeguard of My heave-offer was of all the sanctities of Bnei Yisrael. (18:8)

The offerings Korach controversy had concluded (veritably, it never ends; a new one will unfortunately rear its ugly head to replace the former debacle), and the Torah now lists the twenty-four various gifts, *matnos Kehunah*, that were allotted to the *Kohanim*. In *Pirkei Avos* (6:6), we are taught that the Priesthood is acquired through twenty-four procedures. *Horav Shlomo Wolbe*, זל, observes that this is no coincidence. A corollary must exist between these two “twenty-fours.” He quotes the *Chovos HaLevavos*, who teaches that everything which Hashem grants us comes with an obligation for reciprocity. Hashem shows His kindness to us. We are obliged to reciprocate in kind, by adding joy and fervor to our continued service.

Rav Wolbe derives from here an important lesson for all of us. First and foremost, we must never lose sight of the fact that Hashem created us and the world that we are in. When we bear this in mind, we realize that everything is a gift from Hashem; thus, we cannot take anything for granted. We can have no entitlement. Life, health, intellect, family, and material possessions are all gifts which Hashem, in His infinite kindness, bestows upon us. At any time, He can decide to withhold a gift, and we will not function in the manner that we took for granted.

I write this in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, when the entire world has come to the stark realization that Hashem owes us nothing, and He can demonstrate this at any time. An entire world has been brought to its feet. Furthermore, not only were our material and physical activities halted; our ability to function on a spiritual plane was put to a test unlike anything ever before. No one knows the reason why Hashem does what He does. One thing is for certain: Hashem is holding the cards; He is manipulating the strings.

Hashem does not dole out gifts without a reason. Everything that He gives us has a purpose. The gifts that He gives us are to enable us to serve Him better – with wisdom, strength and material bounty. Nothing one receives from Hashem is automatic, because He owes us nothing. Additionally, everything that we are granted is for the purpose of furthering our knowledge of Hashem and enabling us to serve Him better. The *Kohanim* merited twenty-four gifts, which (in turn) obligated them to perform the twenty-four varied services in the *Bais HaMikdash*. We, too, have a *quid pro quo* to perform Hashem’s service with every gift in our inventory.

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ליבל בן חיים וזנה בת יעקב

שמעון בן גדליה ורייזל בת אליעזר

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Erasing on Shabbos

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: Erasing off my hand

On Friday, I wrote a short reminder on my hand. May I rub it off on Shabbos?

Introduction:

In a previous article, we analyzed the prohibition of writing on Shabbos. We discovered that this melacha was performed in the process of building the mishkan – either when they marked the boards, to make sure that they were placed in the proper location, or, according to another opinion, when they kept records. This does not explain why the activity of erasing, *mocheik*, is a melacha. Rashi (73a) explains that erasing is a melacha because sometimes the person doing the marking made an error that required correction. Thus, the erasing was in order to write the correct numbering. This leads directly to our next point:

Erasing in order to write

When the Mishnah lists the various melachos of Shabbos, it states, “There are 39 categories of melacha: Someone who plants, or plows, or reaps, or gathers, or threshes, or winnows, or selects, or grinds, or sifts, or kneads, or bakes. Someone who shears wools, or launders it, or cards it, or dyes it, or spins... someone who traps a deer, or slaughters it, or skins it... or tans the hide, or smooths it, or cuts it to size, or writes two letters, or erases with the intent of writing two letters, or builds, or razes, or extinguishes, or someone who kindles.” The amount of detail for the melacha of erasing, relative to the other melachos, stands out; most of the melachos are described in Hebrew by one word, without referencing another melacha or a quantity. Yet, when mentioning the melacha of *mocheik*, erasing, the Mishnah limits the melacha to someone who “erases with the intent of writing two letters.” To explain why the Mishnah uses this unusual way of describing *mocheik* requires some introduction:

1. When discussing the laws of Shabbos, Chazal were careful to use two terms: *chayov*, culpable, and *patur*, exempt. *Chayov* means that, when the Sanhedrin was fully functional, these acts were punishable, and, when performed negligently, require the offering of a *korban chatos*.
2. A principle germane to all the laws of Shabbos is that someone violates Shabbos *min haTorah* only when the action has a direct, positive result. If the act appears to be unconstructive, it is prohibited only because of a rabbinic injunction and not *min haTorah*. For example, digging a hole because of a need for fill dirt to cover a spill or the exposed roots of a plant is exempt *min haTorah* from violating the melacha of *choresh*, plowing. This is because creating this hole in the ground is not a positive act. Digging a hole is a Torah violation only when it is either part of an act of plowing – in order to plant or otherwise benefit a plant – in which case it constitutes the melacha of *choresh*; or when it is part of a construction, in which case it constitutes the melacha of *boneh*, building. In both of these instances, the hole is itself beneficial. Erasing does not, in and of itself, provide benefit. It is considered beneficial when (1) you are interested in writing on the paper and to do so you need to erase something, or (2) when there is a mistake on the paper that you need to correct by erasure. When the erasing itself does not provide benefit, the act violates Shabbos only because of a rabbinic injunction. This is why the Mishnah states that erasing is *chayov* when it is performed in order to write. This type of erasing is a positive act and, therefore, a Torah violation.

–When the erasure is “positive,” but you do not intend to write anything – as in the second case mentioned above – is that *chayov* for the melacha of erasing? That is a dispute among poskim that we will discuss shortly.

Why two letters?

The Mishnah states that violating the melacha of erasing requires the intention to write two letters on the erasure. As the Mishnah states, someone is *chayov* for violating the melacha of *koseiv* only when he writes two letters. Writing less than two letters is not substantive enough for a person to be culpable. Since erasing alone is not considered a constructive act, the person is liable only when the erasure clears enough area to write two letters.

Note that it does not state in the Mishnah how many letters must be erased to violate the melacha. It states how much space must be erased – enough space to write two letters.

What is the halacha if someone erased just one letter, but it was large enough to write two letters in its place? Is the person who performed this act guilty of violating the melacha? The Mishnah implies that this act would be *chayov*.

This question is raised by the Tosefta, which states that, indeed, someone who erased a letter large enough to write two letters, is culpable for violating the melacha when his intention is to write two letters in its place. The Tosefta (Shabbos 12:7, quoted by the Gemara) notes that this results in an anomalous conclusion: “Someone who writes one large letter, even though it is as big as two letters, is exempt from having committed a transgression on Shabbos, whereas someone who erases one letter that is as big as two letters desecrates Shabbos. Rabbi Menachem berabbi Yosi said: This is a stringency of erasing that does not exist with writing.”

Erasing stricter than writing?!

The Tosefta is emphasizing that although, in general, there are more ways of violating the melacha of writing than there are of violating the melacha of erasing, this is an instance in which someone could be chayov for erasing, whereas a parallel act of writing would not be chayov.

Erasing scribble

Actually, there are at least two other instances when erasing is treated more strictly than writing. One situation is that of someone who erased scribble in order to write in its place. Since the goal of the melacha of erasing is to write, it makes no difference whether someone erased letters or scribble – in both instances he is chayov for violating the Torah's melacha (Rosh, Shabbos 7:9; Tur, Orach Chayim 340). On the other hand, someone who scribbles does not violate the melacha of writing min haTorah, since he did not write any form of communication.

Left-handed erasing

Here is yet another case in which erasing is treated more strictly than writing.

Although we learned in a previous article that someone who writes with his non-dominant hand has not violated the Torah prohibition of writing, since this is not the usual way to write, this rule applies only to melacha activities that require dexterity. According to most authorities, erasing is not considered a melacha that requires such dexterity, and, therefore, someone who erases with his non-dominant hand violates the melacha min haTorah, assuming that he is erasing for the purpose of writing two letters (Chayei Odom 9:2; Mishnah Berurah 340:22; Shu"t Avnei Neizer, Orach Chayim 209:9). We should note that one early acharon, the Elyah Rabbah (340:11), appears to disagree, suggesting that there is no difference between writing and erasing in this regard.

Permanence

Germane to writing, the Mishnah (Shabbos 104b) teaches: "Someone who writes two letters... is chayov, whether he writes with ink, with a paint pigment, with sikra [a red dye], with tree-exudate gum, with ferrous sulfate, or with anything else that makes a permanent impression."

This requirement – that one is chayov for the melacha only if performed with, or on, an item that results in permanent writing – holds true both for the melacha of writing and for the melacha of erasing. In other words, someone who erased writing that is temporary, or that was written on material that is not lasting, does not violate the melacha of erasing min haTorah. For example, if someone erases writing on a leaf that soon will dry up, he violates a rabbinic injunction but is not chayov (see Tosefta, Shabbos 12:7).

There is a halachic curiosity here: Since the melacha of erasing is for the purpose of writing, or alternatively, when the erasing itself creates something positive, why is this melacha violated only when erasing permanent writing? Erasing temporary writing is also necessary, sometimes, to accomplish a positive result, whether it is to write in its place or for a different positive purpose.

I have not found this question asked by the traditional authorities. It seems to me that the answer is that erasing something temporary is not significant enough to constitute a violation of a Torah law.

Erasing one letter

I mentioned above that the Mishnah implies, and the Tosefta states explicitly, that someone who erases one letter that is large enough to write two letters in its place, with the intent of writing two letters there, is liable for erasing on Shabbos. The Sefas Emes (Shabbos 75b) queries whether someone who erased a space large enough to write two letters, but his intention is to write only one letter, is chayov or not. He does not reach a definite conclusion.

Correction fluid

Using correction fluid (often called "Wite-Out," which is the brand name of one such product), when done to enable rewriting, is prohibited min haTorah.

Coating white

The Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav 340:1) rules that if someone takes a dark piece of wood or other material and whitewashes its surface so that he can write on it, he violates mocheik min haTorah – because this act is equivalent halachically to erasing a dark surface for the purpose of writing on it.

Erasing a tattoo

One acharon discusses whether erasing a tattoo on Shabbos violates the melacha of mocheik. He rules that to do this on a Jew is a violation of Shabbos min haTorah – according to the authorities who hold that an erasure for a positive benefit other than writing is chayov. However, erasing a non-Jew's tattoo is not a violation of mocheik, according to the Minchas Chinuch. (I am unsure how a tattoo can be erased. I have been told that there are several methods, such as using lasers to break down the ink, or rubbing salt or lemon juice and then applying some ointment.)

Ink on sikra

The Gemara (Gittin 19a) teaches that someone who writes with dark ink on top of writing that was red violates two melachos: erasing and writing. His act is considered

to have erased the original red writing and then to have written in dark ink on top of the erasure.

Ches and two zayins

In the Ashkenazi script used for sifrei Torah, the letter ches is written as two zayins with a tiny cap (similar to an upside-down "v") connecting them. The Gemara rules that someone who removes this "cap," thereby creating two zayins, is chayov. The Bavli (104b) rules that he violated one melacha, whereas the Yerushalmi (7:2) rules that he violated both koseiv and mocheik in doing this. Similarly, the Yerushalmi holds that someone who scraped off the corner of a dalet, thereby making it into a reish, violated both melachos, koseiv and mocheik.

Crying over spilled ink

Someone spilled ink intentionally onto a written passage so that it can no longer be read. Does this constitute the melacha of erasing min haTorah? It would appear that it violates the melacha only as a rabbinic injunction, since no improvement resulted from his action (Shu"t Maharshag 2:41).

Erasing wet ink

The authorities disagree as to whether erasing ink or other pigment that has not yet dried violates the melacha of erasing min haTorah. Some contend that this is not chayov, because the writing is not yet permanent; at this stage, it can easily smear and become illegible (Minchas Chinuch, Koseiv #10; Shu"t Har Tzvi, Orach Chayim 1:65).

Erasing on Yom Tov

Writing and erasing are both prohibited on Yom Tov, although kindling a fire for warmth or cooking is permitted. This has an interesting application: Is it permitted to use newspaper to kindle a fire on Yom Tov? Is burning the writing on the paper considered erasing? Certainly, this does not constitute erasing min haTorah, since you will not have any paper to write on when you are finished, and therefore the results are not considered positive, as explained above. Despite that fact, the Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav 511:2) prohibits burning paper that has lettering on it on Yom Tov, because it is considered mocheik miderabbanan. Although cooking and related food preparatory melachos are permitted on Yom Tov, erasing for a non-food purpose is not.

Only in order to write?

Above, I quoted a statement of the Tosefta that erasing a large letter so that you can write two letters in its place is chayov. As a rule, erasing violates Shabbos min haTorah because it is a preparatory melacha to writing. Is this a concept unique to the melacha of erasing, or is it part of the general rule that a melacha must have a positive result to be chayov, and erasing does not usually have, in and of itself, a positive result?

This question appears to be the subject of a dispute between major authorities.

Here is an example of a case that is affected by this dispute. Someone has a mezuzah, sefer Torah or Tefillin in which an extra letter is written. As is, it cannot be used until the extra letter is erased, but once the letter is removed, it is perfectly kosher. Thus, erasing the letter is not for the purpose of writing, but renders a tikun, a positive result. The Pri Megadim (Eishel Avraham 340:7), suggests that erasing the letter is prohibited min haTorah, whereas, according to Tosafos, as explained by Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Gilyon Hashas, Shabbos 73b s.v. Vetzarich), it is not. Tosafos appears to understand that since the melacha of mocheik in the mishkan was in order to rewrite, that is the only category of erasing that is prohibited min haTorah; the Pri Megadim assumes that any erasing that produces a positive result is included in the Torah violation.

Evidence to the Pri Megadim's position can be rallied from a passage of Gemara (Shabbos 149a) which prohibits reading a list of guests that you intend to invite on Shabbos or a list of courses that you intend to serve. This prohibition is because of a rabbinic concern that the host may realize that he invited too many guests (or have too many courses) and decide to erase a name from the list, so that the butler does not go to invite that guest. (Apparently, invitations were neither printed nor delivered before Shabbos, but were delivered orally via courier on Shabbos itself.)

The Gemara's statement implies that the erasing would be prohibited min haTorah because it produces a positive result. If not, and the erasing is prohibited only miderabbanan, we would not make a gezeirah in this instance since the concern is only that someone will violate a rabbinic prohibition (Chazon Yechezkel 12:7; see there that he endeavors to answer the question).

Wiping ink off your hands

Is wiping ink off your hands prohibited because of mocheik?

There is a dispute among late poskim whether wiping writing or even smudges off your hands is prohibited because of mocheik. The Chayei Odom (Hilchos Netilas Yadayim 40:8) rules that if your hands are smudged on Shabbos, say, from pots, and there is a concern that washing netilas yadayim upon arising in the morning or prior to eating bread might remove the stains, it is still permitted to wash them since you are not trying to remove the smudges and it is not definite that they will be erased. (This is referred to in halachic parlance as *eino miskavein* without a *pesik reisha*.) The Chayei

Odom forbids scrubbing your hands clean, because this constitutes mocheik – although he agrees that this does not violate mocheik min haTorah, but only miderabbanan, because you are not wiping off the smudge in order to write on your hands. (Indeed, if you were wiping your hands clean in order to write on them, this scrubbing would be prohibited min haTorah as mocheik.)

In a similar vein, the Minchas Shabbos (80:199) rules that on Friday you should be careful not to use ink or dyes that will remain on your hands on Shabbos. If you did use such ink or dye, and it is still on your hand on Shabbos, and you are embarrassed by it, he permits you to remove it on Shabbos because of kavod haberiyos, the basic dignity to which human beings are entitled. He quotes other authorities who prohibit removing the ink from your hands and even prohibit washing the stained parts of your hands under these circumstances, ruling that you should wrap the writing in cloth or bandages. (From a netilas yadayim perspective, this is permitted when you have an injury that you want to keep clean. It is a chiddush to apply that law to this case.) However, the Maharsham (Kuntrus Ahavas Shalom, end of Minchas Shabbos #4) disagrees with both the Chayei Odom and the Minchas Shabbos, contending that although it is prohibited miderabbanan to erase any ink or smudges, even when you have no intent to write on that place, the rabbinic prohibition applies only to removing ink or dye, but not to removing dirt, which would usually be considered cleaning and not erasing.

Conclusion

The Torah commanded us concerning the halachos of Shabbos by giving us the basic categories that are prohibited. Shabbos is a day on which we refrain from altering the world for our own purposes; instead, the rule of Hashem becomes the focus of all of creation. We contribute to this by refraining from any activity that implies that we have control over the universe (Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch's Commentary to Shemos 20:10).

By demonstrating Hashem's rule even over non-exertive activities, such as erasing, we demonstrate and acknowledge the true Creator of the world and all it contains.

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PARSHAT KORACH

What did Korach 'TAKE'? For some reason, the Torah prefers not to tell us.

Likewise, Korach definitely had many complaints, yet Chumash never clarifies what he proposed instead.

In fact, as we study Parshat Korach, we will notice how many other important details appear to be 'missing'! In this week's shiur we attempt to explain why.

INTRODUCTION

Parshat Korach opens with a pasuk that seems to be grammatically incorrect:

"Va'yikach Korach..." - And Korach, the son of Yizhar, the son of Khat, the son of Levi, TOOK; and Datan and Aviram [the sons of Eliav] and Oan [the son of Pelet] the sons of Reuven." (16:1)

This opening sentence simply states that Korach TOOK, without explaining WHAT he took! In fact, this pasuk is so ambiguous that almost every commentator offers a different interpretation. For example:

Rashi - Korach took himself to a 'different side';
Ramban - he took an "eytzah" (counsel) into his heart;
Ibn Ezra & Chizkuni - he took 'other people';
Seforno - he took the 250 'national leaders'.

[Note as well how just about every translation of this pasuk attempts to 'improvise' in some manner or other.]

However, no matter which interpretation is most accurate, a more basic question remains, i.e.: Why does the Torah begin this parsha in such an ambiguous manner? After all, one would assume that the Torah's message would have been clearer had this pasuk been written 'properly'!

In the following shiur, we will show how this 'opening ambiguity' may be intentional, as it will draw our attention to the unique style that the Torah uses to describe this incident – a style that the Torah uses deliberately - to convey its underlying message!

Let's begin our study of Bamidbar chapter 16 by paying careful attention to the various 'complaints' that Korach raises.

FIGHTING FOR A COMMON CAUSE

From a cursory reading of Parshat Korach it seems that Korach, Datan & Aviram, and the 250 men all unite behind a common cause. Their joint criticism of the leadership of Moshe and Aharon, voiced in their opening protest, demonstrates this united opposition:

"...and they gathered against MOSHE AND AHARON saying: You have taken too much - for the ENTIRE COMMUNITY IS HOLY and God is in their midst, why then do you RAISE YOURSELVES ABOVE God's congregation?" (16:3)

However, it remains unclear from this opening complaint precisely what they want instead:

- * Are they calling for 'new democratic elections'?
- * Do they want Moshe & Aharon to 'step down'?
- * Do they themselves want to 'step up'?
- * Are they simply demanding 'spiritual equality'?
- * Are they just 'chronic' complainers, without any goal?

In response to this opening complaint, Moshe offers a 'test' that sounds (at first) like some type of 'showdown' (see 16:4-7). By examining the details of this suggested 'test', we should be able to arrive at a more precise conclusion concerning what they are truly complaining about: Let's carefully study the psukim that

describe Moshe Rabeinu's suggestion:

"Come morning, and God will make known who is His and who is holy... and he whom He has chosen..."

This you shall do, take fire-pans, Korach and his entire group, ... and put on them KToret before God [i.e. at the Mishkan]... and he [who's offering] God shall choose will be established as "kadosh"... (see 16:5-7)

As you review these psukim, note how it remains rather unclear concerning the precise purpose of this 'ktoret test'!

First, let's discuss what this test cannot be!

It can't be a test to determine who is God's true choice to be the LEADER of Bnei Yisrael, for if so – then only ONE offering could be accepted – and Moshe (as well as Aharon) should participate!

Furthermore, if this is simply a 'showdown' between Moshe and Korach, why should the 250 men participate?

More likely, the purpose of this 'test' is to determine who is entitled to OFFER KORBANOT. This would explain why Aharon (to the exclusion of Moshe) participates together with the 250 men, as one possible outcome of this test would be for God to accept the offerings of all (or at least some) of these participants.

In other words, the purpose of the "ktoret" test is to determine the validity of Korach's claim that everyone in Am Yisrael is "kadosh" (see 16:3), and hence everyone should be allowed to offer korbano. Moshe is suggesting that Korach & his 250 followers should 'give it a try'. If God accepts these offerings, then Korach would be proven correct - if not, then Moshe will be proven correct.

SPIRITUAL EQUALITY

To support this interpretation, we simply need to take a look at Moshe's second response to Korach (see 16:8-11), i.e. in his additional censure to the Levites who have joined Korach:

"Hear me, sons of Levi - is it not enough that God has designated you to come close [i.e. to assemble and carry the Mishkan]... and now you and your fellow Levites DO YOU SEEK THE KEHUNA [priesthood] as well.... - why then do you complain AGAINST AHARON." (see 16:8-11)

This censure of "bnei Levi" - especially the phrase of 'do you seek the priesthood as well - proves that Korach and his 250 men are challenging the decision to limit the offering of "korbanot" to Aharon and his sons. These dissidents demand that anyone who so desires should be allowed to offer "korbanot", for ALL members of Israel are 'spiritually equal' ["ki kol ha'eydah kulam kedoshim..." (see 16:3)].

This also explains why this extra censure is directed specifically to "bnei Levi". Moshe's criticism focuses on the hypocrisy of these Levites - for if they were so worried about 'spiritual equality' why didn't they complain earlier when they themselves were chosen over any other tribe to carry the Mishkan!

Apparently, these dissidents believe that the limitation of offering korbano to Aharon's family stems from Moshe's nepotism, rather than from a divine command. [See Chizkuni 16:15.] Hence, this 'ktoret test', as Moshe suggests, will determine who indeed is capable of offering korbano - i.e. it may be only Aharon, or possibly all (or at least some) of the 250 men as well. [See also 16:16-17.]

ENTER - GROUP TWO

Up until this point, we are left with the impression that everyone mentioned in the opening two psukim - i.e. Korach, Datan, Aviram, and the 250 men - join together in this protest. Hence, we should expect all of them to participate in this 'showdown'.

However, as the narrative continues, a very different picture emerges. Note from 16:12 that Datan & Aviram, for some reason, are singled out:

"And Moshe sent for DATAN & AVIRAM, but they answered: WE WILL NOT COME UP..." (see 16:12-14)

Why must Moshe SEND for Datan and Aviram? After all, were they not together with Korach & Company when they first gathered against Moshe (see 16:2-3)? Furthermore, for what purpose does Moshe call them? Does he want them to participate in the 'ktoret test'? At first glance, it remains quite unclear concerning what this summons is all about.

However, their response to Moshe - "we will not COME UP" - already suggests that Datan & Aviram may comprise an independent group. Note how they remain in their own camp [recall that they are from shevet Reuven] and refuse to even come near the Ohel Moed (where the 'ktoret test' is being conducted).

Furthermore, from their censure of Moshe that accompanied their response to his summons (see below), it becomes quite clear that Datan & Aviram have a more 'political' agenda (and aren't terribly interested in 'spiritual equality').

"Is it not enough that you took us out of a land flowing with milk and honey [referring to Egypt!] to die in the desert and NOW - YOU CONTINUE TO ACT AS LORD OVER US! You have not even brought us to a land flowing with milk & honey (as Moshe had promised)... [therefore] we will not come up!" (16:13-14)

In this brazen defiance of Moshe's summons, Datan & Aviram totally reject Moshe's political LEADERSHIP. In their eyes, Moshe has failed as the nation's leader. After all, when Bnei Yisrael first accepted Moshe as their leader in Egypt, he had promised to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey (see Shmot 3:16-17, 4:30-31). Now that Moshe has informed Bnei Yisrael that entering the Promised Land is no longer on the horizon, Datan & Aviram (and most likely many others) reject the legitimacy of his leadership and authority.

Clearly, this complaint differs drastically from Korach's initial objection to the KEHUNA! Korach and the 250 men challenge Aharon's exclusive status, but never question Moshe's leadership. After all, they all agree to the 'test' that Moshe himself initiates. Datan and Aviram, however, challenge specifically Moshe's leadership.

MOSHE'S PRAYER

Conclusive proof of this distinction can be found in Moshe's immediate reaction to Datan & Aviram's complaint. Pay careful attention to how Moshe turns to God in prayer:

"And Moshe became angry and said to God - 'al tefyen el MINCHATAM' - Pay no attention to their 'oblation' - I did not take from them a single donkey, nor have I wronged anyone of them." (see 16:15)

At first glance, it appears that Moshe now begs God not to accept the "ktoret" offerings. However, this cannot be for two reasons:

1) Datan & Aviram chose not to participate in the "ktoret" test, so why would Moshe request that God not accept an offering that they aren't even bringing?

[See Ramban!]

2) The Hebrew word "minchatam" refers either to a 'meal offering' (see Vayikra chapter 2) or a gift of some sort (see Breishit 32:13,18). Certainly, it is not another name for "ktoret" (incense).

[Note how the commentators dealt with this problem. Even though the first opinion of Rashi claims that "minchatam" indeed refers to the KTORET offering, Ramban (rightly so) disagrees - suggesting that it refers to any type of prayer (or offering) that they may offer. See also Ibn Ezra & Seforno who explain this pasuk in a similar manner.]

Furthermore, the reason that Moshe advances - "for I have not taken anything from them" - clearly relates to Moshe's counter-claim that his leadership has been without corruption. Therefore, this entire prayer relates to Datan & Aviram's complaint against his leadership. Moshe simply turns to God to affirm the legitimacy of his own [divinely appointed] leadership

that has now been challenged. Moshe reminds God that he has been a faithful leader who never abused his power.

TWO GROUPS - TWO GRIPEs

Let's summarize what has emerged thus far. We have identified TWO independent grievances, raised by TWO independent groups, situated in TWO different locations:

GROUP ONE - the 250 men ["adat Korach"]- protest Aharon's exclusive rights to the KEHUNA. They stand ready for their 'test' at the OHEL MOED;

[Note that the Torah consistently refers to this group as "adat Korach" (see 16:5,6,11).]

GROUP TWO - Datan & Aviram (& followers) - complain against the POLITICAL leadership of MOSHE. They gather in the territory of shevet Reuven.

[This location is later referred to as "Mishkan Korach Datan v'Aviram" (see 16:24-27).]

Of course, it remains to be seen where Korach himself stands on these two issues, but there can be no doubt that there are two groups with two very different agendas.

RE-ENTER GROUP ONE

Up until this point (i.e. 16:1-15), the narrative, although a bit complex, has flowed in a logical order: it first presents both groups, followed the presentation of the individual complaints of each faction. But now, for some reason, the narrative begins to 'see-saw,' seemingly randomly, between Moshe's confrontations with each of these two groups.

Note how in 16:16 the narrative abruptly switches from Moshe's response to Datan & Aviram (group II) back to his original confrontation with "adat Korach" (group I):

"And Moshe said to Korach, tomorrow, you and all your company [the 250 men] be before God [at the Mishkan], you and they and Aharon..." (16:16-17 / compare with 16:5-7)

Then the narrative continues to describe this confrontation: The next morning, all 250 men assemble at the Ohel Moed ready with their "machtot" (fire-pans) and "ktoret" (16:18), while Korach rallies a mass crowd to watch (16:19). But then, just as we expect to find out the outcome of this 'showdown', again we find an abrupt change in the narrative.

RE-ENTER GROUP TWO

Precisely at this critical point in the narrative, we find a new 'parshia' (note 16:20-22), which describes God's [first] direct intervention (in relation to this incident), and Moshe & Aharon's reaction.

"And God spoke to Moshe & Aharon: 'Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.' And they fell upon their faces, and said: 'O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall - "ish echad" - one man sin, and You will be wroth with - "kol ha'EYDAH" - the entire congregation?' (16:20-22)

Review these psukim once again, noting how it is not so clear concerning who "ish echad" and "ha'EYDAH" refer to:

Does "ish echad" refer to Korach, and hence the "eydah" refers to the 250 men? Or, does "ish echad" refer to the entire group of complainers - i.e. Korach, and his 250 men. If so, then "eydah" must refer to the entire nation of Israel, or at least the large group of followers who Korach had gathered to watch (see 16:18-19).

Furthermore - what about Datan & Aviram? Should they also be considered as part of the "ish echad" in Moshe's prayer?

Finally, if "eydah" refers to the entire congregation - does this imply simply the 'gawkers', i.e. those who gathered around to watch (see 16:19), or does it really imply the entire congregation, including women & children etc.?

How we understand these words directly affects how we understand Moshe's prayer in 16:22. In other words, is Moshe

asking God to save the 250 men from Korach (if so, then God doesn't answer this request), or is he asking God to save the entire nation from Korach and his 250 men (if so, then God answers this request)?

To answer this question, let's see how God answers this prayer, noting how it seems to totally confuse our understanding of what is happening:

"And God told Moshe, speak to the EYDAH and warn them - WITHDRAW yourselves from the area of MISHKAN KORACH DATAN V'AVIRAM." (16:23-24)

To our surprise, God's answer introduces a location that we have never heard of before: i.e. MISHKAN KORACH DATAN v'AVIRAM. This cannot be the Mishkan itself, rather the word "mishkan" in this context refers to their dwelling site, i.e. where Datan and Aviram reside.

Since Datan & Aviram did not come to the "ktoret" test, we must conclude that their "mishkan" must be located in the area of the Tribe of Reuven. Most probably, this site served as 'party headquarters' for this group of people who have openly rebelled against Moshe's political leadership.

With this in mind, let's attempt to identify whom "eydah" refers to in God's reply to Moshe's prayer (in 16:24). To save the "eydah" from this "ish echad", Moshe must instruct the "eydah" to evacuate the area surrounding Mishkan Korach Datan & Aviram. Hence, the "eydah" must refer to a group of people who have gathered around Mishkan Korach Datan v'Aviram in the Tribe of Reuven. However, this conclusion is rather baffling, for only five psukim earlier, the word "eydah" was used to describe a group of people who had gathered around the OHEL MOED to watch the "ktoret" showdown (see 16:19)!

Once again, we find how the narrative has 'jumped' from Group One [the 250 men offering ktoret] to Group Two [Datan & Aviram].

To prove that there are indeed two groups involved, simply note what takes place in the next pasuk, as Moshe fulfills God's command.

Recall that Moshe must issue a warning to the EYDAH that has gathered around the campsite of Datan & Aviram. As this "eydah" refers to Group Two, Moshe must now LEAVE the area of the OHEL MOED (where Group One has assembled) and GO to the area where Group Two is located - i.e. Mishkan Korach, Datan & Aviram:

"And Moshe GOT UP and WENT TO Datan & Aviram... and he said to the people: MOVE AWAY from the tents of these wicked people... lest you be wiped out for all their sins..." (16:25-26)

Note that Moshe must LEAVE his present location (at the Ohel Moed) and GO TO "Mishkan Korach Datan v'Aviram" (conclusive proof that two separate groups exist). This location, to which the Torah refers as "Mishkan Korach Datan v'Aviram", serves as 'party headquarters' for this rebellious group. Most likely, an alternative leadership group has already formed at this new center.

[Note the Torah's use of the word "mishkan" [dwelling place] to describe their headquarters. Most likely, this term was specifically chosen to indicate that these NEW headquarters stand in defiance of the Moshe Rabeinu's leadership, whose headquarters are the "mishkan" at the Ohel Moed!]

Because Group Two challenges Moshe's leadership (and not Aharon's priesthood), it must be Moshe himself (and NOT Aharon) who confronts this group. Note that Aharon does not accompany Moshe (in 16:25). Instead, he remains at the Ohel Moed, prepared for the showdown with the 250 men (Group One), i.e. the group that questions his KEHUNA.

TWO GROUPS - TWO PUNISHMENTS

At this point, God must prove to the political dissidents that Moshe's leadership was by divine appointment. Therefore, God Himself must 'create' a "beriya" - a new form of creation - to punish this group. Those who distance themselves from this

group are saved (see 16:27-34). However, note that the ground miraculously devours only the members of Group Two - i.e. Datan & Aviram and their staunchest followers.

But what happened in the meantime to "adat Korach" (Group One), i.e. the 250 men. Note that the last time they were mentioned was back in 16:17-19, as they prepared to the "ktoret" showdown; but we were never told what happened to them! For some reason, the Torah leaves us in suspense about their fate; until the very last pasuk of this narrative (and in a very incidental manner):

"And a fire came forth from God and consumed the 250 men who were offering the ktoret." (16:35)

This final pasuk proves not only that there were TWO groups in TWO separate locations, but that there were also TWO distinct forms of punishments:

GROUP ONE -

the 250 men at the Ohel Moed - CONSUMED by fire.

GROUP TWO -

Datan & Aviram & Co. - SWALLOWED by the ground.

So where is Korach in all of this? Was he consumed by fire in the Mishkan together with Group One; or swallowed up by the ground - together with Group Two?

He couldn't be **two** places at the same time, could he?

KORACH - THE POLITICIAN

To appreciate the nature of Korach's involvement, we must understand his connection to each of these two groups. Before we begin, let's use a table to summarize our analysis thus far:

| | <u>GROUP ONE</u> | <u>GROUP TWO</u> |
|-------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Members: | 250 men | Datan & Aviram + followers |
| Claim : | priesthood | new political leadership |
| Against: | Aharon | Moshe |
| Reason: | spiritual equality | failure of leadership |
| Location: | Ohel Moed | shevet Reuven |
| Punishment: | consumed by fire | swallowed by the ground |

At first glance, it appears that each group has some basis for a legitimate complaint.

By challenging the restriction of the KEHUNA to the family of Aharon, Group One asserts their right, as well as the right of others, to offer korbanot.

By challenging the political leadership of Moshe, Group Two voices their concern for the welfare and future of Am Yisrael. In their opinion, remaining in the desert is equivalent to national suicide (see 16:13).

Although Group One has little in common with Group Two, the Torah presents this story as if only one group exists, under Korach's leadership. The narrative accomplishes this by 'jumping back and forth' from one group to the other. The following chart (of perek 16) illustrates this 'textual zig-zag':

| PASUK | GROUP | TOPIC |
|-------|-------|---|
| 1- 4 | both | Introduction |
| 5-11 | ONE | Complaint of those who want 'kehuna' |
| 12-15 | TWO | Summons of Datan & Aviram & their refusal |
| 16-19 | ONE | The test of the "ktoret" |
| 20-22 | both? | Moshe's tfila that God punish only the guilty |
| 23-34 | TWO | earth swallows Datan & Aviram & followers |
| 25 | ONE | fire consumes the 250 men |

Why does the Torah employ this unusual style? How does it help us better understand Korach's involvement with each group?

KORACH - WHERE ARE YOU?

First, we must ascertain to which group Korach belongs. Clearly, he leads Group One, which demands the "kehuna" (see 16:6-8,16-19). Yet, at the same time, he is so involved with Group Two that his name appears first on the banner in front of their party headquarters - "Mishkan KORACH Datan v'Aviram"!

Furthermore, although Korach himself is never mentioned in the punishment of Group Two (scan 16:23-34 carefully to verify this), many of his followers, described by Chumash as "ha'adam asher l'Korach", are swallowed up by the ground (see 16:32) together with Danan & Aviram.

In fact, it remains unclear precisely how Korach himself dies. Was he swallowed by the ground or consumed by the fire?

The 'last time he was spotted' was in 16:19 together with the 250 men (Group One) at the Ohel Moed. But from 16:25 it seems that only the 250 men were consumed, but NOT Korach himself! On the other hand, 16:32 informs us that Danan & Aviram and ALL of Korach's men were swallowed up - but Korach himself seems to be 'missing'! Did he escape at the last minute from both?

Apparently not, for later in Sefer Bamidbar (see 26:9-10) we are told quite explicitly that Korach was indeed swallowed. But to complicate matters even further, Devarim 11:6 implies that only Danan & Aviram were swallowed up.

[Based on the complexity of these psukim, the Gemara in Sanhedrin 110a suggests that he received both punishments! First he was burnt by the fire at the Ohel Moed, and then his body rolled to the area of Danan v'Aviram and swallowed up by the ground.] (See also Ibn Ezra on 16:35.)

So why does the Torah describe these events in such an evasive manner? What can this manner of presentation teach us about the nature of Korach's involvement? Finally, why does Chumash attempt to give us the impression that Korach may be in two places at the same time?

One could suggest that this 'zig-zag' style reflects the nature of the coalition that exists between these two dissident groups, for they share only one common denominator- KORACH.

But what was Korach's motivation in all of this?

To answer this question, let's return to the opening pasuk of this Parsha (see introduction). By not telling us what Korach 'took', the Torah wants the reader to ask this very question - what did Korach take?

[If you didn't ask yourself this question when you begin reading, you most probably would have noticed the **existence** of these two groups as you continue.]

COALITION POLITICS

Korach 'took' two ostensibly 'legitimate' protest groups and joined them together to form his own political power base. [See Ramban 16:1.] Whereas each group alone may have not dared to openly challenge Moshe and Aharon, Korach encourages them to take action. Danan and Aviram, 'inspired' by Korach, establish their own 'headquarters' - "Mishkan Korach, Danan, & Aviram" - in defiance of Moshe's leadership. Likewise, the 250 men, including members of shevet Levi, are roused to openly challenge the restriction of the KEHUNA to Aharon.

Rather than encouraging open dialogue, Korach incites these two factions to take forceful action. Korach probably saw himself as the most suitable candidate to become the next national leader. To that end, he involves himself with each dissenting group. [Anyone familiar with political science (i.e. current events and/or world history) can easily relate to this phenomenon.]

Korach is simply what we would call a 'polished politician'. His true intention is to usurp political power. Towards that goal, he takes advantage of private interest groups.

A LESSON FOR ALL GENERATIONS

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:17) considers the rebellion of Korach as the paradigm of a dispute that was "sh'lo l'shem sha'mayim" (an argument not for the sake of Heaven).

Why is specifically Korach chosen for this paradigm? After all, the arguments presented by Korach ("for the entire nation is holy", etc.) seem to imply exactly the opposite - that it was actually an argument "l'shem shamayim" (for the sake of Heaven).

Pirkei Avot may be teaching us the very same message that the Torah may allude to through its complex presentation of these

events. Precisely because Korach and his followers claim to be fighting "l'shem shamayim," Chazal must inform us of Korach's true intentions. Korach may claim to be fighting a battle "l'shem shamayim," but his claim is far from the truth. His primary interest is to promote himself, to build a power base from which he himself can emerge as the new leader.

This doesn't mean that any form of dissent is evil. In fact, Korach's own great great grandson - Shmuel ha'Navi (see Divrei Ha'yamim I.6:3-13) - also acted 'against the establishment' as he initiated both religious reform [against the corruption of the "kehuna" by the sons of Eli] as well as political reform [in the appointment of David as King instead of Shaul]; however, his intentions and motivations were pure and sincere.

Parshat Korach thus teaches us that whenever a dispute arises over community leadership or religious reform, before reaching conclusions we must carefully examine not only the claims, but also the true motivations behind the individuals who promote them. On a personal level, as well, every individual must constantly examine the true motivations behind all his spiritual endeavors.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In 16:1-2, everyone is introduced: Korach, Danan, Aviram, and the 250 men. Read 16:2 carefully! Who are the leaders and famous people - just Korach, Danan, and Aviram, or also the 250 men? How does this question affect your understanding of the magnitude of the revolt against Moshe and Aharon?

B. Note the appellation with which Moshe opens his tfila: "kel elohei ha'RUCHOT l'chol BASAR" (16:22). Based on the context of this tfila, relate this appellation to the story of the "mitavim" and their punishment, as described in Bamidbar 11:1-35. How does the "basar" sent by the "ruach" in chapter 11 enable God to punish ONLY those who are truly guilty in the sin of the "mitavim"? [Note 11:33-34.]

Note that the only other use of this appellation is in Bamidbar 27:16, when Moshe asks God to appoint a leader to replace him. Relate that parsha and its context to Bamidbar 11:14-17!

C. Although Korach challenges the 'kehuna' and the political leadership for the wrong reasons, many generations later his great-grandson, Shmuel Ha'Navi, repeats this very same reform for the correct reasons. He challenges the corrupt 'kehuna' of Eli's sons, Chofni & Pinchas, and then later reforms the political leadership of the country by becoming a shofet and later establishing the nation's first monarchy.

1. Note the similarities between Parshat Korach and this week's Haftara, especially Shmuel 12:3. See also 3:19-20, 7:3-17.
2. What similarities exist between Shmuel and Moshe & Aharon?
3. In what manner does Shmuel, who is a Levi, act like a Kohen? (Relate to Shmuel 3:1-3, 13:8-12)

D. In earlier shiurim (Yom Kippur and Parshat Tzaveh), we discussed the special nature of the ktoret and its purpose as a protection from the consequences of "hitgalut shchinah". Recall also the events which led to the death of Nadav & Avihu.

1. Why do you think Moshe suggests that the 250 men offer ktoret as proof that they are chosen? Is this his idea or God's? (16:5-7) See Ramban (as usual).

2. Do you think Moshe is aware of the potential outcome- the consumption of all 250 men by fire, or was he merely trying to convince them to withdraw from Korach's revolt?

Relate your answer to your answer to question #1.

3. Why do you think the nation immediately accuses Moshe of causing their death (see 17:6-15)? Why is 'davka' the ktoret used to save the people from their punishment?
4. Why do you think 'davka' this type of punishment is necessary?

E. Recall that in Shmot 2:14, when Moshe admonishes two quarrelling Jews in Egypt, they answer: "mi samcha sar v'shofet

...". Chazal identify these two men as Datan & Aviram. Use the above shiur to support this Midrash.

F. Towards the end of the Parsha, the "mateh shel Aharon" is chosen over the 'matot' of all other tribal leaders.

1. Where is that 'mateh' to be kept afterwards?

For what purpose? (see 17:24-25)

2. Is this 'mateh' ever used later on for that purpose?

3. Before reading this question, which 'mateh' did you think Moshe used to hit the rock at "mei m'riva"?

Now look carefully at 20:8-11.

4. How does this explain Moshe's statement of "shimu na ha'morim"? [cute?]

Parshat Korach

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

ARASHAT KORAH:

Parashat Korach is all about rebellion. But this fact is just about the only thing we can say for sure.

WHAT ARE THEY AFTER?

First of all, what do the rebels want?

Possibilities:

- 1) Priesthood?
- 2) Political leadership?
- 3) Something else?

Let us consider the evidence for each possibility:

1) Priesthood: that the rebels want the priesthood or are at least challenging it seems confirmed by the test Moshe devises: all of the challengers are to appear the next day with fire-pans and incense and offer the incense to Hashem; offering incense, of course, is a priestly function.

Also, Moshe's response to Korah and his crew indicates that he understands their complaint as focused on the priesthood: Moshe asserts that the fire pan test will show "Who is holy"; in addition, he accuses Korah and the other Leviyim of being unsatisfied with their already raised status, and seeking also the priesthood.

2) Political leadership: As we move further into the parasha, it seems that there is another dimension to the complaints of this rebellious confederation. They are protesting not only the issue of the priesthood, but also Moshe's status as political leader. This is implicit in the point of Datan and Aviram, who, after insulting Moshe and refusing to appear before him, accuse him also of seizing the leadership in order to promote himself: "Will you also lord yourself over us?" Moshe's angry, defensive response also indicates that he understands that his leadership has been challenged: "Not one donkey have I taken from them! I have not done evil to even one of them!" A glance at this week's haftara shows that Shmuel produces a similar formula in insisting on his innocence of corruption as leader of the people.

WHOM ARE THEY AFTER?

Approaching the same question from a different perspective, we could look not at what is being challenged, but whom; the possibilities are, of course, Moshe, as political leader, Aharon, as High Priest, and, naturally, Hashem, the ultimate authority behind Moshe and Aharon and the source of their appointment to their positions. The parasha begins, "They stood before Moshe" (16:2); it continues, "They gathered upon Moshe and Aharon," indicating already that Moshe and Aharon seem to be the targets; Moshe specifically defends Aharon on in 16:11, asking why the rebels challenge Aharon, and in the process directing their attention to the real target of their complaints -- Hashem. Once we move to the scene with Datan and Aviram, however, it is clear that Moshe is the target, accused of having wronged the nation by tearing them away from idyllic Egypt, flowing with milk and honey, to die in the barren desert, and on top of it all, of lording it over everyone else. Finally, Moshe redirects our attention to the ultimate target of these attacks in 16:30, where he asserts that "These men have annoyed Hashem."

WHO ARE "THEY," ANYWAY?

As we search further for clarification of these events, we also wonder about the identity of the rebels: who are these challengers?

To judge from the opening of the parasha, there is a conspiracy of rebels -- Korah, Datan, Aviram, Oan and 250 leaders of the people. They are all together, and they have one complaint. But a closer look shows that even at this early stage, the Torah splits up this group into factions by paying special attention to their lineage. Korah's ancestry is traced back 4 generations, as is that of his cohorts, an unusual step which distinguishes these individuals not only in their own right, but also from one another; they are not an undifferentiated pack of rabble-rousers, they are people we can place within the nation, and they come from quite different places within the nation. Korah is from Levi, while the others are from Re'uvein. In addition, there are 250 of the nation's leaders, whose lineage remains unspecified.

As we move through the rest of the parasha, we get confusing signals about whether there is really one group or two (or even 3, as some commentators suggest). At first, the initial complaint sounds like one issue -- the priesthood. This group has come to challenge Aharon as high priest and the privilege of his sons in their designation as priests. But Moshe's response to the complaint hints that the reality is more complex, as he specifically addresses "Korah and his entire group," emphasizing the Levi side of the rebels' group but implying that there is another group among the rebels -- the Re'uvein side. Furthermore, in the end of Moshe's first short speech to

the rebels, he says, "You have much already, sons of Levi," making it sound as if he is speaking only to one part of the rebel group. At this point, however, we have no information about what the Re'uvein side of the rebellion might want. Our impression that this first complaint is only half the story is further reinforced by Moshe's second little speech, in which he addresses "the sons of Levi" and accuses them of greed in seeking also the priesthood.

We become thoroughly convinced that there are two separate rebel sub-groups when we read of the confrontation between Moshe and Datan and Aviram. The very fact that Moshe must summon them to appear before him shows that they are not already there -- they apparently are not present when the Levi side of the group presents Moshe and Aharon with their claim.

To summarize: so far, it seems like there are two separate groups with two separate claims:

A) Korah and his crew challenge Aharon's status as high priest, and Moshe responds to them with the challenge of the fire-pans and with a scolding about their overreaching themselves. On some level (as several commentators point out), the claim that the Korah crew is making is a reasonable one. Korah and his friends are from Levi, like Aharon and his sons, and, in fact, from the very same family within Levi, so they find it particularly unfair that some Leviyyim have made it all the way to priesthood, while others remain "only" Leviyyim. Why do some people have the privilege of approaching Hashem and serving Him, while others must watch from afar? It must be particularly galling to Korah to hear Hashem say things like, "I have given the Leviyyim to Aharon and his sons," statements which throw in Korah's face what he might have become but didn't.

B) On the other side of the confederacy, Datan and Aviram (Oan has apparently disappeared, as Hazal note) challenge Moshe's status as political leader. On some level, this, too, makes sense: they are descended from Re'uvein, as the parasha notes at the outset, and Re'uvein had every right to assume that he would take up political leadership. That this has not materialized must leave some of the Re'uveinites feeling cheated.

NOT SO FAST:

But then comes an event which questions whether this rebellion splits into two issues as neatly as we have set out. Moshe, infuriated by Datan and Aviram, asks Hashem not to accept their "offering." This makes it sound like they are actually part of the Korah/Levi group, and will be participating in the fire-pan challenge, while according to the picture we have been developing, it would make no sense for anyone but Korah and company (who are challenging the priesthood) to take the fire pan test. What do Datan and Aviram, who are attacking Moshe's leadership, have to do with the incense offering which will take place the next day?

And as long as we're talking about Moshe's angry, defensive request of Hashem not to accept their offering, let's ask ourselves: why does Moshe even *consider* that Hashem might accept their offering? He himself has just said that the rebels are really ganging up against Hashem, not against himself and Aharon, so what chance is there that Hashem will respond favorably to their offering?

Taking a closer look at Moshe's encounter with Datan and Aviram, it appears that Moshe's reaction to them is much stronger than his reaction to Korah and company. In response to Korah, Moshe is composed, confident, forthrightly rebuking them for their self-promoting greed. But Moshe's response to Datan and Aviram is angry, personal, defensive, highly emotional, even vulnerable, as he defends himself against their charge that he has used his leadership to promote himself. Moshe insists that he has not benefited personally at all from being leader, that he has not enriched himself at the people's expense, that he has not extorted anything from them. And, on a certain level, he also puts the rebels on the same level as himself, as he entertains the possibility that Hashem may respond favorably to their incense offering and therefore passionately prays that Hashem not accept their offering. Why is Moshe so upset?

On the surface, the answer seems clear: Datan and Aviram are unbelievably obnoxious and aggressive. Recalling Egypt as the land "flowing with milk and honey," they blame Moshe for the fact that they will never enter the Land of Israel (although it is their own fault, in the wake of the debacle of the spies) and accuse him of being in it for self-aggrandizement.

DIGGING DEEPER:

But there is more to it than this. We don't get a full picture unless we look at the events not just in this parasha, but in the entire context of the sefer. This will lead us to some new questions, and to some new answers for the questions we have already asked:

First, why does this rebellion take place now? Why not earlier? If the Leviyyim are upset about the selection of the Kohanim, then their complaint should have come in Exodus or in Leviticus, when the Kohanim were first appointed. And if the people of Re'uvein are upset about Moshe's leadership, they should have made their complaint long ago. Why now?

Our parasha illustrates a classic tendency: people are willing to tolerate a lot when they have hope -- when they have something to lose. But once they lose hope and feel threatened, they are no longer willing to make sacrifices for higher goals, to tolerate what they did before. As long as the people were headed to the fabled Land, they accepted a state of affairs they didn't like: the Leviyyim accepted their inferiority to the Kohanim, the people of Re'uvein accepted Moshe's authority. But now the people are going nowhere. They have lost hope; they have nothing to lose, no reason to tolerate an imperfect situation, since the consequences of rebellion can

hardly be worse than their present situation. All of their old dissatisfactions come to the surface, just as old wounds and hurts, long forgotten and half-forgiven, are sometimes dredged up by spouses when they find something new over which to conflict. This is why our parasha comes on the heels of Parashat Shelah, where the people lose their privilege to enter the Land.

Second, what has been going on in Moshe's head recently -- how has his own evaluation of his leadership record and leadership ability been impacted by the events of the recent past?

Sefer BeMidbar has brought many challenges to Moshe and his status as leader. Some of these challenges have come from the people, some from Moshe's own family, and some from himself:

When the spies return and deliver their evil report about the Land, the people despair of ever conquering the Land. In their disappointment and disillusionment, the people raise a familiar refrain: "Let us return to Egypt!" Not only do the people want to return to Egypt, they also want a new leader to take them there: "Let us appoint a leader and let us return to Egypt!" Besides whatever feelings Moshe may have about the people's rejection of the Land and consequent rejection of Hashem's promises to aid them in conquering the Land, there is also a personal element of rejection which must affect Moshe deeply: the people have rejected his leadership (and not for the first time, either).

But the most painful criticism is that which comes from those we love or those who love us, those from whom we expect support (again, marriage provides a useful illustration). In this light, Miryam's criticism of Moshe's taking a foreign wife is not simply slander, it is slander by his big sister! Remember that this is the same big sister who stood at the side of the Nile River, anxiously watching to see what would happen to her baby brother, who was floating precariously in a homemade lifeboat. This is the same sister who suggested to the daughter of Paro that the infant be brought to his own mother to nurse. This very woman is the woman who criticizes Moshe. She accuses him of taking on airs: a bride from his own nation apparently is not good enough for him; he must look outside to find someone appropriate to his station.

The Torah tells us nothing about Moshe's reaction when he hears Miryam's words; instead, the Torah interjects the seemingly irrelevant fact that Moshe is the most humble man on earth. Normally, we understand this interjection about Moshe's humility in context: we are being told by the Torah that Miryam is wrong, that Moshe has other reasons for choosing a foreign bride, that his behavior is not due to pride or haughtiness. Or, we are being told why Moshe himself does not respond to the criticism -- he is so humble that he does not mind the carping; it does not bruise his ego since he "has" no ego. But there is another possibility, which we will approach in a moment.

Hashem, listening to Miriam's leshon ha-ra, immediately orders Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam to the Ohel Mo'ed, where He appears in a pillar of cloud and furiously rebukes Miryam and Aharon for what they have said about Moshe. Many commentators struggle to explain why Moshe must be present to witness the dressing-down that Miryam and Aharon receive. Why must Moshe witness as Hashem blasts of his sister and strikes her with a plague?

The answer to both of our questions -- why the Torah informs us here about Moshe's extreme humility, and why Moshe must witness Miryam's come-uppance, may be one and the same: what the Torah is telling us when it follows Miryam's criticism of Moshe with the statement that Moshe is the most humble person on earth is that Moshe is extremely vulnerable! Miryam's criticism does not slide right off of Moshe's back. He takes it to heart, and he wonders whether she is not wrong. Moshe doubts himself, just as Miryam doubts him. Her criticism penetrates his heart, his humility guaranteeing that even whispered criticism resounds and echoes in his ears as if it had been shouted. He thinks nothing of himself, so it is natural for him to agree with others who malign him and wonder if he is indeed unworthy of leadership, worthy of the authority he wields.

If we look back to the roots of Moshe's leadership, we find powerful confirmation of Moshe's self-doubt. Remember that when Hashem first appears to Moshe in the desert and commands him to take his people out of slavery, Moshe refuses -- 4 times! -- claiming that he is not qualified: "I am not a man of words"; "I am of uncircumcised lips"; "Send anyone you want (but not me)!" Finally, Hashem becomes angry with Moshe's humble refusal to take the reins of leadership, and brooks no further refusal. He simply commands Moshe to obey, and Moshe does. But Moshe's self-doubt does not disappear, it merely hides to dog him for the rest of his life. Moshe never achieves granite-solid belief in himself as a leader; his extreme humility guarantees that he will perform faithfully as the receiver of the Torah, adding nothing of his own to adulterate God's perfect message, but it also corrodes his confidence and makes him susceptible to catastrophic self-doubt.

Miryam's crime is not so much that she has spoken evil about another person, although this is certainly part of the issue; and it is not so much that she has made a colossal theological error in equating herself to Moshe, although this is also part of the issue; it is that she has deeply damaged Moshe himself, this "humble man," who looks to his sister for support and instead hears an implicit accusation of hubris. Moshe is not only dismayed to hear his sister's opinion of him, but, more deeply, he is not sure that she is wrong. Of course, she is indeed wrong, as Moshe is truly the most humble of all people, and did not choose his foreign bride to put on airs, but this very humility is what makes Moshe doubt himself and wonder if he is right after all. The reason Miryam is taken to task is not merely because of slander or heresy, but because she certainly must know of her younger brother's vulnerability, and yet she does not hesitate to toss this accusation.

Miryam's error involves not merely the interpersonal crime of damaging Moshe's self-confidence, but the entire context of the event: Moshe's confidence is deeply linked to his leadership ability. In previous weeks, we talked about Moshe's believing in the people and how he slowly loses faith in the people as Sefer BeMidbar continues. This week, we see Moshe's leadership crumbling from the inside, as he loses faith in himself. This is why Moshe must be present to hear Miryam chastised so harshly by Hashem. The true audience at which Hashem is aiming his words is not Miryam, but Moshe!

"If God gives you a prophecy -- I make Myself known [to you] in a vision. I speak in a dream! Not so with My servant, Moshe! He is the most trusted of all My house! I speak to him mouth to mouth, without symbols, and he sees an image of God. How could you not fear to speak evil of My servant, of Moshe!"

Miryam is indeed being rebuked, scolded for her mistake -- her presumptuous mistake. And she is also being scolded for slander. But perhaps the more important audience here is Moshe himself, for these words are aimed at restoring his belief in himself. Miryam's sharp criticism cut him deeply and left him questioning his own legitimacy. Hashem must undo the damage she has done, by building Moshe back up:

"My Moshe! My Moshe! How could you! How dare you!"

Hashem is truly addressing Moshe himself:

"Moshe, you are the only one, the only one to whom I speak face to face, without visions or riddles or symbols, without obstructions. Moshe, you are My most trusted, My right hand, the only one. Your brother and sister are prophets, but second-rate; you, you are My chosen! My servant, My servant Moshe! How dare your sister speak this way about you!"

But the damage is done. Miryam has done much more than slander her brother. She has provided the impetus which will spin Moshe into a maelstrom of self-doubt, a whirlpool of confusion which will lead him to doubt Hashem, doubt himself, and eventually disobey Hashem's instructions in his frustration with the people and in his feeling of impotence.

ENTER KORAH:

Into this environment step Korah and his followers, to challenge Moshe once again. Do not imagine that Moshe fends off each of these attacks and remains impervious. Each challenge leaves him weaker, more vulnerable, more prone to self-doubt.

When the parasha begins, Moshe does not suspect that the rebels are challenging him. He assumes that they are challenging only Aharon. This is why he accuses them only of wanting the priesthood and rebukes them only for challenging Aharon. He has no doubts about the legitimacy of Aharon's leadership or about Hashem's support of Aharon, so he forcefully defends Aharon and the Kehuna.

But then, to his shock, Moshe discovers that the rebellion truly targets him as much as it targets his brother! Before, Moshe responded with force and power, proposing a test by fire to prove God's chosen; now, he reacts defensively and weakly. Datan and Aviram accuse him of being in it for himself, lording it over them, taking them from a land flowing with milk and honey to die in the desert. As much as Moshe knows what Egypt was, as much as he knows that he is not in it for himself, as much as he knows that their death in the desert will be by their own hand and not by his, he nevertheless feels the guilt of having failed to bring his people to the Promised Land. If only he had been stronger, maybe they would have made it. If only he had been wiser. More patient, more generous. If only he had been a better teacher, a better communicator, a more charismatic leader, more inspiring. Moshe knows the people are responsible for their fate, but he blames himself for not lifting them to what they could have become. Moshe becomes angry and defensive -- "I have not taken a single one of their donkeys! I have not done evil to even one of them!" But he is also gripped once again by doubt: maybe they are right; maybe it is my fault. Maybe I never was a capable leader after all.

When Moshe first offers the fire-pan test to Korah and his crew, he is confident that the test will show that Aharon was Hashem's chosen. But now he is not so sure; his self-confidence has evaporated, and he turns to Hashem and insists that Hashem not accept the offering of the rebels. Of course, Hashem never for a moment even considered accepting their offering and rejecting Moshe, but after being targeted by Datan and Aviram, Moshe has begun to believe that this is a possibility. Now he sees the "It is too much for you" of Korah and his cohorts as directed not only against Aharon, but against himself as well, and he considers the possibility that they may be right. Only in this light is it possible to understand why Moshe feels the need to justify himself: "I have not taken one donkey from them!"

May we have the strength to strengthen our leaders and show them our faith in them.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Korach: K'Toret and 'Anan: A Study in Leadership and Diversity

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. INTRODUCTION

Our Parashah is made up of two parts: a narrative (Chapters 16-17) and a series of laws (Chapter 18). The narrative describes a rebellion involving Korach, Datan and Aviram and 250 leaders from among the various tribes (see Ramban at 16:5). [Rabbi Menachem Leibtag has astutely pointed out that our story weaves together two independent insurrections - his shiur can be found at <http://www.virtual.co.il/torah/tanach>] It also includes the death of the rebel leaders and of the Divine approval of the selection of Levi as the "chosen tribe". The laws in Chapter 18 include various gifts given to the Kohanim and Levi'im - known as "Mat'not Kehunah uL'viyah". The connection between narrative and law in this Parashah is quite obvious - once the selection of Aharon (and future Kohanim) and the Levi'im has been reaffirmed, it is the most appropriate location to introduce/review the various "taxes" accorded to them.

The narrative itself has many difficulties:

* When did this rebellion (or these rebellions) take place?

* Against whom was it directed (God, Mosheh, Aharon, the Levi'im)?

* What was the real motivation of Korach - and was it the same as his comrades? The answers to these three questions may be interrelated; since, if Korach was truly motivated by a spirit of populist sanctity, it would be hard to date the rebellion; however, if it is (as Ramban suggests) against the "switching" of the sanctity of the B'chorot (first-born) for the Levi'im, then it would fit right into Parashat Bamidbar, where the Levi'im are reckoned separately - or perhaps in Parashat B'ha'alot'kha, where the sanctification ceremony of the Levi'im is detailed.

Besides these general questions relating to the rebellion, the beginning of the story - specifically, Mosheh's reaction to Korach's demands - raises several questions of a more local nature:

Now Korach son of Yitz'har son of K'hat son of Levi, along with Datan and Aviram sons of Eliav, and On son of Pelet - descendants of Re'uven - took two hundred fifty Israelite men, leaders of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men, and they confronted Mosheh. They assembled against Mosheh and against Aharon, and said to them, "Rav Lakhem" (You have gone too far!) All the congregation are holy, everyone of them, and YHVH is among them. So why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of YHVH?" When Mosheh heard it, he fell on his face. Then he said to Korach and all his company, "In the morning YHVH will make known who is His, and who is holy, and who will be allowed to approach Him; the one whom He will choose He will allow to approach Him. Do this: take censers, Korach and all your company, and tomorrow put fire in them, and lay K'toret* (incense) on them before YHVH; and the man whom YHVH chooses shall be the holy one. *Rav Lakhem B'nei Levi" (You Levi'im have gone too far!?) Then Mosheh said to Korach, "Hear now, you Levi'im! Is it too little for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to allow you to approach Him in order to perform the duties of YHVH's tabernacle, and to stand before the congregation and serve them? He has allowed you to approach Him, and all your brother Levi'im with you; yet you seek the priesthood as well! Therefore you and all your company have gathered together against YHVH. What is Aharon that you rail against him?" (Bamidbar 16:1-11)

And Mosheh said to Korach, "As for you and all your company, be present tomorrow before YHVH, you and they and Aharon; and let each one of you take his censer, and put K'toret on it, and each one of you present his censer before YHVH, two hundred fifty censers; you also, and Aharon, each his censer." So each man took his censer, and they put fire in the censers and laid K'toret on them, and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Mosheh and Aharon. Then Korach assembled the whole congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of YHVH appeared to the whole congregation. (ibid vv. 16-19)

II. ANALYZING MOSHEH'S REACTION

Mosheh's reaction to Korach is puzzling on several accounts:

* Why did Mosheh repeat his instructions for the "selection test" of the K'toret (vv. 6-7 and v. 17)?

* In the first instance (v. 6), Mosheh tells Korach and his group to "take censers" - indicating that they did not already have a designated censer for each leader; in the second instance (v. 17), he says: "and let each one of you take his censer", implying that each leader already had a "personal" censer.

* Why did Mosheh choose this particular "test"? After the Nadav and Avihu tragedy (Vayyikra 10:1-2), wasn't the "danger" inherent in an improperly offered K'toret made obvious to all? Wasn't Mosheh effectively threatening Korach and his group with Divine death by inducing them to offer this improper K'toret? And from Korach's perspective - wasn't he committing suicide by going along with Mosheh's plan? Surely he and his entire group knew what had happened to Aharon's sons on the day of Mishkan-dedication!

* A seemingly ancillary question: When Korach and his followers confront Mosheh in front of the Mishkan, the Torah tells us that "the Glory of YHVH appeared before the entire congregation" (16:19); when the people complain to Mosheh and Aharon that they have "killed the nation of YHVH" (17:6), they all turn to the Mishkan, which is "covered by the Cloud, and the Glory of YHVH appeared". Why is the Cloud mentioned only the second time - after the death of the rebel leaders - but not during their confrontation with Mosheh?

* Another ancillary question (or so it seems): Mosheh had prayed on behalf of the people several times (in response to the sin of the golden calf, the sin relating to the spies); but only here, when God threatens to destroy the people in response to the Korach rebellion, does Mosheh address God as *E-lohei haRuchot I'Khol Basar* - "the God of the spirits of all flesh" - a phrase he used only one other time. When Mosheh asked that God appoint his successor (Bamidbar 27:16), he addressed Him as *E-lohei haRuchot I'Khol Basar*. What is the meaning of this Divine address and why is it used exclusively in these two places by Mosheh?

III. THE K'TORET AND THE 'ANAN

In the description of the Avodat Toharat haMikdash (the service of purification of the Sanctuary), which we associate with Yom

haKippurim, the Torah tells us that:

[Aharon] shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before YHVH, and two handfuls of crushed sweet K'toret, and he shall bring it inside the curtain and put the K'toret on the fire before YHVH, that the cloud of the K'toret may cover the mercy seat that is upon the covenant, or he will die. (Vayyikra 16:13)

Generating the "cloud of the K'toret" (*Anan haK'toret*) is the apparent purpose of burning the K'toret itself - in other words, Aharon was told to burn the K'toret in such a manner as the cloud of smoke would cover the entire Kapporet. The Gemara infers from the last two words in this verse that if he does not successfully "encloud" the Holy of Holies with the smoke of the K'toret, that he is liable for death (BT Yoma 53a; see MT Avodat Yom haKippurim 5:25). Indeed, the opening phrase of the description of the Avodat Yom haKippurim in the Torah introduces the K'toret:

YHVH said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time into the sanctuary inside the curtain before the mercy seat that is upon the ark, or he will die; for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. (Vayyikra 16:2)

This "cloud" is understood by our Rabbis to refer to the cloud of the K'toret (see BT Yoma ibid., MT Avodat Yom haKippurim 1:7).

As Ramban points out (introduction to Parashat Terumah), the many facets of the Mishkan were established in order to maintain a permanent connection and association with the stand at Sinai - to wit, to take Sinai on the road to Eretz Yisra'el. Since the K'toret, in its most central use, was intended to create a cloud of smoke that would fill the Holy of Holies, it is easy to understand the parallel with Har Sinai. Just as Sinai was covered with an *Av he'Anan* (thick cloud) during the Revelation (Sh'mot 19:16; 24,15-18), similarly, the Mishkan was to be covered with the 'Anan haK'toret when God's Presence was to be made most manifest.

Regarding the cloud which covered Sinai, God told Mosheh:

I am going to come to you in an *Av ha'Anan*, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after. (Sh'mot 19:9). In other words, Mosheh's continued "successful" existence inside of this *Av ha'Anan* would establish and strengthen his leadership and the people's faith that he was, indeed, God's prophet. (See Ramban ad loc.)

We can now "connect the dots" and understand the relevance of using the K'toret - the replica of the Sinai-cloud - to demonstrate the propriety of Mosheh's selection, as well as that of Aharon and the Levi'im.

Our answer, however, only takes us halfway - why did Mosheh choose this "dangerous" demonstration and why did Korach and his followers take him up on it?

In addition, our earlier questions (of a more local nature) remain unanswered. In order to understand them, we have to examine why the 'Anan - and its K'toret substitute - would represent and demonstrate Divine selection.

IV. REVELATION: THE COEXISTENCE OF MULTIPLE TRUTHS

In the Pesikta Rabbati (21:4), we read:

R. Yanai said: The Torah which God gave to Mosheh included forty-nine arguments in favor of purity and forty-nine arguments in favor of impurity [on any given question]...[Mosheh] asked: "How should we rule?" - to which God answered: "If those who argue in favor of impurity are the majority, it is impure; if those who argue in favor of purity are the majority, it is pure."

The Rabbis did not view the resolution of Halakhic disputes as determinations of "right" vs. "wrong"; rather, they understood that the Torah included both possibilities and that arguments could be marshalled to support either side. In the final analysis, the earthly court would decide which arguments held the greatest sway. [The reader is directed to Dr. Eliezer Berkovitz's "Not In Heaven" and to Dr. Moshe Koppel's "Meta-Halakha" for in-depth analyses of this area of Halakhic development]. In other words, when Mosheh experienced the Divine Revelation in the 'Anan, he was experiencing a co-existence of theoretically intolerant opposites: Responses of "Valid" and "Invalid" to the same Halakhic questions. This is the Divine Reality that no other prophet could face head-on (see Bamidbar 12).

Revelation, which included mutually contradictory and divergent versions of the Truth, was accompanied by this 'Anan - the thick cloud. This cloud was replicated in the Mishkan via the K'toret.

This K'toret, although offered up daily, finds its most critical application on Yom haKippurim, as part of the purification of the Mishkan. Purification, as Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l points out throughout "Al haTeshuvah", is an inherent contradiction which only the Divine can sustain - taking that which is human, frail and fallible and cleansing it as if the stain of sin and the blemish of impurity had never polluted that which is holy. The K'toret, just like the original 'Anan, allowed for that Divine mystery of coexistent contradiction. The K'toret even included, by definition, a pungent element which, like all other 10 spices, was indispensable to its validity:

R. Hana b. Bizna said in the name of R. Shim'on Hasida: Any fast which does not include *Posh'ei Yisra'el* (the sinners among Israel) is not considered a fast; the galbanum (*Helb'nah*) which is pungent was included among the spices for the K'toret" (K'reitot 6b) This is where Korach erred - and why the K'toret was the perfect demonstration of Korach's wrong-headed philosophy.

V. THE STRIVING FOR HOLINESS

Much has been said about the juxtaposition of "Parshat Tzitzit" (Bamidbar 15:37-41) and the Korach narrative. The Midrash Tanhuma which notes that Korach and his followers dressed up in all-T'chelet garments and challenged Mosheh's ruling that even such garments need a blue thread to fulfill the obligation, is well-known.

There is, however, another explanation for the sequencing of Tzitzit -> Korach. The purpose of Tzitzit is: "In order that you shall remember to fulfill all of My Mitzvot, that you should be holy to your God". Compare this formula with Korach's claim: "All the congregation are holy". Whereas Korach maintained that everyone is of equal status and their holiness is cut from one cloth, the Torah itself (in the previous section) notes that each person must do his own remembering and striving for sanctity. The holiness which we achieved at Sinai was not a perpetual gift - it was a model of what we must work to experience every day.

Korach's claim of populist sanctity and of an egalitarian Kedushah runs counter to the message of Tzitzit - and to the multiple realities

implied by the 'Anan and by the K'toret. While the 'Anan allowed for different versions of Truth, the K'toret allowed for purification of that which was blemished - for an essential striving for purity which had not been realized.

VI. SUMMARY

We can now go back to our earlier questions and answer:

Originally, Mosheh directed Korach and his followers to select a spokesman/leader. This would have to be someone who could sense the different motivations, attributes, needs and desires of the members of the group, as befits any successful leader. To demonstrate who could be the "Rav Lakhem B'nei Levi" (note that this is an alternative translation to that suggested at the beginning of the shiur), they would see if the coals ("fire") in any of their flash-pans would ignite the K'toret inside. This test would, of course, only include Korach and his 250 followers - and exclude Mosheh and Aharon.

This then explains 16:8: Then Mosheh said to Korach, "Hear now, you Levi'im!". Mosheh addressed Korach as if he and his followers had gone through the K'toret test and Korach had been found to be the leader of that group. This is a brilliant tactic on Mosheh's part - in that he addressed his disputant on his own terms; this is often an effective way of redefining the terms of the dispute.

After this test was successfully completed and a leader of the Korachites was Divinely selected (a notion that flies in the face of Korach's populist ideology - which means that Korach would not follow through on it), that group would "debate" against Mosheh and Aharon on the matter of Levite leadership and the Kehunah caste. That was to be the next day, when all 250 followers, Korach AND Aharon are to assemble for another "K'toret test". This is the second set of instructions (v. 17) and explains the differences in the wording between the two that were pointed out earlier.

This also explains why the 250 followers were not consumed by Divine fire at the first test - because they never went through with it! It was only in the presence of Aharon and Mosheh that they could no longer back down and had to go through with it - and that's when the Divine fire consumed them.

This also explains why the Cloud only appeared at the Mishkan after Korach and his followers had been consumed by the fire of God; the Cloud, as the ur-K'toret, represents the ability to abide different types of people, with their varying levels of sanctity and with their individual struggles with impurity. This orientation was the opposite of that held by Korach, such that the 'Anan could not appear until their demise.

We now understand the wording of Mosheh's address in response to the Divine threat to destroy the congregation.

Commenting on Mosheh's request of God to appoint a successor, the Midrash Tanchuma states:

Teach us, master, what B'rakhah should be said if upon seeing different kinds of people?...if you see a great mass of people, you say 'Barukh...Hakham haRazim' (Blessed...Who is Wise regarding Secrets); just like their faces are not alike, similarly, their wills are not alike, rather each person has his own will...Know that it is so; when Mosheh requested of God at the time of his death, saying 'Master of the Universe, each person's will is obvious and known before You - as you know that not of your children are alike. When I leave them, may it please You that if you choose to select a leader for them, choose one who can tolerate each of them according to his own will.' How do we know this? From what we read in the matter: 'Let YHVH, the God of the spirits of all flesh...' (Midrash Tanchuma, Pinchas Ch. 10)

In other words, Mosheh phrased his request for a new leader in that fashion because it indicates the ability of a leader to understand the different wills, desires, orientations and attributes of each of his flock - and the knowledge of how to lead them as a group nonetheless. This is a Divine attribute, exemplified not only by God's intimate knowledge of each of us, different though we are, but also in Revelation of a multi-faceted Torah, as well as the purification of the Mishkan, as explained above.

This explains why this particular address was used by Mosheh when asking God to spare the people who were led after Korach - that unlike Korach's approach, equating each person in the his claim that "all the congregation is holy", Mosheh understood quite well that a multi-faceted Torah was given to a diverse nation, made up of individuals who struggle, each at his own pace, to achieve Kedushah.

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