

**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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Mazel-Tov to Rabbanit Dasi Fruchter and Daniel Krupka on their wedding on Wednesday. Mazel-Tov also to the proud parents, Rena & Chaim Fruchter and Elisa Kahn & Anatol Krupka; siblings, and entire family.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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Tammuz always gives me a feeling of dread. Yes, we have maximum sunlight, the pleasures of summer (when it is not too hot to enjoy being outside), and the time of vacations. However, I always remember the first major loss in my adult life, my grandfather's death on 8 Tammuz when I was 21 years old. Then, of course, we have 17 Tammuz and the Three Weeks, time of so many disasters for our people.

As I have mentioned the last two weeks, Miriam's tzaraat, Korach's rebellion, and the departure of the Meraglim all take place the same week (22-29 Sivan of the second year in the Midbar). The three sins are also related thematically. Miriam and Aharon speak lashon horah (evil speech) regarding Moshe, and ten of the Meraglim speak lashon horah about the land of Israel (that it eats and destroys people in the land). Korach and many of the men from Reuven rise up against the leaders while they are already under attack. Korach attacks Aharon and his sons for being selected as Kohenim rather than his first cousin Korach and his sons. (The claim that all the people are holy is not his true sentiment.) The tribe of Reuven object to losing the rights of the first born to the tribe of Levi (formalized in Behaalotecha). Their chief target is Moshe, political leader of B'Nai Yisrael. (The best explanation to sort out the two rebellions, presented together in the Torah, is the attached shiur by Rabbi Menachem Leibtag.)

The anger behind the final three sins of the second year comes up as we approach the Three Weeks. The seventeenth of Tammuz is the date of many disasters for our people: Moshe coming down to Egel Zahav and destroying the luchot; ending of the daily (tamid) offerings in the Temple (when the Kohenim run out of Kosher animals to offer); collapsing of the Jerusalem city walls during the sieges leading to the destruction of both Temples; and a Roman general (Apostamos) burning a Torah scroll in public and placing an idol in the most sacred room in the Temple.

Rabbi David Fohrman interprets why these disasters remain so important to Jews. In each case, the destruction involves symbols of our closeness to Hashem. The luchot, korbanot, and Temple are very important to our religion, but what remains after our enemies destroy them? We still have our direct relationship with Hashem. Moshe repeatedly urges the people to express their feelings, even anger, directly to Hashem – not to fellow humans.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine (see below) addresses this question in asking how Korach's sons could survive with no help when the earth around them is swallowing up their family. The sons pray to Hashem, seeking teshuvah. Their only hope is God, and He rescues them. The sons survive to become great religious leaders and authors of some of the most significant of our psalms. Rabbis Fohrman and Rhine present the same point. Our enemies may destroy our institutions and symbols, but we are always able to ask Hashem directly for help. Our history demonstrates that on many occasions, God does answer our prayers and deliver us.

After Korach, God and Moshe give up on the generation of the Exodus. Chapter 19 presents the Torah (procedures) for purification after contact with a dead body. This chapter could go anywhere after Yitro, because it relates to any death or contact that creates ritual impurity. Hashem must have presented this information to Moshe by Har Sinai, because ritual purity has been a constant issue. The chapter does not refer directly to the generation of the Exodus. Chapter 20 resumes during the last year in the Midbar, 38 years later. After Korach, the Torah ignores the generation of the Exodus, except for reporting on the deaths of Miriam and Aharon.

The lessons of Korach, Miriam, and the Meraglim remain important to us today. Self hating Jews who align themselves with BDS and J Street view Jews as enemies who commit crimes against Arab victims – even when the Arabs bomb our cities, focus on civilian targets, and attack Jews all over the world. Politicians and Jews who equate Arab attacks against our people with Arab violence are not friends of the Jewish community, yet many of our people support them politically. The neighborhoods where I grew up in Los Angeles are at least as heavily Jewish now – and considerably more upscale – than they were when I was living there. These neighborhoods were always safe, yet now violence against Jews, their homes, and their property is common.

Four yahrzeits of people close to me during Tammuz add to the depressed mood in the Torah during this part of Sefer Bemidbar. My mind also goes to my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z”l, who taught me so much about our religion and introduced me to so much analysis of Torah during the two thirds of my life when we were in close contact. The two themes I have explored – the importance of establishing a direct relationship with Hashem and our concern with protecting our people from those who seek to destroy us – were both close to his heart. May we, our children, and our grandchildren merit to find outstanding Rebbes to fill this role for each of them. Shabbat Shalom.

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah & Alan

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## **Dvar Torah: Korach: That's No Small Point** by Rabbi Label Lam

*And Moshe said to Korach, "Listen please, son of Levi! Is it a small thing that the G-d of Israel distinguished you to sacrifice to Him and to perform the work of the Temple of HASHEM, and to stand before the congregation as their servant, and He brought you close and all your brothers, the children of Levi and you also quest the Kehuna (priesthood)? (Bamidbar 16:8-10)*

*The evil inclination is likened to a fly... (Brochos 61A)*

How could such a great man as Korach have fallen so far so quickly? He was endowed with extraordinary wealth and charisma. How could he have allowed himself to be brought literally over the edge? Let us pause to appreciate just how fatal a flaw can be.

I heard a marvelous parable from a close colleague and friend Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein shlita that goes something like this. A fellow living comfortably in his beautiful home is approached by a stranger with a bizarre request. He offers to buy the house for a million dollars, a fair market price but the man refuses. He loves his house and has no intention of selling.

The stranger persists. I'll rent a room from you for a \$500,000.00. The man begs off once again and denies his offer. The stranger counters that all he wants is a bed, not even a whole room and for that he's willing to pay \$250,000.00, but the homeowner insists more fervently than ever that he doesn't want the stranger living in his house under any conditions. You might think that that would have been the end of the conversation but the stranger makes a stranger than ever offer. All he wants is a spot on the wall and for that he'll pay \$125,000.00. The man could resist no longer. What would he lose by selling a spot on the wall? The deal is done.

The next night at 2:00 AM there's a thunderous knock on the door. The stranger is there demanding to visit his spot. The owner is compelled to let him in. The stranger begins to hammer a nail into his spot. The homeowner protests at first but the stranger reminds him that the spot belongs to him and he can do with it what he pleases. The next night at 3:00 AM there is another loud knock on the door. The stranger enters with a large painting. He hangs an objectionable image on the nail. The owner protests but the stranger convinces him that it his spot and he can do with it what he pleases. Every night there's another intrusion and the terribleness of the pictures he hangs are increasingly distasteful. He tries to force the stranger out of his house but the stranger has firmly staked out his turf. The owner offers him a million dollars to exit but he makes life so miserable that owner abandons his own home.

Rabbi Wallerstein explains that the negative inclination comes to us and offers to take away our entire Yiddishkeit and we bravely refuse. Then he tries to separate a person from some major organ of his Torah life like Shabbos or Kashrus and we are stalwart. Then the evil inclination angles to enter our lives in some more subtle form and that we flatly reject. Finally he seeks a spot the width of a wire on the wall, a seemingly innocuous concession and before we know what has happened we are at risk of forfeiting what was never negotiable.

The negative inclination is likened to a fly because it is persistent, and no matter how many times it is chased away it returns. Its genius is in finding that point of greatest vulnerability and deficiency. So it was that an unchecked trait like jealousy was able to sink Korach's ship and that's no small point!

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5768-korach/>

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## **Conversations, not Diatribes: Thoughts for Parashat Korah**

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

Here are two views on fairness; with which one do you agree more?

A. It is only fair that those who are wealthier should share with those who have less. The essential health of a society is based on compassion and caring, a spirit of responsibility for all members of society.

B. It is only fair that people should be allowed to keep what they earn through their own hard work. The essential health of a society is based on respect for individual rights and individual choices.

Those who opt for A are most likely to be political liberals. Those who choose B are most likely to be conservatives.

Depending on one's view of fairness, one will favor particular policies relating to such things as welfare, benefits for illegal immigrants, role of government, taxation, foreign aid etc. Some will view contemporary government as fostering neglect of basic social, educational and health needs of the weakest members of society; others will view it as fostering creeping socialism. Some will claim that the government doesn't intervene enough to help all members of society; others will argue that the government is too invasive and is infringing on our personal autonomy. Some will blame our society's ills on the "greed" of Wall Street; others will blame the "lazy anarchists" who don't work productively and who want to live off of the labor and enterprise of others.

Which view is correct?

Actually, there is truth in both positions. A problem arises, though, when demagogues and ideologues of either side assume that they are entirely wise and virtuous and that the others are entirely misguided and wicked. Radical liberals and radical conservatives are so convinced that Fairness and Truth are on their side, they do not really give heed to the opinions of the other side. As political views become more polarized, increasing numbers of people talk and listen only to those with whom they agree. Instead of reasoned public discourse, we often hear strident shouting matches where each side vilifies the other.

Dr. Jonathan Haidt, in his book “The Righteous Mind,” offers considerable insight into why good people are divided by politics and religion. He advises us to become aware of why we hold our moral views, and why others might hold views that differ from ours. He writes: “We are deeply intuitive creatures whose gut feelings drive our strategic reasoning. This makes it difficult — but not impossible — to connect with those who live in other matrices....So the next time you find yourself seated beside someone from another matrix...don't just jump right in. Don't bring up morality until you've found a few points of commonality or in some other way established a bit of trust...We're all stuck here for a while, so let's try to work it out (p. 318).”

In this week's Torah portion, we read of a full blown rebellion among the ancient Israelites. Korah and his cohorts arose against the leadership of Moses. The rebels were masters of demagoguery. They protested to Moses: “All the congregation is holy and God is in their midst? Why do you lord over the congregation of God?” Factions arose among the Israelites. Tensions reached the breaking point.

Ultimately, Korah and his followers were miraculously swallowed up by the earth. Yet, even after this divine vindication of Moses' leadership, the people murmured against him and Aaron: “you have killed God's people.” Peoples' “gut feelings” were in control of their “strategic reasoning.” Once they had been fired up by the oratory and demagoguery of Korah and company, they were not receptive to other points of view.

It is natural and normal for people to have different outlooks and to approach life from different moral matrices. But when we assume that all truth and righteousness is on our side, and that there is no truth or righteousness on the other side — then we enter into hostile relationships that are destructive to the overall fabric of society.

It is healthy for society to have liberals and conservatives, and for both sides to air their views passionately and sincerely. Yet it is essential that both sides actually listen to each other, and see what they can learn from each other. Instead of shouting matches, we need to engage in calm conversation where we can build on those values we all share. And when we inevitably have unbridgeable differences of opinion, let us not allow these differences to undermine our basic civility and decency.

“We're all stuck here for a while, so let's try to work it out.”

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

<https://www.jewishideas.org/majorities-are-often-wrong-thoughts-parashat-shelah-lekha>

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## Remembering Justice Benjamin Nathan Cardozo

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

Benjamin Nathan Cardozo (1870-1938) was one of the greatest American jurists. During his distinguished career, he served as Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals from 1926 until his appointment to the United States Supreme Court in 1932. He was known for his calm wisdom, personal dignity, and his commitment to social justice. His speeches and writings were characterized by clear thinking and graceful style.

Cardozo was born into a Sephardic Jewish family that had roots in America since Colonial days. Among his ancestors were those who fought in the American Revolution. His family was associated with Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York, founded in 1654; he retained his loyalty to Shearith Israel throughout his life, and was buried in the congregation's cemetery upon his death.

As a young attorney, recently graduated from the Law School of Columbia University, Cardozo had several interactions at Shearith Israel that reflected his generally traditional worldview. In 1895, as the congregation was planning to build a new synagogue building on Central Park West, a number of leading members were calling for reforms in the synagogue's customs. For centuries, Shearith Israel had followed the ancient traditions of Western Sephardim, including the separation of men and women during prayer services. The reformers called for various changes, including a seating arrangement in the synagogue that allowed men and women to sit together. The congregation's religious leader, Dr. Henry Pereira Mendes, strongly opposed the reforms. Tensions within the congregation came to a head at a meeting of congregants on June 5, 1895. A number of reformers put forth their motion to institute changes; Dr. Mendes and another synagogue leader spoke in opposition to their motion. Then the 25 year old Cardozo made "a long address, impressive in ability and eloquence," in which he argued for the continuity of synagogue tradition. He pointed out that the congregation's constitution provided for separate seating of men and women, following in the traditional patterns of Spanish and Portuguese congregations. It would be unlawful to violate the constitution. Aside from the legal point, Cardozo stressed the importance of maintaining synagogue traditions that had been established and maintained by generations of congregants. Regardless of one's personal opinions or level of religious observance, the synagogue is a sacred space that should maintain its integrity. Following Cardozo's speech, a vote was taken: the motion to alter the synagogue customs was defeated by a vote of 73 to 7!

In 1898, Cardozo gave a talk at Shearith Israel on Benjamin Disraeli, late Prime Minister of the British Commonwealth. Disraeli was born into the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish community of London, but his father had his children baptized before Benjamin's Bar Mitzvah. So he was a Jew by birth and by public perception; but was a Christian by formal religious profession. In spite of facing ongoing anti-Semitism, Disraeli rose to the top of the British government, a highly regarded confidant of Queen Victoria.

The young Cardozo drew a thoughtful portrait of Disraeli's personal and political life. He could not help but recognize the phenomenal rise to power of a man who was constantly subjected to anti-Semitism in spite of his having been baptized. Although Disraeli presented himself as a Christian, he never flinched from pride in his Jewish background. He described Christianity as a fulfillment of Judaism. Cardozo noted that Disraeli's position was problematic: "So we find it to the last — the same union of loyalty to the race and disloyalty to the faith, the same impossible effort to reconcile the irreconcilable and to treat the religious tenets of his manhood as a development of the religion in whose shelter he had been born" )Disraeli, the Jew, Essays by Benjamin Cardozo and Emma Lazarus, ed. Michael Selzer, Selzer and Selzer, Great Barrington, Mass, 1993, p.49(. Cardozo noted that Disraeli — in spite of his tremendous successes — was ultimately a conflicted and lonely soul: "The nation marveled at his wit; it laughed at his sallies; it applauded his intrepid spirit; but all the time, it must have felt within its heart that he was a stranger within its gates."

To his credit, Disraeli never apologized for or denied his Jewishness. Quite the contrary. He flaunted his Jewishness and presented the Jews and Judaism in positive lights. Cardozo offered an appreciation of Disraeli's role vis a vis the Jewish people: "As we look back upon him now, we see, I think, that he affected us for good. He taught us to think worthily of ourselves — that indispensable condition, as men have often said, which must be satisfied before it can be hoped that we shall be thought worthily of by others. He was himself, before all the world, a living illustration of the powers that are in us, of our resources, of our intellect, of our vigor; of our enthusiasm, of our diplomacy; of our finesse. ... He might have stood for many other and perhaps greater things; he might have aided us in many other ways; but these he did stand for in these he did aid us; and if the aid might have been greater, it none the less was great. It is something to have contributed a little to rousing the self-consciousness of a race, in waking it to a sense of its own dignity, and in waking others to a sense of its latent powers. In these days of Zionism, in these days of Herzl and Nordau, let us remember that we are working upon soil which Disraeli and men like him have helped posterity to till. By his own personality, as well as by his words and deeds, he seemed to weave into the woof of English public life some portion of the Hebraic spirit; to Hebraize the mid of the Protestant and the Puritan; and even to revive in his own day some glimmer of those ancient glories which it was one of the functions of his life to illustrate to the world. For that service at least, let us honor him tonight" )pp. 65-66(.

In a series of lectures at Yale University in 1921, Cardozo reflected on the nature of the judicial process. "There is in each of us a stream of tendency, whether you choose to call it philosophy or not, which gives coherence and direction

to thought and action. Judges cannot escape that current any more than other mortals. All their lives, forces which they do not recognize and cannot name, have been tugging at them — inherited instincts, traditional beliefs, acquired convictions; and the resultant is an outlook on life, a conception of social needs....We may try to see things as objectively as we please. None the less, we can never see them with any eyes except our own" )The Nature of the Judicial Process, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1921, p. 12(.

Cardozo's own "stream of tendency" included a deep respect for tradition...but a keen awareness of the forces for change. While he understood that judges must not set aside existing rules at pleasure, he also criticized "the demon of formalism." Judges must balance their decisions, taking into consideration the welfare of society. Cardozo drew on a Talmudic teaching that describes God as offering Himself a prayer: "Be it my will that my justice be ruled by my mercy." He suggested that judges keep this prayer in mind during their own deliberations )pp. 66-67(.

In a keenly self-revelatory comment, Cardozo reminisced on what he had learned from his experiences as a judge. "I was much troubled in spirit, in my first years upon the bench, to find how trackless was the ocean on which I had embarked. I sought for certainty. I was oppressed and disheartened when I found that the quest for it was futile....As the years have gone by, and as I have reflected more and more upon the nature of the judicial process, I have become reconciled to the uncertainty, because I have grown to see it as inevitable" )p. 166(.

In a subsequent series of lectures at Yale, Cardozo noted that "law must be stable, and yet it cannot stand still....The victory is not for the partisans of an inflexible logic nor yet for the levelers of all rule and all precedent, but the victory is for those who shall know how to fuse these two tendencies together in adaptation to an end as yet imperfectly discerned" )The Growth of the Law, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1924, p. 143(.

Cardozo appreciated the need for balancing various tendencies — the faithfulness to precedents and the drive for change. It is not a simple matter to judge fairly and correctly. "In our worship of certainty, we must distinguish between the sound certainty and the sham, between what is gold and what is tinsel; and then, when certainty is attained, we must remember that it is not the only good; that we can buy it at too high a price; that there is a danger in perpetual quiescence as well as in perpetual motion; and that a compromise must be found in a principle of growth" )pp. 16-17(.

Cardozo's vast erudition was accompanied with a profound sense of social responsibility, his own personal dignity, and a calm wisdom. He was serenely confident and competent; and at the same time, he was genuinely humble and self-reflective.

He was a proud Jew. He was moderately observant of religious rituals, although not strictly so. He expressed his views on religion on various occasions. In 1927, he spoke at a dinner in honor of the 75th birthday of his rabbi at Shearith Israel, Dr. H. P. Mendes. In praising Dr. Mendes, he underscored the values of doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with the Lord. That same year, Cardozo spoke at a dinner in honor of his friend, Rabbi Stephen Wise. He again stressed the role of religion as an agent of social justice. "Religion is worthless if it is not translated into conduct. Creeds are snares and hypocrisies if they are not adapted to the needs of life....Has there been some social wrong, some oppression of the people, some grinding of the poor? That is a matter for religion. Has there been cruelty to Jews abroad or to colored men at home?....That is a matter for religion. Has the sacred name of liberty, which should stand for equal opportunity for all, been made a pretext and a cover for special privileges for a few? That is a matter for religion. )quoted in Andrew L. Kaufman, Cardozo, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 190(.

But religion was more than social justice. At its best, religion must be marked by a selfless idealism and commitment to transcendent ideas. In 1931, Cardozo gave the commencement address at the Jewish Institute of Religion, and referred to Tycho Brahe, the 16th century Danish astronomer, who devoted long years to mark and register the stars, when people mocked him for this seemingly useless endeavor. "The submergence of self in the pursuit of an ideal, the readiness to spend oneself without measure, prodigally, almost ecstatically, for something intuitively apprehended as great and noble, spend oneself one knows not why — some of us like to believe that is what religion means" )Kaufman, p. 190(.

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When I began serving Congregation Shearith Israel in 1969, and for many years thereafter, the rabbis' gowning room was the old office of the late Rabbi Dr. David de Sola Pool. Several photographs hung on the walls, including one of Justice Benjamin Nathan Cardozo which he presented to the Congregation in 1932 upon being appointed to the United

States Supreme Court. He inscribed it: "To the historic Congregation Shearith Israel in the City of New York, with the affectionate greetings of its member."

Thus, every morning and evening before synagogue services, I was greeted by the handsome visage of Justice Cardozo. Although he died before I was even born, so that I did not know him personally, I somehow felt a friendship and kinship with him. He was, for me, an entry way into the past of my congregation and community. His photograph conveyed the confidence and the judgment, challenging us to be faithful to the past and yet open to the needs of the present...and future.

#### References:

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Selzer, Michael, Disraeli, the Jew, Selzer and Selzer, Great Barrington, 1993.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/remembering-justice-benjamin-nathan-cardozo>

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### **Korach – When All Else Fails**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

Korach was a great man who was afflicted with jealousy. He wished that he had been chosen as Kohein Gadol instead of Ahron. Korach staged a rebellion against Moshe which gained enough momentum that Moshe was concerned that the people might be misled by Korach's propaganda. Moshe declared, "If these people die naturally, then Hashem did not send me. But if an unusual event occurs and the earth swallows them, then it will be known that they have provoked Hashem with their rebellion." Indeed, at that critical moment Hashem interceded and Korach and his buddies were swallowed up together with their families.

The story of Korach is a remarkable one. But perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that Korach's children were saved. As the Torah tells us, "The children of Korach didn't die." )Bamidbar 26:11(

If the families of the rebellion organizers deserved to die, why were the children of Korach saved?

The commentaries explain that originally the sons of Korach were part of the rebellion. But as the punishment occurred, they desired to do Teshuva. And so, Hashem saved them.

That salvation is most remarkable. At the moment that the sons of Korach desired to retract -- to withdraw from the rebellion and do Teshuva -- there was not a single person who would stand up for them and plead their case. At that moment of destruction, they were the pariahs of the community, rejected by all. The Torah records that the bystanders ran away in fear, "Lest we, too, be swallowed up." The sons of Korach had no one to befriend them at that critical moment. Except for... Hashem, Himself.

Sometimes, a person may feel so lost or distant that they do not feel that their prayers would be answered. Those feelings of desperation can be the greatest catalyst for effective prayer. When all else fails, there is only one friend that one can rely on: Hashem Himself.

King Dovid said it clearly. "Hashem is close to all those who call to Him sincerely." )Tehillim 145( It does not say, "Hashem is only close to the righteous... to those who did good deeds today." Instead, the criterion is sincerity. And that is something that desperation can produce most effectively.

Similarly, in Tehillim 86 Dovid declares, "For You are good, forgiving, and kind to all those who call to you." The catalyst for Hashem's blessing is "To call" to Him.

It was this quality of sincere calling which saved the sons of Korach from the brink of destruction. It is this quality that can save a person in any generation.

But how does one do it? How does one talk to Hashem with sincerity in their moment of need? The answer is: Just do it.

Sometimes we are so inhibited that we can't seem to get the words out. Ultimately, the answer is "Just do it."

I once read a story in the memoirs of a teacher who, one year, had one of her daughters in her class. For the first few months, the daughter was so inhibited by what her classmates would think that she simply sat quietly throughout her mother's class.

One day the mother posed a provocative thinking question and successfully engaged the class in a heated discussion. In the midst of the teacher's moderating the various points of view, the daughter forgot her inhibitions, and blurted out, "But Ma!..."

Instantly the other students burst out in surprised but delighted laughter. The "ice was broken" and from then on, the daughter was able to communicate.

Our tradition teaches that even when all has failed, and one feels inhibited from even dreaming of salvation, Hashem still waits for a justification to intercede favorably. This is what happened to the sons of Korach. They were failed by everyone. Their parents had failed them; the Jewish community had given them up for lost. There was only One, who still waited to see what would happen.

That Korach was punished is remarkable. But that his children were saved is perhaps an even greater lesson for us all.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos and an enjoyable summer!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

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## **Korach – The Price of Character**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2021 \*\*

This week's parsha begins with the painful scene of Korach's challenge to Moshe. With a large gathering of leaders of the nation, Korach stands before Moshe and Aharon and challenges Aharon's appointment as Kohein Gadol, claiming that Moshe was simply taking honor for his own family. Moshe is so deeply struck by Korach's onslaught that he simply collapses and falls on his face.

The Ramban notes that the Torah does not mention Aharon's reaction. He explains that this is because Aharon had no reaction. Due to Aharon's great humility and his ethical and holy nature he did not respond in any way during Korach's rebellion. He remained silent throughout, as if he agreed that Korach was greater than him and he was only following Moshe's orders to be the Kohein Gadol. (Bamidbar 16:4)

If we could put ourselves in Aharon's place, this is an astounding and inspiring display of the nobility which a human being can strive for. Korach had riled the nation, beginning with the leaders to challenge Aharon's worthiness for his position. Unexpectedly Aharon suddenly finds himself surrounded by hundreds of noble leaders, all declaring him unworthy. The shame must have been painful. At the same time, Aharon knew that Hashem had chosen him. He must have felt such righteous indignation at being challenged. This challenge then built and continued until the next day when Korach gathered the entire nation against Moshe and Aharon. Yet, through it all, Aharon chose silence. He could not bring himself to



stand up and proclaim his own worthiness. He even went so far as to accept their challenge and present himself as if he truly was unworthy of his G-d given position. Such is the nobility and dignity which a human being can achieve.

If we consider the scene further, though, Aharon's reaction would seem to be a grave error. Aharon was in effect agreeing with Korach. When others would see Aharon's silence, they would surely take that as an indication that Korach was right. Why was it necessary for him to present himself as if he agreed with Korach that he wasn't worthy? Aharon was a man who chased and sought peace wherever he went. Surely he recognized that he was lending strength to Korach's rebellion by indicating Korach was right. Wouldn't it have sufficed for Aharon to simply step aside and recuse himself, and simply show he was willing to do whatever was decided? Why did he have to imply that he also felt he should not be the Kohein Gadol?

The Ramba"n's words answer this question with an astounding lesson. He tells us that it was because of Aharon's holy and humble character that he chose to be silent. If Aharon would do anything less than to agree with Korach's challenge, it would have required him to indicate that he did consider himself worthy. To Aharon's great and noble character, any such conduct felt like he was elevating himself above others. Actively elevating one's self over others is an act of haughtiness and pride. Just as G-d does not want us to violate the mitzvos, G-d does not want us to violate our character. Aharon therefore felt that despite the effect it might have, he had to accept Korach's challenge. He could not lower himself to indicate that he was indeed worthy.

Aharon understood that our personality and character development is precious to G-d. G-d loves each and every person individually, even more than a parent loves each of their children. Our existence in this world is for the purpose of utilizing its opportunities to become the best person we can be. Once Aharon had achieved this high level of sensitivity and humility, he understood that G-d would not want him to damage it.

As we go through our daily routine lives, it is easy to see ourselves as small and insignificant. We don't see any obvious impact to our decisions, words and actions. This Ramba"n teaches us that the impact we have on our own character is already of great significance. Every time we deepen our sensitivities we have achieved something of great importance before G-d, because each one of us individually is G-d's precious child.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

\*\* In case his Dvar Torah arrives after my publication deadline, I am reprinting his Devrei Torah from 2021.

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## **Beware of Hypocrites**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*\*

With the story of Korah, the war against Moshe and the ingratitude expressed by the people receive new dimensions. Moshe's leadership has been challenged before, but this time he was facing a well-organized mutiny, with those at the helm taking aim at him personally. It must have been very difficult for Moshe, who put his life on the line from the first moment he witnessed the suffering of the Israelites, and who had to endure exile and persecutions, to be accused that he wants to aggrandize himself at the expense of the people. His first response to that claim is spontaneous: "if you feel that you are chosen, bring your incense before HaShem tomorrow" (16:5-7), but he does not make it yet an official challenge. He first tries to reason with the Levites, reminding them the prestigious position they hold, but there is no record of their reaction, and it is possible that they ignored his plea.

Following that failed attempt to communicate with the Levites, Moshe calls the lay leaders of the rebellion, Datan and Aviram, but they are ready for him with poison-tipped arrows.

*They said: we will not come up [to you, but also to the land]. Is it not enough that you took us out of the land of milk and honey to kill us in the desert, that you seek to establish yourself as our master?*

They mock Moshe by saying that his efforts were futile. They were already living in the Promised Land, and he took them out of it by force. They remind him of his first encounter with the Israelites, when he tried to end the fight between two slaves and was told by them (Ex. 2:14):

*Who has appointed you to be our master and judge?*

The words שר and השתרר share the same Hebrew root, and so Datan and Aviram were telling Moshe that they are back where they started, and that nothing has changed. They continue blaming him:

*You have not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and you have not given us fields and vineyards! Are you trying to blind us? We will not come up!*

It seems that they are just presenting the other side of the equation: you took us out of our Promised Land and did not bring us into your Promised Land, but Moshe understood their words in a completely different way. He became very angry and said: "I have not taken [even] a donkey from them [as a bribe] ..." Moshe's response demonstrates his brilliance as a leader and his genuine concern for the people. He got upset because he heard their subliminal message. Datan and Aviram were saying that they seek the well-being of the nation, but hinted that if Moshe will guarantee them estates with fields and vineyards, they will calm the mutiny. When they say, "you did not give us..." they mean "you have a chance to give us now", and when they say, "are you trying to blind us?" they mean "oh yes, please blind us!" With bribe, that is, as the Torah says (Ex. 23:8) "bribe blinds justice".

Moshe now sees through them, and through Korah and the "holy" rebels as well. He knows that they are heralding the nation's cause only as a façade. They say that the whole community is holy and therefore no leader is needed, but they are making a cynical use of the frustration following the verdict of wandering in the desert for forty years, and they want to depose Moshe and become leaders themselves.

Moshe therefore returns to his initial suggestion, turning it into an official challenge. He asks Korah and all his followers, two hundred and fifty community leaders, to join Aaron in a ritual of incense-offering, meant to show who is God's chosen one. Had Korah and his people been honest, they should have immediately rejected that test. They should have repeated their argument that there is no need for a leader, and suggest that they believe in populist leadership, in rotation, an orchestra without a conductor. But instead, they walk into his trap like a blind ant, and eagerly poise themselves early next morning, to see which one of them will be the one to depose the "dictator" and become the new dictator.

It was because of their hypocrisy, and not because he was personally offended, that Moshe demanded a spectacular punishment. He knew very well that while the nation could overcome disgruntled and even mean people, the hypocrites could cause total devastation.

The Talmud (Sotah 22:2) records, in that vein, an advice given by King Yannai (127-76 BCE) to his wife:

*Do not fear the pious or the non-pious, but rather the hypocrites who pretend to be pious.*

It is interesting to note that King Yannai would probably have identified more with Korah than Moshe, since he has appointed himself High Priest.

Shabbat Shalom.

\*\* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia's original in Sefaria.

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## Korach: Valid Confrontations

By Rabbi Eliezer Weinbach \*

At the beginning of this week's parsha, Korach leads his followers against Moshe and Aaron. He makes the claim that since the entire nation is holy, why should leadership be relegated to just two people?(Num 16:3). As we know, HaShem doesn't agree, and causes the earth to swallow the followers of Korach(Num 16:31-33). What exactly did they do wrong?

On Bava Batra 74a, Rabba bar bar Chana is traveling through the desert and comes across the fiery rift from where the followers of Korach can still be heard chanting. They say "Moshe and his Torah are true and we are liars." It sounds like they admit their faults. If so, why are they still being punished thousands of years later?

The followers of Korach haven't learned the correct lesson. The problem wasn't that Moshe was right and they were wrong. The problem was that they came in aggressively: "rav lachem – it is too much for you!" (Num. 16:3). They were

concerned with delegitimizing the current leadership and coming into power themselves. This is in contrast to Yitro who told Moshe “kaved mimecha – it is too heavy for you”(Ex. 18:18) but then proceeded to help Moshe by creating new systems.

There are plenty of things that we can confront our leaders about, but we must do so with respect, and with the intention of making our communities better, not raising ourselves up. Argument for the sake of the community is welcome, as long we remember all of our Jewish values throughout the confrontation.

Shabbat shalom.

\* Rabbi Eliezer Weinbach, an experimental educator, is pursuing graduate level studies in Jewish education and in the environment.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2022/06/korach22/>

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## **Korach's Genius** by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

In the past few years, “bringing people together” to support a position has become a rallying cry and put on a pedestal as a lofty goal. Whether for politics or community building, it is definitely a valuable skill.

But it's not the only skill worth having. Sometimes a person's talent is discovering insights and relaying truth to people. Having concerns about “togetherness” can hinder that person's work. Imagine if a scientist had to alter his research to please people so they'd “come together” or if a Jewish scholar abrogated his duties to speak unalterable Torah truths to keep the coalition together. Cue the prophet Jeremiah who had this duty throughout his life.

Moshe was one such person. He had to speak the truth in order to build the Jews from slaves to a nation of “priest-kings.” But you can't do that without creating some grumblers amongst the people.

All of these tensions burst out in our Torah portion this week with Korach (Moshe's cousin) leading a rebellion against Moshe's leadership. But if you look at the verses, it's not so clear who's who.

The Torah starts with Korach “taking” people including Dasan, Aviram, and On from the tribe of Reuven. Plus 250 leaders from around Israel. The Torah barely records any of Korach's words. Moshe doesn't even go talk to Korach when he tries to make peace but rather to Dasan and Aviram. Was this just Korach's rebellion? And whatever happened to On? Who were these 250 leaders?

Whatever the case, it does not seem from the plain sense of the verses that Korach had a grievance and then tried to get people to agree with his grievance. Rather, it seems he was able to tap into other people's specific issues with Moshe and build a coalition with him at the helm. Dasan and Aviram were early foes of Moshe. Reuven, the firstborn tribe, and other leaders of Israel, harbored ill will by being passed over for the Levites. And Korach had his own issues with Moshe and Aharon. They didn't all have the same grievance, but Korach had this amazing ability to build coalitions and togetherness. It's no small feat to bring differing viewpoints and egos under one common goal.

This was the talent of Korach. Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg would call him “Zaidy Korach” as an honorary title, because Korach had wonderful skills that we should emulate. He had a tremendous power that we need and should learn from. But he used it in a negative way that ended in tragedy.

Imagine if Moshe and Korach had worked together. With Moshe speaking truth and Korach building coalitions and community, the Jews would have been unstoppable.

Sadly it didn't work out back then. But maybe it'll work out in our day. God should help us to be able to integrate the talents of Korach and Moshe and be able to speak truth without compromising our unity.

It's a hard task. But we'll keep trying.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Note: Rabbi Rube is has been away for a family simcha this week. Watch for new Devrei Torah when he returns.

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## **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 ennoble 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.)

[https://www.ravkooktorah.org/KORACH\\_67.htm](https://www.ravkooktorah.org/KORACH_67.htm)

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## **Argument for the Sake of Heaven (Korach 5768, 5779)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

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 Datan 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" (Num. 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" (Num. 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 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.

#### FOOTNOTES:

[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.

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/korach/argument-for-the-sake-of-heaven/>

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## **Moses Never Gave Up on Them**

By Yossi Ives \* © Chabad 2022

Moses was the leader designated by G d to lead the Jewish People, and had very publicly been the instrument for the fulfilment of His plans. This, however, did not stop an insurrection, led by Korach and his two leading accomplices, Datan and Avriam, to challenge Moses' authority. When the conspirators refused to relent, posing a tangible risk of dividing the Israelites, G d decided to make a memorable example of these three men – and the earth opened up and swallowed them and their families inside.

In anticipation of this event, G d instructed Moses:

*Speak to the congregation saying, 'Withdraw from the dwellings of Korach, Datan and Aviram.'*

The next verses report that this is indeed what Moses did:

*Moses arose and went to Datan and Aviram, and the elders of Israel followed him. He spoke to the congregation saying, 'Please get away from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything of theirs, lest you perish because of all their sins.'*<sup>1</sup>

Rashi quotes the words from the text "Moses arose" and comments:

*He thought they would show him respect, but they did not.*

What is Rashi trying to explain? The storyline seems clear enough. Moses was told to go to the dwellings of the three main conspirators and warn those assembled there to keep their distance as disaster was about to strike. And the Torah tells us that he did just that. Why would we need any further explanation? Besides, what makes Rashi think that (even part of) the reason for Moses going was to seek respect from the condemned individuals?

What seems most incomprehensible about Rashi's comment is the notion that Moses would have been thinking about his own honor during the moments before a tragedy was about to occur. Why would Rashi think that Moses would have brought his own interests into the equation?

Some sources<sup>2</sup> suggest that Moses was hoping that the men would be embarrassed and seize their last chance to repent; but Rashi makes no mention of repentance. Moreover, the Torah attests that Moses was the most "humble person on the face of the earth."<sup>3</sup> Surely, then, getting respect would be the last thing on his mind!

In fact, Rashi's comment is so problematic that an entirely new perspective is required. As was his custom, the Rebbe found the key in a small detail.

Rashi's comment is appended to the words "Moses arose," when it seems that it should have been connected to the subsequent words, "and went." After all, isn't Rashi explaining the reason Moses "went"? Not so, says the Rebbe. We know why he went – the Torah says so explicitly – but we do not know why we are told that he "arose."

After all, if we are told that "Moses went" clearly he must have risen. How else can a person go from one place to the next if not by rising to one's feet first? Those words therefore seem entirely superfluous.

Hence, Rashi explains that when it says "Moses arose" it alludes to something more significant. He does not mean merely that he "took to his feet," but that he "took a stand." Moses understood that he was now under direct Divine orders to pave the way for the demise of those three men. He recognized that he was not authorized to persuade, admonish, or plead



with them to reverse course, so his options were limited.

Yet Moses wanted to do at least one last gesture that could put some doubt into their minds, because he realized that this was their last chance. The problem was that saying another word to them would have been in violation of his instructions. All he was mandated to do was inform those around them of the impending danger.

Thus, “Moses arose.” He decided that he would do something to instill some element of awe into the rebels, in the hope that this would engender some last-minute respect, and save them from their impending demise.

This interpretation of the word “arose” is not entirely new. In regards to the verse “the field of Ephron arose,”<sup>4</sup> referring to its purchase by Abraham as a burial site for his wife Sarah, Rashi explains the meaning of the word “arose” as “it experienced an elevation.”

Here too, it has an allegorical connotation: Moses elevated the occasion. In which way did he do so?

**It turns out there is a rather significant clue in the text. The verse reads “the elders of Israel followed Moses when he set off to the tents of the three men.” Why was it necessary to say this? How does this detail add to the story? In fact, it is a central element. That is how Moses elevated the occasion. He did not just go himself to get the matter over with. Rather he first “arose” and turned it into a big event, one that would involve all the elders. Moses and all the elders marching in formation would have drawn a huge crowd. [emphasis added]**

Moses was not permitted to say another word to Korach and company, so instead he led a procession of all the elders of Israel in a show of force and as an act of dignity. Perhaps seeing this impressive sight, they would reconsider, he thought. Thus, says, Rashi, “He thought they would show him respect.” Moses hoped that this parade of dignitaries and a vast assemblage of Israelites would have made an impression and engender some awe – and thereby save their lives. Alas – as Rashi concluded – “they did not.” But it was not for lack of trying.

To think that these three men had led a significant revolt against Moses’ authority. They accused Moses of being corrupt, which caused him great distress. They had already received multiple warnings and had treated them contemptuously. They had run out of chances long ago.

Despite all this, Moses still sought a creative way of getting through to them by turning his walk into a procession. He never gave up trying to inspire in them a change of heart to save them from the destruction they were about to bring upon themselves.

With this act, Moses set an example for us how to never give up trying to inspire positive change in ourselves and others.

Adapted from Likkutei Sichot, vol. 28, Korach I.

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Numbers 16:23-27.
2. Tanchuma Korach 3; Bamidbar Rabba Korach 18:4.
3. Numbers 12:3.
4. Genesis 23:17.

\* Rabbi of Cong. Ahavas Yisrael, Pomona, N.Y.; also founder and Chief Executive of Tag International Development, a charitable organization that focuses on sharing Israeli expertise with developing countries.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5152305/jewish/Moses-Never-Gave-Up-on-Them.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5152305/jewish/Moses-Never-Gave-Up-on-Them.htm)

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### **Bound to Inspire**

Insights from Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z”l, Lubavitcher Rebbe \*

The following is based on a talk by the Rebbe, in which he describes the continuing energy flowing from a tzaddik -- even after his soul has ascended on high, and how we can tap into it, physically.

Rabbi Shalom DovBer, fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, famously said before his passing: "I am going to heaven, but my writings I am leaving to you."

"Tzaddikim resemble their Creator." Just as G-d embedded Himself within His Torah, tzaddikim likewise "embed" themselves within the words of Torah that they teach.

This, thus, is the meaning of Rabbi Shalom DovBer's statement, by studying "his writings" (his Torah) in a manner that leads to action, to the extent that his teachings become disseminated, one becomes bound to Rabbi Shalom DovBer himself, as he is in his state of ascent in Heaven.

The Rebbe applied the same principal to the sixth Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, who also left us his writings, books, and possessions through which we can physically connect to him.

By binding oneself to the leader of the generation -- by connecting to his writings, books, and so on, in which he embedded himself -- all those who walk in his ways receive from the essential, eternal existence of the tzaddik's holiness.

This is primarily accomplished by studying his writings and teachings, and translating them into action; educating oneself as well as by disseminating the writings and teachings to others.

We need to attach ourselves to the Jewish leaders of each respective generation, to our Rebbe. This ensures us that we will receive from the leader's "eternity."

--Staying the Course, P. 126-130

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--The Rebbe (Igrot Kodesh, vol 2)

\* The Rebbe's 28<sup>th</sup> yahrzeit is this Shabbat, 3 Tammuz.

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Shabbat Parashat Korach

5782 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Servant Leadership

"You have gone too far! The whole community are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above God's congregation?" (Num. 16:3).

What exactly was wrong in what Korach and his motley band of fellow agitators said? We know that Korach was a demagogue, not a democrat. He wanted power for himself, not for the people. We know also that the protestors were disingenuous. Each had their own reasons to feel resentful toward Moses or Aaron or fate. Set these considerations aside for a moment and ask: was what they said true or false?

They were surely right to say, "All the congregation are holy." That, after all, is what God asked the people to be: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, meaning, a kingdom all of whose members are (in some sense) priests, and a nation all of whose citizens are holy.[1]

They were equally right to say, "God is with them." That was the point of the making of the Tabernacle: "Have them make My Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). Exodus ends with these words: "So the Cloud of the Lord was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire was in the Cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels" (Ex. 40:38). The Divine Presence was visibly with the people wherever they went.

What was wrong was their last remark: "Why then do you set yourselves above God's congregation?" This was not a small mistake. It was a fundamental one. Moses represents the birth of a new kind of leadership. That is what Korach and his followers did not understand. Many of us do not understand it still.

The most famous buildings in the ancient world were the Mesopotamian ziggurats and Egyptian pyramids. These were more than just buildings. They were statements in stone of a hierarchical social order. They were wide at the base and narrow at the top. At the top was the King or Pharaoh – at the point, so it was believed, where heaven and earth met. Beneath was a series of elites, and beneath them the labouring masses.

This was believed to be not just one way of organising a society but the only way. The very universe was organised on this principle, as was the rest of life. The sun ruled the heavens.

The lion ruled the animal kingdom. The king ruled the nation. That is how it was in nature. That is how it must always be. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled.[2]

Judaism is a protest against this kind of hierarchy. Every human being, not just the king, is in the image and likeness of God. Therefore no one is entitled to rule over any other without their assent. There is still a need for leadership, because without a conductor an orchestra would lapse into discord. Without a captain a team might have brilliant players and yet not be a team. Without generals, an army would be a mob. Without government, a nation would lapse into anarchy. "In those days there was no King in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25).

In a social order in which everyone has equal dignity in the eyes of Heaven, a leader does not stand above the people. They serve the people, and they serve God. The great symbol of biblical Israel, the menorah, is an inverted pyramid or ziggurat, broad at the top, narrow at the base. The greatest leader is therefore the most humble. "Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3).

The name given to this is servant leadership, [3] and its origin is in the Torah. The highest accolade given to Moses is that he was "the servant of the Lord" (Deut. 34:5). Moses is given this title eighteen times in Tanach. Only one other leader merits the same description: Joshua, who is described this way twice.

No less fascinating is the fact that only one person in the Torah is commanded to be humble, namely the King:

When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical Priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites. (Deut. 17:18-20)

This is how Maimonides describes the proper conduct of a King: Just as the Torah has granted him the great honour and obligated everyone to revere him, so too it has commanded him to be lowly and empty at heart, as it says: 'My heart is a void within me' (Pa. 109:22). Nor should he treat Israel with overbearing haughtiness, as it says, 'he should

not consider himself better than his fellows' (Deut. 17:20).

He should be gracious and merciful to the small and the great, involving himself in their good and welfare. He should protect the honour of even the humblest of people.

When he speaks to the people as a community, he should speak gently, as in 'Listen my brothers and my people...' (King David's words in I Chronicles 28:2). Similarly, I Kings 12:7 states, 'If today you will be a servant to these people...'

He should always conduct himself with great humility. There is none greater than Moses, our teacher. Yet, he said: 'What are we? Your complaints are not against us' (Ex. 16:8). He should bear the nation's difficulties, burdens, complaints and anger as a nurse carries an infant.[4]

The same applies to all positions of leadership. Maimonides lists among those who have no share in the world to come, someone who "imposes a rule of fear on the community, not for the sake of Heaven." Such a person "rules over a community by force, so that people are greatly afraid and terrified of him," doing so "for his own glory and personal interests." Maimonides adds to this last phrase: "like heathen kings." [5] The polemical intent is clear. It is not that no one behaves this way. It is that this is not a Jewish way to behave.

When Rabban Gamliel acted in what his colleagues saw as a high-handed manner, he was deposed as Nasi, head of the community, until he acknowledged his fault and apologised. [6] Rabban Gamliel learned the lesson. He later said to two people who declined his offer to accept positions of leadership: 'Do you think I am giving you a position of honour [serarah]? I am giving you the chance to serve [avdut].' [7] As Martin Luther King once said "Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve." [8]

C. S. Lewis rightly defined humility not as thinking less of yourself but as thinking of yourself less. The great leaders respect others. They honour them, lift them, inspire them to reach heights they might never have done otherwise. They are motivated by ideals, not by personal ambition. They do not succumb to the arrogance of power.

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Sometimes the worst mistakes we make are when we project our feelings onto others. Korach was an ambitious man, so he saw Moses and Aaron as two people driven by ambition, “setting themselves above God’s congregation.” He did not understand that in Judaism to lead is to serve. Those who serve do not lift themselves high. They lift other people high.

[1] Some suggest that their mistake was to say, “all the congregation are holy” (kulam kedoshim), instead of “all the congregation is holy” (kula kedoshah). The holiness of the congregation is collective rather than individual. Others say that they should have said, “is called on to be holy” rather than “is holy”. Holiness is a vocation, not a state.

[2] Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, 1254a21-24.

[3] The well-known text on this theme is Robert K Greenleaf, *Servant leadership: a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*, New York, Paulist Press, 1977. Greenleaf does not, however, locate this idea in Torah. Hence it is important to see that it was born here, with Moses.

[4] *Hilchot Melachim* 2:6.

[5] *Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:13.

[6] *Brachot* 27b.

[7] *Horayot* 10a-b.

[8] Martin Luther King Jr., Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech (Oslo, Norway, December 10, 1964).

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

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“And they rose up in the face of Moses” (Numbers 16:2) When is dissension and argument positive, healthy debate and an outgrowth of “these and those are the word of the Living God” (B.T. Eruvin 13), and when is dispute negative, a venomous cancer which can destroy the very underpinning of our nation?

Apparently Korach’s rebellious dissent is negative, as the Talmud maintains: “Rav said: He who is unyielding in maintaining a dispute violates a negative command, as it is written, ‘And let him not be as Korach, and his company’” (B.T. Sanhedrin 110a). But can we glean from this statement operative guidelines as to when it is right and when it is wrong to argue?

We all know the story of Korach, the subject of this week’s Torah portion; this rebel against Mosaic authority and Aaronic Priesthood influenced 250 leading Israelite personages to stand up against the established and Divinely ordained leadership.

After a contest between the upstarts and Moses involving the offering of fire-pans of incense to determine the chosen of God, which concludes with Korach and his cohorts being consumed by a Divine fire, God commands that the 250 pans of the rebels be pounded into plates to cover the altar: “To be a memorial to the children of Israel, that no stranger who is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before God; do not be as Korach, and his company, as God said by the hand of Moses, concerning him” (Numbers 17:5).

Rav’s prooftext regarding an unyielding disputant comes from this verse; the Bible is therefore saying, according to Rav’s interpretation, that no one should ever again maintain a dispute, as God said concerning him, that is, concerning Korach. This view would maintain that the problem of Korach was that he would not give in and continued the argument; one may raise a dissenting opinion, but when the accepted leader rejects it, the dissenter must back down.

Rashi suggests a different understanding. He takes the pronoun “him” to refer to Aaron; the problem with Korach’s argument was that he was challenging God’s chosen Kohanim – the descendants of Aaron – as the only legitimate priests. Such a challenge can never be allowed in the future, “as God said concerning him” – that is, concerning Aaron.

Rav Isaac Bernstein, z”l, of London, in a masterful lecture, cited the Hatam Sofer, who claims that it is the attitude of the dissenter – and not the subject of his dissent – which makes the difference. This Sage bemoans the fact that all too often, when two people argue, one (or both) of the parties involved will claim that only he has a direct pipeline to God; consequently only he has the only right opinion, and the other view must be totally delegitimized. These individuals claim that they are arguing “for the sake of heaven, in the name of God and Torah”.

Supporting his view, the Hatam Sofer reads the verse, “don’t be like Korach, and his company, (who argued that) God spoke by the hand of Moses (only) to him;” to Korach; it is forbidden for any individual to maintain that God speaks only to him, that only he knows the truth, and that there is no possibility of truth to his opponent. Hence an illegitimate and therefore improper debate is one which seeks to delegitimize the other side, declaring that only one side has the whole truth!

The Hatam Sofer proves his point from the case of R. Eliezer in the Talmud, who actually did have a pipeline to God (B.T. Bava Metzria 59b) but nevertheless was bested in debate by the Sages because, in the final analysis, halakha is determined by the logic of the majority of the Sages, not by voices from heaven.

The Talmud records how R. Eliezer disagreed with his contemporaries on the status of a particular oven. He was absolutely convinced that he was right and to prove his claim, he asked and received a series of signs from heaven demonstrating the accuracy of his halakhic opinion. Nevertheless, since his was a minority view in the face of a majority ruling, his refusal to relent led to his excommunication. The case of R. Eliezer is brought to teach that even if you are certain that God is on your side, you dare not read the other view out of the realm of legitimacy.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Rabbi Bernstein further directs us to another fascinating source. We have a mishnah in Tractate Sukkah with the following law: “If a man’s head and the greater part of his body were within the sukkah and his table of food and within the house (thus outside of the Sukkah), Beit Shammai declared such a meal on Sukkot to be invalid and Beit Hillel declared it valid... Beit Hillel says to Beit Shammai: ‘Was there not an incident wherein the elders of Beit Shammai and elders of Beit Hillel went to visit R. Yochanan the son of the Hurani, and they found him sitting with his head and the greater part of his body in a sukkah, and the table of food inside the house, and they did not make any comment about it? Did this not imply that the Academy of Shammai had acquiesced in this case to the Academy of Hillel!’ Beit Shammai said to them: ‘Here (specifically) is the proof (to our position).’ In actuality, the elders of Beit Shammai did say to R. Yochanan ‘If it is in such a way that you always perform (the mitzvah of Sukkah), then you never (successfully) performed the commandment in your lifetime’ (Mishnah Sukkah 2:7).” And so Beit Shammai never gave in to Beit Hillel!

How are we to understand the mishnah?

This issue is addressed in the work of R. Naftali of Vermaiser, “Maaleh Ratson”, in which he explained the mishnah as follows: the elders of Beit Shammai and the elders of Beit Hillel had indeed been present together at the sukkah of R. Yochanan, and they all saw that their host conducted himself in accordance with the law of Beit Hillel. Beit Shammai, although of a different opinion than Beit Hillel, said nothing – because of their respect for Beit Hillel, and because they understood the validity of a dissenting opinion different from their own. Only after the elders of Beit Hillel left the sukkah did the elders of Beit Shammai clarify their alternative position by presenting another viewpoint.

This sensitivity displayed by the representatives of the two major and opposing Academies in Mishnaic times emphasizes the fundamental pluralism in the Talmud: two views may be at loggerheads, but we must respect and learn from – rather than revile and delegitimize – our opponents. And two opposing sides in a debate can and must respect and socialize with each other, even to the extent of marrying into each others’ families!

Can we say that we have adequately absorbed the lessons of the dangers of dispute and dissension? Has Korach and Korachism truly been consumed by fire, never to be heard from again?

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### **The Person in the Parsha**

**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

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### **The Secret of Remaining Correct**

Very often, we think that if a person is especially spiritual, he cannot possibly be very

practical. It is as if religious devotion and good common sense just don't go together.

My own experience has taught me that, on the contrary, some of the soundest advice I have ever received came from people who spent most of their time in sacred practice, and who seemed, on the surface, to be quite detached from every day affairs. Indeed, it was an old pious Chassid who encouraged me to embark upon my career as a psychologist, and it was a Chassidic Rebbe who, much later in my life, advised me to make a mid-career change and assume a rabbinic pulpit.

In my study of Jewish sources, I have encountered individuals who devoted their lives to very lofty ideals, but who had sage counsel to offer those who were engaged in much more worldly matters.

One such person was Rabbi Israel Salanter (November 3, 1810-February 2, 1883). Reb Yisrael, as he was known by his many disciples, founded the Mussar Movement, which endeavored to inspire the public to be more conscious of the ethical components of our faith. Whereas his "curriculum" consisted of sacred writings, some of which bordered on the mystical, he used techniques which were extremely down to earth. Indeed, it seems clear that he was aware of the theories of psychology that were just beginning to be introduced during the latter half of the 19th century, when he began to spread his teachings.

Reb Yisrael had much sound advice to give, even to those who were not members of his movement, and one such piece of advice always struck me as being unusually insightful and very useful, even in quite mundane situations. This is what he said, with reference to someone who is involved in an argument with another: "If you are right, make sure that you remain right."

What he meant was that it is human nature that when a person is right and utterly convinced that his cause is just, he often goes to ridiculous extremes to justify his position—so much so that he goes on to say or do things which undermine his position. He says things he shouldn't have said, attacks his enemies in an unseemly fashion, and further conducts himself in a manner which eventually proves to be his own undoing.

It is much better, suggested Reb Yisrael, to state your case succinctly and cogently, and leave it at that. It is even advisable to yield a bit to your opponent, losing a small battle or two, but winning the bigger war. It is best to remain relatively silent after expressing the essentials of your case and to realize that, in the end, "truth springs up from the earth, and justice looks down from heaven" (Psalms 85:12).

Knowing about his magisterial erudition, when I first came upon Reb Yisrael's helpful admonition, I knew that he must have had sources in sacred Jewish texts for all that he said. Over the years, I have collected quite a few citations in our literature that might have served as the basis for his words.

One such source occurs in our Torah portion this week, Parshat Korach (Numbers 16:1-18:32). I am indebted to a precious little book of Torah commentary, *Zichron Meyer*, by Rabbi Dov Meyer Rubman, of blessed memory, who was a pupil of a pupil of Rabbi Salanter, and who helped establish a yeshiva in Haifa.

The story is a familiar one. Korach rebels against the authority of Moses and Aaron, and rallies two hundred and fifty "chiefs of Sanhedrin" to his cause. The opening words of the story, "And Korach took himself..." imply that, rather than expressing his complaint privately and respectfully to Moses, Korach chose to incite a crowd of others to publicly and brazenly protest.

Rabbi Rubman quotes from the collection known as *Midrash Tanchuma*: " 'And Korach took...' This bears out the verse, 'A brother offended is more formidable than a stronghold; such strife is like the bars of a fortress' (Proverbs 18:19). It refers to Korach, who disputed with Moses and rebelled, and descended from the prestige he already had in hand. ' "

Korach, explains Rabbi Rubman, had some valid and persuasive arguments—so much so that he was able to gain the allegiance of two hundred and fifty "chiefs of Sanhedrin," each of whom was a qualified judge. He was a "formidable stronghold."

Had he addressed Moses and Aaron properly, those aspects of his complaint that had legitimacy would have been heard. They may have been able to find an appropriate leadership capacity in which he could serve. Was this not the case when others, such as those who were ritually unqualified to bring the Paschal offering, or the daughters of Zelafchad, approached Moses with their complaints? Did Moses, under Divine guidance, not find an adequate solution to their complaints?

Initially, there was some merit to Korach's dissatisfaction. In some sense, he was "right." But he was not satisfied with that. He had to push forward, involve others, speak blasphemously, and enter into a full-fledged revolt. He thus "descended from the prestige he had in hand."

Had he heeded the very practical counsel of Rabbi Salanter, "if you are right make sure you remain right," his story would have turned out very differently. Instead of being one of the

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rogues of Jewish history, he may have become one of its heroes.

Here you have it. Rabbi Israel Salanter may have been considered a naïve luftmensch by his contemporaries, a man with his head in the clouds, whose words can be useful to even the most practical of men.

When we are convinced that we are right we tend to invest as much energy as we can to prove ourselves right. Reb Yisrael advises us to spare ourselves the effort and trust more in our convictions. If they are indeed warranted they will speak for themselves.

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### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand Rabbi of Smyrna & Rabbis Shach, Shteinman, and Sofer Share Same Shalom Sentiment**

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Various Torah Parshas lend themselves to specific homiletic topics. For example, Parshas Chayei Sarah is an appropriate time to talk about shidduchim (courtship and matrimony); Parshas Vayera is an appropriate time to talk about hachnosas orchim (hospitality); Parshas Korach is the parsha of machlokes (argumentation) and unfortunately, we all know that this topic is more relevant than many other parshas in the Torah because unfortunately people are always getting into machlokes.

Before getting into the body of the shiur, I want to share four comments from great individuals on this topic.

I saw written in the name of Rav Chaim Palagi (1788-1868; Smyrna, Turkey) "From the time I started having a modicum of intelligence, I noticed that man or woman, regardless of family, regardless of country – any party that was involved in machlokes – suffered from it. Neither side ever emerges unscathed and unhurt from machlokes." Rav Palagi lived to a ripe old age, and said that he saw in his lifetime that when people get into protracted arguments—be it inter-family, inter-community, inter-city or intra-city—neither side ever wins. Both sides suffer, physically and financially. He says that any person with seichel (clarity of understanding) should walk away from machlokes even if they are right, whether it will cost them physically, financially, or in terms of their honor. Whatever one loses by walking away from machlokes, he will eventually get back. One will ultimately profit in this world and the next by virtue of the fact that he was a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace.

I further once heard in the name of Rav (Elazar) Shach (1899-2001; Bnei Brak), zt"l, that he never saw anyone who lost by walking away from machlokes. This means when a person faces a choice of losing money or making a machlokes, Rav Shach advised people to be mevater (to pass up the opportunity to "fight for what is rightly his"). He said that in his long lifetime, he never

witnessed anyone who ultimately lost because he was mevater.

Finally, I received an email written by students of Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman [1914-2017; Bnei Brak], (shlit"ta), zt"l. It is written there, "We once asked our Rebbe (Rav Shteinman), "When the machlokes between Korach and Moshe began, how were the innocent bystanders supposed to know who was right?" On the one hand there was Moshe Rabbeinu—he certainly had credentials of his own. But on the other hand, there were 250 people. These were not 250 peasants. These were 250 Roshei Sanhedraos (distinguished people) and they were presenting reasonable complaints. How should they have known with which side the truth resided? Rav Shteinman answered (in rhyming Hebrew) *Mi she'Shosek hu ha'Tzodek*. He who keeps quiet—he is the one who is right. That is the sign.

The pasuk says "It is He Who makes your borders peaceful (*ha'Sam Gevulech Shalom*) and with the cream of wheat (*chelv chitah*) He sates you." (Tehillim 147:14). The Chasam Sofer used to say that every person has his own 'red lines' which he refuses to cross. He then interprets the pasuk as follows: *Ha'Sam Gevulech Shalom*—If your 'red line' (*Gevulech* – your border) is *Shalom* (Peace) then you will have a bounty of *chelev chitah*. It means that in the end, you are going to win.

This is the introduction to my discussion tonight about the evils and harm caused by machlokes.

### The Unnamed Sinners Are Finally Called Out by Name

The parsha starts with the following pasuk: "And Korach, son of Yitzhor, son of Kehas, son of Levi separated himself, with Dassan and Aviram, son of Eliav, and Oon son of Peles, sons of Reuven." [Bamidbar 16:1] Korach had 250 people on his side who said they also wanted to be Kohanim. They began arguing with Moshe Rabbeinu. Of the 250 men siding with Korach, the Torah specifically mentions Dassan and Aviram. This is the first time in the Torah where Dassan and Aviram are specifically mentioned by name. The Torah, however, alludes to them well before this.

First of all, according to the Medrash, they appear all the way back at the beginning of Sefer Shemos: "They said to them (to Moshe and Aharon): 'May Hashem look upon you and judge, for you have made our very scent abhorrent in the eyes of Pharaoh and the eyes of his servants, to place a sword in their hands to murder us!'" [Shemos 5:21]. The Medrash says that the people who complained here to Moshe and Aharon that they ruined the reputation of Bnei Yisroel in the eyes of Pharaoh and his servants were none other than Dassan and Aviram.

Number two: In the famous story of Moshe witnessing the Egyptian beating the Jew, the Medrash says that an Egyptian taskmaster came into Dassan's tent, sent Dassan out to work and had relations with Dassan's wife. Dassan came back and found the taskmaster in bed with his wife and got into a fight with him. This was the context, according to the Medrash, of the Egyptian man hitting the Jew. It was that Egyptian taskmaster who was hitting Dassan. Moshe killed the Egyptian, thereby saving Dassan's life. What does Dassan do? The next day when Moshe chastised Dassan for striking another Jew, Dassan went and reported to Egyptian authorities that Moshe killed an Egyptian.

A third place: According to the Medrash, the people who spoke up by Yam Suf and said, "Let's appoint a new leader and return to Egypt" [Shemos 14:4] were Dassan and Aviram.

Number four was at the time of the Mann. Chazal say that when Moshe Rabbeinu said, "Don't leave over Mann until morning" – who were the people who "did not listen to Moshe and left Mann over until the morning"? It was none other than Dassan and Aviram. [Shemos 16:19-20]

These two people have a list of indictments that is as long as an arm. So, if they started their mischief in Egypt and they were repeat offenders time and again, why is it only here that the Torah chooses to call them out by name?

Rav Ruderman, zt"l (Founding Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel) used to have an expression when something upset him. He would say (in Yiddish) "Dos iz ba'mir en record" – meaning, I am recording this. All the other times, the Ribono shel Olam does not write down their names, but when it comes to Machlokes—and they jumped into a Machlokes which was not even their own Machlokes—here the Ribono shel Olam writes their names: *Dos iz ba'mir en record*.

Dassan and Aviram can challenge Moshe Rabbeinu, they can report him, they can disobey his orders by the Mann, they can challenge him by the Yam Suf, BUT when they jump into a Machlokes, then the Ribono shel Olam records it for all eternity.

### One Lost Glove Deserves Another

The final remark I wish to make comes with an incident:

When Korach and his companions challenge Moshe Rabbeinu, the Torah says "He fell on his face" [Bamidbar 16:4] – literally he collapsed! Rashi quotes the Medrash Tanchuma. Moshe had to fall on his face as a result of the machlokes, because this was already the fourth major iniquity involving the people. The nation already had three strikes against them. This was already the "fourth strike."

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Rashi continues: They sinned at the Golden Calf (Parshas Ki Sisa) and Moshe davened for them (Va'Yechal Moshe) (Shemos 32:11). They sinned with the complainers (Parshas Be'ha'Aloscha) and Moshe davened for them (Va'Yispalet Moshe) (Bamidbar 11:2). They sinned with the Spies (Parshas Shlach), and here too Moshe went to bat for Klal Yisrael (v'Sham'u Mitzrayim...v'Omr... ) (Shemos 14:13-14). But by the Macholkes of Korach, his hands became weak. This time he just did not have the capacity to pray for their forgiveness.

Rashi cites the parable of the king's son who rebelled against his father and the king's friend appeased the king on his son's behalf—once, twice, and three times. After that, the appeaser throws up his hands in despair. "I cannot go in anymore to petition the king on behalf of this chronically rebellious child." There are only so many times that someone can go back to the well. There comes a point when the well dries up.

Why does Moshe not daven for Klal Yisrael here? He is ready to daven for Klal Yisrael but he cannot believe it is going to work, because how many times can someone go back?

Now, put yourself in Moshe Rabbeinu's place. He is being attacked personally. His integrity is being challenged. Most people in that situation are interested and care about themselves, about their own reputation and status. But what is Moshe Rabbeinu worried about? What is going to be with Klal Yisrael? This is the ultimate selfless Jewish leader. It is not about me. I do not care about me. I do not care about my job or what they say about me. I care about what is going to be with my people. This is an example of self-denial and concern about others, which distinguishes Moshe Rabbeinu and makes him the ultimate *manhig Yisrael* (Jewish leader).

We are not necessarily leaders, but this capacity to think about somebody else—even in a moment of personal distress—is something which ideally should not be beyond our grasp.

The wife of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, predeceased her husband. He was in the hospital because his beloved wife had just died. A student of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach met his Rebbe in the corridor of the hospital (unaware that his Rebbe had just lost his wife). The wife of the student had just had a baby. The student came over to Rav Shlomo Zalman and said, "I just had a son (or daughter, whatever the case may have been)!" Rav Shlomo Zalman gave him a big smile and such a hearty "Mazal Tov!" Here in a moment of such sorrow, he was able to put his personal Tzores aside. This fellow deserves a Mazal Tov now and I will not let my personal problems dampen his Simcha. I will give him the 100% sincere and hearty Mazal Tov that

his Simcha warrants, as if nothing had happened to me. There are people who do not live for themselves, but rather they live concentrating on the needs and feelings of others.

I read a very interesting story in the sefer Dorash Mordechai. Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mir Mashgiach, once boarded a train as the door was closing. He stuck out his hand, so the door would not close, and the door pulled off the glove he was wearing. The glove fell to the platform outside the train, as the train doors closed. Rav Levovitz lost his glove.

What did he do? He ran over to the open window of the train and threw out the other glove. The students who were with him asked him: "Why did you throw out the other glove?" He told them: "What am I going to do with one glove? This way, there is already one glove lying there on the station platform. If I throw out the other glove, now a person who finds them will have a decent pair of matching gloves. At least someone will have a pair of gloves."

This is a small incident, but realize what this incident says. This was an instantaneous reaction. Okay, I lost my glove, but at least somebody will now have a pair of gloves. This is a demonstration of a person who is not wrapped up in himself, not self-possessed with his own problems and his own loss. Even in a moment of distress, it is possible to think about somebody else.

This is the Avodas HaChaim which we should try to learn. We should not only to be impressed by the attributes of our Gedolim, but we should try to practice the same in our daily lives.

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#### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

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Something extraordinary happened in my living room. My wife Valerie has always wanted to grow Flame Lilies. This is because the Flame Lily is the national flower of Zimbabwe where Valerie grew up. So at long last she bought the bulbs and quite remarkably, within just a few weeks the plants reached right up to the ceiling. There were two stems about 18 inches apart, and then something very special happened. Tendrils started to grow from each stem horizontally. They moved towards each other until eventually they met and curled around each other. Each tendril was in search of another to connect with, to bond to.

This fascinating natural inclination to connect is something we can all learn from and it's certainly a lesson which was lost on Korach. Parshat Korach commences with the words, "Vayikach Korach," – "Korach took." (Bamidbar 16:1)

All of our mefarshim, our commentators, want to know: what did Korach take? In the Targum Onkelos, the Aramaic translation, Onkelos explains, "Ve'itpeleig Korach," – "Korach took himself to the other side."

He separated himself from Moshe and Aharon and the rest of the people. Korach thrived in an environment of divisiveness, and that was his downfall.

There are two occasions in the Torah in which we're told that something is not good. Right at the beginning of Bereishit, 2:18 we're told, "Lo tov lihyot adam levado." – "It is not good for a person to be alone,"

and that is why Hashem created Eve – to be alongside Adam. Later, in the book of Shemot, 18:17, Yitro said to his son in law Moshe, "Lo tov," – the way in which you are judging the people by yourself is "not good." You should do so with others. When we separate ourselves from others rather than connecting with them, that is not good for us and it's not good for our society.

The Torah gives us a mitzvah that we should not be like Korach and his followers but rather we should strive to appreciate the relationships in our lives, to bond together in a meaningful and constructive way with others. This certainly is one of the major lessons of the coronavirus during which we have been denied that opportunity to have physical contact with others.

Let us appreciate the relationships we have by reaching out to others with affection and love. After all, if plants can do it, we can too.

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#### **Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\***

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##### **The Power of Speech in Judaism**

The very first words of our Parsha are problematic. It says Vayikach Korach-Korach took, but this is the only place in the Torah where the verb "took" does not have a direct object. It does not say what Korach took, and Rashi offers several explanations. One of them is that Korach took people with his speech (Rashi commentary on Numbers 16:1). This expression has remained in use until today. When someone is "taken", he or she feels conned by another's words. Korach had that charismatic power of speech that brought him 250 followers. In the twentieth century, the two most powerful evil leaders were two butchers who had great powers of speech. Both Hitler and Stalin killed millions with their words, as they never physically killed anyone. One of the main differences between man and all other creatures in the world is man's ability to speak. When God created man, calling him Nefesh Chaya', a living soul, Onkelos commentary and translation into Aramaic translates this phrase for man's uniqueness as a "Ruach

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Memalela-A Speaking Spirit." Thus, that which is Godly in each human being is his ability to speak. The symbols called words (written or spoken) have a special power that can often define a particular human being and help him or her attain both positive and negative goals in life. Why and how are words considered so powerful? What makes the spoken word so important for the Jew? How can speech be maximized for positive rather than negative purposes?

The Power of Speech -The letters of the Aleph Bet, the Hebrew alphabet, and the spoken word are the very building blocks of the universe, as God created the world through speech, in ten specific pronouncements (sayings), and not through actions (Genesis 2:7). Jews each morning recount this idea in Baruch She-amar prayer (First blessing of the Pesukai Dezimrah section of the morning prayers) reciting "Blessed is He who spoke, and the world came into being." Proverbs (Proverbs 18:21) tells us that the tongue can control life and death, i.e., through our use of speech. The very first sin in history was brought about through the power of speech. Had not the serpent convinced Eve through words to eat of the fruit and then, later, had not Eve convinced Adam with words to similarly sin (Genesis, chapter 3:1-6), the course of human history would have been quite different, as the punishments of the serpent, woman and man changed their natures forever (Midrash, Tanchuma Beraishit 8). Even saying something that is true, but, nevertheless, improper, can lead to dire consequences through God. When a groom and bride marry, everyone is aware what will transpire between them that evening. However, if someone verbalizes this concept of sex, the Talmud (Shabbat 33a) says that this person will automatically be doomed for an evil fate, even if this decreed reverses a person's good fate that had been sealed for the next seventy years.

The Talmud (Erchin 15a) declares that improper speech is far more severe than improper action and proves it from the Torah story of the ten spies who sinned by improperly speaking evil about the Land of Israel. The consequences of those words and the improper reaction of the people was the punishment denying all the Jewish adults of that generation the opportunity to inherit the Land, and they died in the desert. Yet, when these very same Jews, months earlier, worshipped the Golden Calf, their punishment in committing that sin of action, not mere words, was far less severe than the decree of death. This same concept is echoed in the Midrash (Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 3:621) which shows through other similar verses that the consequences of improper speech are very often more grievous than the consequences of improper actions.

The Talmud (Erchin 15b) points out that the physiological makeup of the human being

demonstrates how much the tongue must be guarded. The other limbs of man's body are exposed and seen by others. The tongue, however, is created hidden from view. In addition, there was a need to surround the tongue with two protective "walls," the mouth and the teeth, to prevent its misuse. Thus, we see how powerful language can be for both the positive of creation of the world as well as the destruction of the world.

**The Importance of Speech For The Jew -** When David, poet, king, warrior, and musician, wrote about the secret of a long and meaningful life, he did not record that the Jew should keep a particular ritual such as Shabbat or Kashrut, and did not even say the secret lay in being kind to one's fellow man. Rather, he writes (Psalms 34:13-14) that a person should guard his tongue from speaking evil. It is clear that refraining also serves as a catalyst, leading to other righteous acts. In Judaism, there are three cardinal sins that are so heinous that a Jew is commanded to give up one's life rather than violate them (Sanhedrin 74a). They are murder, adultery, and idol worship. And yet, the Jerusalem Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 4a) states that while it is true that for these three sins one pays both in this world and the next world, the sin of speaking evil about someone else is so abhorrent, that it is considered as heinous as all three of these cardinal sins combined! This is not a mere statement of hyperbole, as Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 7:3) quotes this passage as part of Jewish law. Jewish sensitivity to the potential sin involving speech is so acute that more than one quarter of all the publicly enumerated sins on Yom Kippur (The Al Chet prayer, recited ten times on Yom Kippur) involve the use of speech. The sin using speech is so reprehensible that according to Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 7:6), a person is required to move from the neighborhood rather than remain when one's neighbors continually speak evil about others.

Until now, we have spoken about the negative consequences of improper speech. However, the Jew must become sensitized to the positive impact of good speech as well. Each person's words must be uttered with careful deliberation, so that the spoken word reflects a person's true inner beliefs. A Jew is not permitted to say something which contradicts his or her thoughts, or believe one thing and act in an insincere, hypocritical manner. Such a person would be immediately ejected from the House of Study (Berachot 28a). One of the three categories of people that God particularly despises is a hypocrite -- the person who speaks on one manner but thinks in a different manner (Pesachim 113b).

**The Danger of Improper Speech -** In demonstrating how harmful the written or spoken word can be, it has been said that the pen (or the spoken word) is mightier than the sword. However, Judaism does not compare the pen (or tongue) to a sword but, rather, to an arrow (Jeremiah 9:7). Why is this so? How is an arrow

different conceptually from a sword? According to the Midrash (Midrash Tehillim 120:4), unlike a sword, an arrow, once released (like a bullet from a gun) cannot be stopped, while a sword can be retracted until the very last instant, before hitting the target. A spoken word is like the arrow, not the sword, since, once it is uttered, cannot be retrieved. Evil speech is also analogous to an arrow because an arrow, although aimed at one particular target, can easily go astray and inadvertently hurt an unintended victim. Because of its close proximity, a sword almost never misses its intended victim. Lashon Hara, evil speech, like the arrow, although intended for one victim, often inadvertently hurts someone else.

The damage caused by speaking evil is often worse and more permanent than a physical blow. While a physical injury may often heal completely, a person will rarely recuperate completely from the effects of evil speech against him or her, even after an extended time period. It is for this reason that the punishment for publicly embarrassing someone with words is much more severe than the punishment for physically hurting an individual. Even a murderer who is punished with death by the Jewish court does not lose his share in the World to Come, while one who publicly embarrasses an individual, does indeed lose his or her share in the World to Come, which is a far greater punishment than even the death penalty (Bava Metzia 59a, Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 6:8).

There is a story about a man who had sinned by uttering Lashon Hara (speaking evil), and wished to repent, so he went to the Rabbi. He went to the Rabbi told him to get feathers from a pillow. When he returned, the Rabbi told the man to scatter the feathers in the wind and he obeyed. But when the Rabbi told the man he must now gather those same feathers once again, the man said that this was an impossible task, and he could not comply. At that point, the Rabbi pointed out that, like the feathers, once words are uttered and scattered, they cannot be retrieved, and, therefore, there can be no repentance for Lashon Hara. This reflects the Jerusalem Talmud's passage (Jerusalem Talmud, Bava Kama 36b), which states that it is possible for man to repent for all sins except Lashon Hara.

The importance in Judaism of speaking in a clean manner, without using vulgarity, cannot be overemphasized. The Talmud (Pesachim 3a) records that the Torah, which was usually very careful not to use even one unnecessary, extra letter, intentionally used extra words in describing something in pure, clean language terms, rather than the shorter more vulgar language. A person who uses his mouth for vulgarity, according to the Talmud (Shabbat 33a), is sent deeper in "hell." It is for this reason that speech is called by the Psalmist (Psalms 149:6) a double-edged sword. On the one hand, speech has the potential to uplift man and make him Godly or, on the other hand, it can also show the worst side of man. Even though at

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most times a person should say little or nothing at all, as noted above, there are times when a person should use his speech and speak out. A student who does not understand should not be afraid to admit this to the teacher before peers (Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah 4:5).

Specifically today, there is an additional burden placed upon Jews regarding their speech. Since the Temple's destruction, it is "the offering of our lips," (Hosea 15:3) man's speech, in the form of our prayers, which takes the place of the sacrifices upon the altar. However, just as a sacrifice is unacceptable to God and forbidden to be offered if there is an impurity either in the sacrifice or in the altar itself, so, too, man's verbal sacrifice to God, his prayer, cannot properly be offered if the instruments of sacrifice, the mouth and lips are impure. How can the same lips which curse or speak evil about others be used as a vehicle for sacrifice through prayer?

In the last twenty years, since the rise and dominance of the Internet of Social Media in the lives of most people, the power of speech (including the written word) has been multiplied geometrically. Thus, a Jew today must be especially careful what he or she writes and says to others. The effects can be devastating or uplifting.

**\* This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at [nachum@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:nachum@jewishdestiny.com)**

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### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

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#### Selfless Leadership – for the Sake of the People - Rabbi Todd Berman

Leaders sometimes toss around the notion of biblical ethics or tradition to anchor personal predilections or preferences in the Torah. Yet if we take a close look at the qualities of leadership the Torah presents, we find models that seem too often absent.

Parashat Korach presents the first and most famous rebellion against Jewish leadership. Korach of the tribe of Levi, along with Datan and Aviram, criticizes the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They gather a band of two hundred and fifty others to challenge the present hierarchy. Discussion of their argument and the Divine response which leads to the death of Korach and his supporters is well known. But a simple, almost repeated story, caught my eye.

During the argument, Moses commands the rebels to prepare for a competition of incense offerings. They do, and in the middle of the story, God expresses His anger, and Moses and Aaron respond: And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Stand back from this community that I may annihilate them in an instant!" But [Moses and Aaron] fell on their faces and said, 'O God, Source of the breath of all flesh! When one man sins, will



You be wrathful with the whole community?" (Numbers 16:20-22)

God readies to destroy those who challenge His chosen leaders and who want to replace the present system. Moses and Aaron almost accuse God of a lack of justice: "one man sins, will You be wrathful with the whole community?" They stand their ground, and seemingly, God retracts his earlier anger. One almost hears an echo of the accusation made centuries before by Abraham at Sodom:

Abraham came forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? ...Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Genesis 18:23-25)

Almost channeling Abraham's heroic demands, Moses and Aaron will not allow God to act unjustly. As fitting descendants of the great Jewish patriarch, chosen for his love of kindness and justice, Moses and Aaron risk themselves challenging the Divine.

This mini-story seems as if to repeat with an important addition. After the destruction of Korach and the rebels, the people fear that the Divine wrath weakens the nation: The next day the whole Israelite community railed against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You two have brought death upon the LORD's people!" But as the community gathered against them, Moses and Aaron turned toward the Tent of Meeting; the cloud had covered it, and the Presence of the LORD appeared. When Moses and Aaron reached the Tent of Meeting, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Remove yourselves from this community, that I may annihilate them in an instant." They fell on their faces. (Numbers 17: 6-10)

Again, Moses and Aaron, like Abraham, beseech God and demand mercy. But in this attempt, they add a new step: Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take the fire pan, and put on it fire from the altar. Add incense and take it quickly to the community and make expiation for them. For wrath has gone forth from the LORD: the plague has begun!" Aaron took it, as Moses had ordered, and ran to the midst of the congregation, where the plague had begun among the people. He put on the incense and made expiation for the people; he stood between the dead and the living until the plague was checked. Those who died of the plague came to fourteen thousand and seven hundred, aside from those who died on account of Korach. Aaron then returned to Moses at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, since the plague was checked. (Numbers 17: 11-15)

In this case, Moses and Aaron not only pray to God and demand mercy but act immediately to stem the Divine punishment. Their actions could not spare everyone; however, most of the

nation healed. Here, prayer and debate do not sufficiently satisfy the demands of the hour. They are ready to take action in order to counter the Divine punishment.

In all three stories, Abraham and Sodom, Moses and Aaron with Korach, and finally with the people, the three leaders demand justice from God through debate, prayer, or action. In all three cases, they could have turned away. The people sinned, and God punishes them. Sometimes the punishment is even unjust or at least overly severe. Yet leadership demands taking risks – not for oneself or one's aggrandizement but the sake of the people.

These stories offer a counter to the actions of Korach and his cohort. Moses and Aaron's ascension, by Divine decree, to leadership disturbs the rebels. Korach himself was a leader of the tribe of Levi, and Levi was designated as the tribe to serve God in the Mishkan. Yet, that privileged position could not satisfy Korach's ego. Korach focuses on his own needs. Moshe and Aaron defend the people. The narcissism that leads Korach and others to rebel is precisely the weakness limiting their abilities and highlighting those of Moses and Aaron. Authentic leadership needs to put the nation before self, others before personal gain. Abraham, Moses, and Aaron, indeed, represent the accurate Torah model of Jewish leadership ethics.

As an alumnus of Yeshivat HaMivtar and Ohr Torah Stone involved in teaching Torah, I frequently look back to the models of Torah leadership I had the privilege to learn from and hopefully emulate. My rabbanim bequeathed to me a Torah of both *Hessed* and *Mishpat* – loving kindness and pro-active justice. From Abraham through Moses and Aaron and all throughout the ages, Torah leadership demands sacrificing oneself for the good of Klal Yisrael. I want to thank Ohr Torah Stone for setting me on a path which hopefully enables me to successfully pass these eternal Torah values to my students as well.

### **Is Judaism Pluralistic? And what is the difference between disagreements and war? Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum**

Throughout history, Judaism has been characterized by *machloket* – halachic disputes and disagreements. The Jewish world has always comprised a myriad of diverse opinions: Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel and many other worldviews of all hues and colors. Similarly, Torah learning is founded upon endless deliberation and dialogue: parents and children, teachers and students engage in constant debate, each expressing a distinct opinion as part of the Torah learning process. "A parent and a child, or a teacher and his disciple who study Torah and become rivals in their learning, do not leave until their love for each other returns." (Talmud Bavli, Kidushin 30:2)

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

The study of Torah is, by definition, a learning process involving dispute and controversy, rather than one aiming to achieve peace or harmony. It highlights the differences that exist between different parties, and only at the end of the learning process, after tensions have run high and each of the learners has expressed his take on the issue – only then can peace be achieved. However, this peace is contingent on the ability of all parties to listen to each other, be attentive to the other and engage in dialogue. Sometimes the learning process itself – the controversies, debates and conflicting claims it entails – are more important than the conclusion itself.

Interestingly, neither the Torah nor Jewish thought idealize unanimity or uniformity of thought; on the contrary – philosophical dispute and debate are constantly encouraged. Perhaps this is so because Judaism is a religion of deliberation and contemplation, rather than one of dogmas, wars or conflicts. Differences of opinion are desirable, as they serve to uncover both the individual's truth as well as the collective one. Controversial discussions and debates have numerous benefits, all of which are significant. The Jewish people believe in a culture of controversy, one which encourages diverse opinions to be voiced respectfully and empathetically without waging personal wars. This notion is expressed in the Aruch HaShulchan: "This precisely is what makes our holy and pure Torah so glorious. For the entire Torah is called a Song, and what makes a song great is its multiple voices; and the fact that each voice is distinctly heard, is also what makes the song so melodious and pleasant to the ear" (from the introduction to Aruch HaShulchan on Choshen Mishpat).

There are two ways to solve disputes and conflicts. Either by exercising authority, or by engaging in persuasive dialogue. Those who try solve problems by means of force, do not, in fact, acknowledge the other party's right to hold a different opinion and voice it. The use of force usually solves nothing, but simply postpones the problem to a future date and may even perpetuate the situation.

On the other hand, one who tries to solve complex situations by engaging in dialogue and expressing deep conviction, attempts to persuade his opponent by showing mutual respect. The only way to resolve wars is by respecting the views of the opponent. This does not mean to say that all people must think alike. People are entitled to have their own opinions, and disagree with others. One is allowed have a *machloket* with another party and dispute other opinions, but this should never result in war. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook phrases this ever so perfectly:

"Some err in thinking that world peace can only be founded upon homogeneity of opinions and a uniformity of traits. For this reason, when these people see Torah scholars

engaging in debate and deliberation which lead to greater diversity of opinion and numerous methodologies and interpretations, they come to think that this causes dispute which is the opposite of peace. But this is not so! For real peace is founded upon pluralistic peace which is one that incorporates all parties and worldviews, fine-tunes them and gives each its appropriate place. Only by bringing together all the pieces, all the seemingly controversial views and the conflicting parts – only then can real truth and justice come to light” (commentary on the words: “Torah scholars enhance peace in the world”).

Every individual brings into the world a special trait or value, unique to him only, and it is this that makes the Creation truly whole. Wholeness is not achieved by blending all of mankind and blurring all distinctions; rather, the world must contain all the colors of the rainbow, the entire spectrum of differences and traits, each of which contributes something unique and complements the other components.

I am pained by the fact that in today’s Jewish world there are hardly any true halachic debates or Torah deliberations. Instead, people are engaged in conflicts and wars, showing no respect for each other. People don’t really listen and there is no real attempt to engage in well-meaning and constructive debate and dialogue. Rabbi Aharon Milevski of blessed memory, who was a disciple of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski and Rabbi Kook, and served as the chief rabbi of Uruguay for many years – a position I was fortunate enough to hold myself – said during a farewell party held for him by the community that “Little people make wars; great people engage in debates.” May we be so fortunate as to revive true and constructive machloket and bring all wars to an end.

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#### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

#### **Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger Ambitious Self-Awareness**

Finally, after this one last event, all of the cynics withdrew their conjured claims of mosaic nepotism. Apparently, the earthquake which tracked, targeted, and swallowed Korach, his closest relatives, and their homes did not give the hold-outs peace, nor did the fire that consumed two hundred and fifty followers of Korach. Yet the tranquil but unnatural budding of Aharon’s otherwise dead rod, pulled out from among the dormant representative rods of his competitors, did finally resolve all that fed this monster of machlokes. And of this most impressive incident, each rejected leader wanted their own personal souvenir.

"and the rod of Aharon...grew buds and the buds matured and its blossoms bloomed and it bore ripe almonds. And Moshe brought out all the rods from before Hashem [and showed them] to the Jews and they [each leader] looked at the rods [that did not sprout] and each one took his rod" (Bamidbar 17:23-24).

That the story continues with holding onto Aharon’s rod for safekeeping and as an eternal reminder of the divine selection of Aharon is well understood. Yet the interest that each leader had in their failed attempt to upset Aharon’s position seems like keeping the salt in an open wound. Perhaps these leaders wish to remind themselves that they were not Aharon. They did not have his leadership that kept our nation whole while under the thumb of slave masters; they did not have the selflessness required to be set aside with open arms by a younger brother; they did not have the unconditional obedience to Hashem that he thus exemplified; the empathy necessary to tirelessly seek respectful and loving relationships was not their lot.

However, I prefer to see that by treasuring the rejected rods, they held on to a much more productive optimism. These rods would always remind their owners of their aspirations to be an Aharon. These sticks would take them back to the moments when they felt empowered and energized to find their place in the holiest of spaces and the most sublime service of Hashem. It is not unlike the maturing scholar, or the advancing professional who recalls his dreams of his youth, the goals of his yeshiva days, the lofty moments that have slipped by. The wise do not bask in nostalgia; rather they realistically reconnect with renewed and seasoned vigor.

It is this self-awareness that these sticks brought to the minds of the nesi'im, along with the promise and the optimism that they expressed. They in turn would remind each person of the unique place that each one has, the unique blessings that each one is called upon to activate. And that does ultimately bring much contentment.

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#### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

**Who Owns the Problem?** - Korach the son of Izhar, the son of Kohas, the son of Levi took [himself to one side] along with Dasan and Aviram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peled descendants of Reuven. They confronted Moshe together with two hundred and fifty men from the children of Israel, chieftains of the congregation, representatives of the assembly, men of repute. They assembled against Moshe and Aaron, and said to them, “You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above HASHEM’s assembly?” Moshe heard and fell on his face. He spoke to Korach and to all his company, saying, “In the morning, HASHEM will make known who is His, and who is holy, and He will draw [them] near to Him, and the one He chooses, He will draw near to Him. Do this, Korach and his company: Take for yourselves censers. Place fire into them and put incense upon them before HASHEM tomorrow, and the man whom HASHEM chooses, he is the holy one; you have taken too much upon yourselves, sons of Levi.” (Bamidbar 13:1-7)

There is so much going on this dialogue between Korach and Moshe and then Moshe to Korach. Korach accuses Moshe of taking too much upon himself. Moshe’s reaction is to fall on

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

his face. Why? Then Moshe volleys back to Korach, “You have taken too much upon yourselves, sons of Levi.” Each one, starting with Korach, believes the other has taken too much.

Who’s right? We know the answer, of course because we read further and saw what happens in the end. If we were bystanders at the time, we might have trouble discerning who is being genuinely genuine and who is being disingenuous.

Let us analyze the situation with a ubiquitous psychological phenomenon. It’s commonly called, “projection”. There is a subconscious tendency to hoist our own foibles and faults upon others and to assume that even our darkest motives must be theirs. Why and how this works is not our discussion here and now. That it exists and is pervasive is a reality that we must be on guard for. How might it apply here?

Korach assumes that Moshe must have some political motive for the appointments that he made. He is crowning himself as the leader because of his love for power and control and authority. He selects his brother because of nepotism. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. On a Machiavellian level it all make much sense.

However, we are talking about Moshe Rabbeinu, the most self-effacing and humble man on the face of the earth. He has done nothing on his own without consulting with the Creator first. He does what he is told and when he is told to do it. He has dedicated his life to serving the People of Israel and being dutifully loyal to whatever HASHEM commands him to do. There is no personal discretion in any of his appointments. He didn’t want this job in the first place and he is willing to surrender again and again.

So where did Korach get this big idea that Moshe is doing all this for himself and his family? The answer is as simple as a dimple. It is born in his own mind. He has political ambitions and an appetite for grander grandeur, so he projects his own subconscious motives onto Moshe and assumes that he too must have these same ulterior motives and is acting out of self-interest. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Moshe falls on his face because the accusation is so preposterous. Moshe realizes that Korach grossly misunderstands his true motives, so he points back to him, “you have taken too much upon yourselves, sons of Levi”. The problem is with you!

Admittedly it is hard for most of us to understand a level above our own and to appreciate that some people really are operating on a higher plane of existence. This is like the farmer who fed his horse a healthy bale of hay every day. One day the farmer failed to feed the horse and the horse was thinking to himself, “Hey, the farmer must have eaten my hay!” We know that the farmer is not interested in eating his hay, but hey that’s the way a horse thinks!

In business and in psychology it is important to know “who owns the problem?”. In this particular situation it is abundantly clear that it is Korach who is the one who owns the problem.

**Home Weekly Parsha Korach 5782**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

This week's reading describes the rebellion of Korach and other disastrous incidents that occurred to the generation that left Egypt, who were destined to expire in the desert of Sinai. After the previous debacles: the complaints against Moshe by Miriam and Aaron, the demand for food, the ingratitude towards the manna that fell from heaven, the failed mission of the spies who visited the land of Israel and the military defeat suffered by the Jews at the hands of the Canaanites, it seems that this generation would have learned its lesson by now.

Instead of internalizing the reasons for these events and their reactions, we read in this week's portion about the anger and frustration by many of the leaders that was turned upon Moshe instead of the self-examination that would have been proper and beneficial. Korach and his group spoke in the name of high-sounding democracy and equality. It is quite common in history that dangerous, corrupt, and nefarious political groups always claim the high moral ground for themselves.

One of the great shams of Marxism was that it always used high sounding moral adjectives to describe itself. When it was the aggressor, it called itself peace loving. When it was totalitarian and dictatorial in its rule, it always titled itself Democratic and progressive. The high-sounding words of fairness and equality that were hurled against Moshe by Korach and his group of followers, sound hollow to us even today, thousands of years later.

We have witnessed in our own time the fact that disparate groups and differing individuals unite because of a common hatred or dislike of another group or person. According to the Midrash, each of the 250 followers of Korach had a different agenda and ambition for themselves. It was the opportunity to strike down Moshe, whose presence and greatness so tormented them, that it brought all of these differing personalities together and ironically guaranteed them a common fate of destruction.

Because of his piety and innocence, Moshe is the greatest thorn in the side of the rebels who are only looking for their satisfaction and advancement. Moshe understands it is not his personal honor that is at stake here, but rather the entire concept of Torah leadership and the essence of being a special people with a divine mission. It is not his personal reputation alone that he is defending but, rather, the spiritual future of the Jewish people.

The rebellion of Korach is not a small offense but a great personal failing like the sin of the Golden Calf. It is a mortal blow to the continuity of the Jewish people and to its very survival. The Torah describes the events throughout the desert of Sinai so that we will be aware of the pitfalls that lie at the footsteps of personal ambition and unwarranted hubris.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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from: The **Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust** <info@rabbisacks.org>

**When Truth is Sacrificed to Power**

**KORACH**

What was wrong with the actions of Korach and his fellow rebels? On the face of it, what they said was both true and principled.

"You have gone too far," they said to Moses and Aaron. "All of the community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's people?"

Num. 16:3-4

They had a point. God had summoned the people to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," (Ex. 19:6), that is, a kingdom every one of whose members was in some sense a priest, and a nation where every member was holy. Moses himself had said, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would place His spirit upon them all!" (Num. 11:29) These are radically egalitarian sentiments. Why then was there a hierarchy, with Moses as leader and Aaron as High Priest?

What was wrong with Korach's statement was that even at the outset it was obvious that he was duplicitous. There was a clear disconnection between what he claimed to want and what he really sought. Korach did not seek a society in which everyone was the same, everyone the Priests. He was not as he sounded, a utopian anarchist seeking to abolish hierarchy altogether. He was, instead, mounting a leadership challenge. As Moses' later words to him indicate, he wanted to be High Priest himself. He was Moses' and Aaron's cousin, son of Yitzhar, the brother of Moses' and Aaron's father Amram, and he therefore felt it unfair that both leadership positions had gone to a single family within the clan. He claimed to want equality. In fact what he wanted was power.

That was the stance of Korach the Levite. But what was happening was more complex than that. There were two other groups involved: the Reubenites, Dathan and Aviram, formed one group, and "two hundred and fifty Israelite men, leaders of the community, chosen from the assembly, men of repute," were the other. (Num. 16:2) They too had their grievances. The Reubenites were aggrieved that as descendants of Jacob's firstborn, they had no special leadership roles. According to Ibn Ezra, the two hundred and fifty 'men of rank' were upset that, after the sin of the Golden Calf, leadership had passed from the firstborn within each tribe to the single tribe of Levi.

They were an unholy alliance, and bound to fail, since their claims conflicted. If Korach achieved his ambition of becoming High Priest, the Reubenites and the men of rank would have been disappointed. Had the Reubenites won, Korach and the men of rank would have been disappointed. Had the men of rank achieved their ambition, Korach and the Reubenites would be left dissatisfied. The disordered, fragmented narrative sequence in this chapter is a case of style mirroring substance. This was a disordered, confused rebellion whose protagonists were united only in their desire to overthrow the existing leadership.

None of this, however, unsettled Moses. What caused him frustration was something else altogether – the words of Datan and Aviram:

"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 insist on lording it over us! What is more: you have not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you think that you can pull something over our eyes? We will not come up!"  
Num. 16:13-14

The monumental untruth of their claim – Egypt, where the Israelites were slaves and cried out to God to be saved, was not "a land flowing with milk and honey" – was the crux of the issue for Moses.

What is going on here? The Sages defined it in one of their most famous statements:

"Any dispute for the sake of Heaven will have enduring value, but every dispute not for the sake of Heaven will not have enduring value. What is an example of a dispute for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. What is an example of one not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his company."

Mishnah Avot 5:21

The Rabbis did not conclude from the Korach rebellion that argument is wrong, that leaders are entitled to unquestioning obedience, that the supreme value in Judaism should be – as it is in some faiths – submission. To the contrary: argument is the lifeblood of Judaism, so long as it is rightly motivated and essentially constructive in its aims.

Judaism is a unique phenomenon: a civilisation all of whose canonical texts are anthologies of argument. In Tanach, the heroes of faith – Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, Job – argue with God. Midrash is founded on the premise that there are "seventy faces" – seventy legitimate interpretations – of Torah. The Mishnah is largely constructed on the model of "Rabbi X says this, Rabbi Y says that." The Talmud, far from resolving these arguments, usually deepens them considerably. Argument in Judaism is a holy activity, the ongoing internal dialogue of the Jewish people as it reflects on the terms of its destiny and the demands of its faith.

What then made the argument of Korach and his co-conspirators different from that of the schools of Hillel and Shammai. Rabbeinu Yona offered a simple explanation. An argument for the sake of Heaven is one that is about truth. An argument not for the sake of Heaven is about power. The difference is immense. In a contest for power, if I lose, I lose. But if I win, I also lose, because in diminishing my opponents I have diminished myself. If I argue for the sake of truth, then if I win, I win. But if I lose, I also win, because being defeated by the truth is the only defeat that is also a victory. I am enlarged. I learn something I did not know before.

Moses could not have had a more decisive vindication than the miracle for which he asked and was granted: that the ground open up and swallow his opponents. Yet not only did this not end the argument, it diminished the respect in which Moses was held:

The next day the entire Israelite community complained to Moses and Aaron, “You have killed the Lord’s people!”

Num. 17:6

That Moses needed to resort to force was itself a sign that he had been dragged down to the level of the rebels. That is what happens when power, not truth, is at stake.

One of the aftermaths of Marxism, persisting in such movements as postmodernism and post-colonialism, is the idea that there is no such thing as truth. There is only power. The prevailing “discourse” in a society represents, not the way things are, but the way the ruling power (the hegemon) wants things to be. All reality is “socially constructed” to advance the interests of one group or another. The result is a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” in which we no longer listen to what anyone says; we merely ask, what interest are they trying to advance. Truth, they say, is merely the mask worn to disguise the pursuit of power. To overthrow a “colonial” power, you have to invent your own “discourse,” your own “narrative,” and it does not matter whether it is true or false. All that matters is that people believe it.

That is what is now happening in the campaign against Israel on campuses throughout the world, and in the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) movement in particular.[1] Like the Korach rebellion, it brings together people who have nothing else in common. Some belong to the far left, a few to the far right; some are anti-globalists, while some are genuinely concerned with the plight of the Palestinians. Driving it all, however, are people who on theological and political grounds are opposed to the existence of Israel within any boundaries whatsoever, and are equally opposed to democracy, free speech, freedom of information, religious liberty, human rights, and the sanctity of life. What they have in common is a refusal to give the supporters of Israel a fair hearing – thus flouting the fundamental principle of justice, expressed in Roman law in the phrase *Audi alteram partem*, “Hear the other side.”

The flagrant falsehoods it sometimes utters – that Israel was not the birthplace of the Jewish people, that there never was a Temple in Jerusalem, that Israel is a “colonial” power, a foreign transplant alien to the Middle East – rival the claims of Datan and Aviram that Egypt was a land flowing with milk and honey and that Moses brought the people out solely in order to kill them in the desert. Why bother with truth when all that matters is power? Thus the spirit of Korach lives on.

All this is very sad indeed, since it is opposed to the fundamental principle of the university as a home for the collaborative search for truth. It also does little for the cause of peace in the Middle East, for the future of the Palestinians, or for freedom, democracy, religious liberty, and human rights. There are real and substantive issues at stake, which need to be faced by both sides with honesty and courage. Nothing is achieved by sacrificing truth to the pursuit of power – the way of Korach through the ages.

[1] A reminder of the context: this piece was written by Rabbi Sacks in 2015, although his timeless words continue to give us pause about such movements and their substantial impact.

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**Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Korach (Numbers 16:1-18:32)**

**By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “And they rose up in the face of Moses” (Numbers 16:2)

When is dissension and argument positive, healthy debate and an outgrowth of “these and those are the word of the Living God” (B.T. Eruvin 13), and when is dispute negative, a venomous cancer which can destroy the very underpinning of our nation?

Apparently Korach’s rebellious dissent is negative, as the Talmud maintains: “Rav said: He who is unyielding in maintaining a dispute violates a negative command, as it is written, ‘And let him not be as Korach, and his company’” (B.T. Sanhedrin 110a). But can we glean from this statement operative guidelines as to when it is right and when it is wrong to argue?

We all know the story of Korach, the subject of this week’s Torah portion; this rebel against Mosaic authority and Aaronic Priesthood influenced 250 leading Israelite personages to stand up against the established and Divinely ordained leadership.

After a contest between the upstarts and Moses involving the offering of fire-pans of incense to determine the chosen of God, which concludes with Korach and his cohorts being consumed by a Divine fire, God commands that the 250 pans of the rebels be pounded into plates to cover the altar: “To be a memorial to the children of Israel, that no stranger who is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before God; do not be as Korach, and his company, as God said by the hand of Moses, concerning him” (Numbers 17:5).

Rav’s prooftext regarding an unyielding disputant comes from this verse; the Bible is therefore saying, according to Rav’s interpretation, that no one should ever again maintain a dispute, as God said concerning him, that is, concerning Korach. This view would maintain that the problem of Korach was that he would not give in and continued the argument; one may raise a dissenting opinion, but when the accepted leader rejects it, the dissenter must back down.

Rashi suggests a different understanding. He takes the pronoun “him” to refer to Aaron; the problem with Korach’s argument was that he was challenging God’s chosen Kohanim – the descendants of Aaron – as the only legitimate priests. Such a challenge can never be allowed in the future, “as God said concerning him” – that is, concerning Aaron.

Rav Isaac Bernstein, z”l, of London, in a masterful lecture, cited the Hatam Sofer, who claims that it is the attitude of the dissenter – and not the subject of his dissent – which makes the difference. This Sage bemoans the fact that all too often, when two people argue, one (or both) of the parties involved will claim that only he has a direct pipeline to God; consequently only he has the only right opinion, and the other view must be totally delegitimized. These individuals claim that they are arguing “for the sake of heaven, in the name of God and Torah”.

Supporting his view, the Hatam Sofer reads the verse, “don’t be like Korach, and his company, (who argued that) God spoke by the hand of Moses (only) to him;” to Korach; it is forbidden for any individual to maintain that God speaks only to him, that only he knows the truth, and that there is no possibility of truth to his opponent. Hence an illegitimate and therefore improper debate is one which seeks to delegitimize the other side, declaring that only one side has the whole truth!

The Hatam Sofer proves his point from the case of R. Eliezer in the Talmud, who actually did have a pipeline to God (B.T. Bava Metzia 59b) but nevertheless was bested in debate by the Sages because, in the final analysis, halakha is determined by the logic of the majority of the Sages, not by voices from heaven.

The Talmud records how R. Eliezer disagreed with his contemporaries on the status of a particular oven. He was absolutely convinced that he was right and to prove his claim, he asked and received a series of signs from heaven demonstrating the accuracy of his halakhic opinion. Nevertheless, since his was a minority view in the face of a majority ruling, his refusal to relent led to his excommunication. The case of R. Eliezer is brought to teach that even if you are certain that God is on your side, you dare not read the other view out of the realm of legitimacy.

Rabbi Bernstein further directs us to another fascinating source. We have a mishnah in Tractate Sukkah with the following law: “If a man’s

head and the greater part of his body were within the sukkah and his table of food and within the house (thus outside of the Sukkah), Beit Shammai declared such a meal on Sukkot to be invalid and Beit Hillel declared it valid... Beit Hillel says to Beit Shammai: 'Was there not an incident wherein the elders of Beit Shammai and elders of Beit Hillel went to visit R. Yochanan the son of the Hurani, and they found him sitting with his head and the greater part of his body in a sukkah, and the table of food inside the house, and they did not make any comment about it? Did this not imply that the Academy of Shammai had acquiesced in this case to the Academy of Hillel?' Beit Shammai said to them: 'Here (specifically) is the proof (to our position).' In actuality, the elders of Beit Shammai did say to R. Yochanan 'If it is in such a way that you always perform (the mitzvah of Sukkah), then you never (successfully) performed the commandment in your lifetime' (Mishnah Sukkah 2:7)." And so Beit Shammai never gave in to Beit Hillel!

How are we to understand the mishnah?

This issue is addressed in the work of R. Naftali of Vermaiser, "Maaleh Ratzon", in which he explained the mishnah as follows: the elders of Beit Shammai and the elders of Beit Hillel had indeed been present together at the sukkah of R. Yochanan, and they all saw that their host conducted himself in accordance with the law of Beit Hillel. Beit Shammai, although of a different opinion than Beit Hillel, said nothing – because of their respect for Beit Hillel, and because they understood the validity of a dissenting opinion different from their own. Only after the elders of Beit Hillel left the sukkah did the elders of Beit Shammai clarify their alternative position by presenting another viewpoint.

This sensitivity displayed by the representatives of the two major and opposing Academies in Mishnaic times emphasizes the fundamental pluralism in the Talmud: two views may be at loggerheads, but we must respect and learn from – rather than revile and delegitimize – our opponents. And two opposing sides in a debate can and must respect and socialize with each other, even to the extent of marrying into each others' families!

Can we say that we have adequately absorbed the lessons of the dangers of dispute and dissension? Has Korach and Korachism truly been consumed by fire, never to be heard from again?

Would that it were so!

Shabbat Shalom!

## Every Child Needs a Miriam

### A Single Gesture Toward a Baby Reverberates Throughout History Rabbi YY Jacobson

#### Miriam's Skin Disease

At the end of this week's portion (Behaaloscha), we catch a rare and fascinating glimpse into the interpersonal relationship of Moshe, his brother Aaron, and their sister Miriam.

Miriam, speaking to her brother Aaron, was critiquing Moses' marriage. The Torah is decidedly cryptic about what exactly she was criticizing, stating merely that "Miriam and Aaron spoke about Moses regarding the Cushite woman he had married[1]." There are various ways to explain what it was she said and who this Cushite woman was[2]. Whatever the case is, an older sister voicing criticism of her baby brother's marriage is easy enough to understand—even if that younger brother happens to be Moses himself.

G-d hears their conversation and decides to clarify to Aaron and Miriam who their younger brother is. He says to them: "Please listen to My words. If there are prophets among you, I make myself known to them only in a vision or a dream. Not so is My servant Moses; he is faithful throughout My house. With him, I speak mouth to mouth... he beholds the image of the Lord. So how were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?"

G-d departs in a huff, and Miriam – and according to Rabbi Akiva in the Talmud[3], Aaron too—is left stricken with leprosy, the biblical punishment for slander. Moses then intervenes, crying out to G-d[4]: "I beseech you, G-d, please heal her!" G-d limits her affliction to seven days, that she (like all lepers) must spend in isolation outside the camp.

Following these seven quarantined days, she would be healed and could reenter the camp. In the words of the Torah:

"She shall be quarantined for seven days outside the camp, and afterward can she re-enter."

The Torah finishes the story: "And the people did not travel until Miriam had re-entered."

The greatest biblical commentator, the 11th-century French sage, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, known as Rashi, quoting the Talmud[5], tells us that the nation waiting for Miriam was a unique honor conferred upon her in the merit of something she had done eight decades earlier. At the beginning of Exodus, Pharaoh decreed that all male Jewish children be drowned in the Nile Delta. Moses' mother had placed her infant Moses in a basket and had set him afloat in the Nile. It is here that Miriam debuts in biblical history: "His sister stood from afar, to know what would happen to him[6]." It is the merit of her waiting for Moses that the nation now waited for her.

Although the nation was ready to embark on the next leg of its journey, they stopped for seven days, waiting for Miriam who was quarantined outside of the camp, as a reward for her noble deed decades earlier when Moses was an infant floating in the river.

Would They Let Her Die?

Yet, upon deeper reflection, this explanation by Rashi is deeply disturbing.

Is the only reason the nation waited for Miriam, while she was quarantined for a week because she once waited for Moses as an infant? What was the alternative? Not to wait for Miriam and leave her alone in a parched and barren desert, without food, water, or any protection, a place the Torah describes[7] as "a desert great and awesome, full of snakes, vipers, scorpions, and drought, where there was no water?"

Suppose Miriam would have never watched over Moses as an infant. Would she have then not been rewarded this "honor" and left to die in the desert alone?

Equally disturbing is the expression Rashi uses that the Jewish people waiting for Miriam was an "honor" ("kavod") bestowed upon her. Yet, this was no honor; it was a matter of life and death. It is impossible for any human being, let alone an elderly woman (Miriam at that time was 87, being seven years older than Moses, who was 81 at the time), to survive alone in a dangerous desert.

And what happened to the other lepers expelled from the camp, who did not receive this special "honor" of the nation waiting for them? Were they simply abandoned to die whenever the people continued their journey?

#### The Camp

In an ingenuous presentation, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (in an address delivered on Shabbos Behaaloscha 1965[8]) presented the explanation.

We must draw attention to two words in the text. The verse states: "She shall be quarantined for seven days outside the camp (mechutz lamachaneh), and then she should reenter." Each word and expression in Torah is precise. The words "outside the camp" intimate that her exclusion and expulsion would be effective when the people are encamped; when they are dwelling in one place as a camp ("machaneh" in Hebrew means to dwell in one place, as in the term "vayachanu"), and she would remain outside of the camp.

Only if she is quarantined for seven days outside of the nation's dwelling when it constitutes a stationary "camp", would she fulfill her duty and would be able to heal and reenter the community.

What this meant was that travel time did not count for this seven-day quarantine period. Even if Miriam were to travel in isolation behind the rest of the nation, this would not be counted as part of her seven-day quarantine necessary for her healing and reentry, since she was not quarantined "outside the camp", because during their traveling the Jews did not constitute a "camp", a "machaneh."

Thus, if the nation would not have waited the seven-day period for Miriam, she would have certainly traveled along with them. But she would not have had the ability to go into isolation for seven days to heal until the nation would cease traveling and become a "camp" once again.

This would have delayed her healing process as long as they were on the move.

This, then, was the special honor bestowed upon Miriam. By delaying their journey for seven days, Miriam could be quarantined immediately outside of the camp, and at the conclusion of the week, reenter the camp after a full recovery. Her leprosy would not linger for even one extra day. This was not a question of life and death; it was only a question of how long she would endure her malady.

81 Years Earlier

Why did Miriam deserve this honor?

Let us now go back 81 years earlier. Let us see what Miriam actually did for her baby brother Moses, and then we can begin to appreciate the spiritual dynamics of history – how all of our actions return to us: what we put out there comes back to us.

Picture the scene: The king of the country, the most powerful man on the planet, the leader of the most important civilization at the time, had decreed that all Jewish newborn boys must be drowned. Miriam's baby brother is one of those slated for death. Their mother had just sent the infant to his divinely ordained fate by letting him sail into the Nile, which happens to be the longest river in the world. This desperate act was carried out in the hope that perhaps an Egyptian would, against odds, be aroused to compassion and save the innocent Jewish boy.

Miriam goes to the river. "His sister stood from afar, to know what would happen to him [6]." She gazes at her brother from a distance to see how things would play themselves out. Miriam was a seven-year-old girl at the time. If he is captured by Pharaoh's soldiers, she knows she cannot save him; she is also probably too far away to help if the basket capsizes, nor will she be able to do much if an Egyptian takes the baby to his own home. Nor can she nurse the infant if he is crying for milk.

So what does she actually achieve by standing guard (besides finding out what might happen to him)? She achieves one thing. We may see it as a small achievement, but from the biblical perspective, it is grand.

When Pharaoh's daughter discovers baby Moses wailing, she naturally attempts to find a wet nurse to feed him. Moses, although starving, refuses to nurse from an Egyptian woman[9]. That was when Miriam steps in: "Shall I go and call for you a wet nurse from the Hebrew women, so that she shall nurse the child for you?" she asks the Egyptian princess[10]. The princess, Batya, agrees. Miriam calls the mother of the child. Batya gives her the child so that she can nurse him. Moses is curled up again in the bosom of his loving mother. He survives, and the rest is history.

Let's now engage in the "what if" hypothesis. Suppose that Miriam was absent from the scene, what would have occurred? It is likely that after observing that the baby is not taking to any Egyptian women's milk, Batya would have eventually realized, that Moses, whom she knew was a Jewish child (as she states clearly, "he is a child of the Hebrews"), might take better to the milk of a Jewish woman. She would have summoned a Jewish woman and Moses would have received his nourishment. It would have taken longer, Moses would have cried for another hour or two, but eventually, he would have been fed.

So what did Miriam accomplish? Miriam's actions caused Moses' hunger to last for a shorter period of time. Miriam alleviated Moses' hunger pangs sooner, shortening the span of his discomfort.

Miriam caused a young Jewish baby, a "Yiddishen kind," to weep for a few moments less. She alleviated the agony and distress of a baby.

Eighty-one years pass. Miriam is experiencing discomfort. She has a skin disease. The nation is supposed to travel, on route to the Holy Land. (This was before the sin of the spies, and the people were still moving towards the Land of Israel, hoping to fulfill the great dream.) But if they begin traveling now, Miriam's agony would be prolonged, maybe a few hours, maybe a few days, as long as the Hebrews are journeying. On the road, she would not have the opportunity to be quarantined for the requisite seven days.

Because she diminished the discomfort of her brother, eight decades later an entire nation—around three million people, men women, and children—plus the holy Tabernacle, the Ark, Moses, Aron, all of the leaders, and G-d Himself -- all waited. She minimized her brother's

pain, and now millions of people waited patiently to minimize her distress.

Because the energy you put out there is the same energy that comes back to you, in one form or another form.

Your Weeping Child

How many times a night do you wake up to your crying infant who yearns to be fed or just held? Mothers often awake every few hours (if they even get that amount of rest) to cradle and nurture their little wailing angels. Some husbands do not even take note; they sleep through the night and then wonder why their wives are exhausted the next day...

It can become stressful to tend continuously to the needs of our little ones. Babies certainly know how to let themselves be heard and we caretakers often become overwhelmed and drained in the process. The serene corridors of office buildings seem so much more serene and interesting.

Yet, as this Miriam episode teaches us, real history is not created in office buildings. It is created in the arms of mothers and fathers nurturing the souls G-d granted them to create our collective tomorrow. On a single day, a little boy was spared, for a short time, hunger pangs. Eight decades later, millions of people and G-d himself, interrupted their journey to pay homage to that individual gesture.

Every child needs a Miriam in his or her life--and all of us can become that Miriam. We meet or hear of children or teenagers who are in pain, starving for nourishment, love, validation, confidence, and meaning. We may say: They will grow up and learn how to manage. Or we may tend to them, be there for them, embrace them, and shorten the span of their agony.

And when we do that, as little Miriam did, millions will be thankful to us for making a difference in that one individual's life.

Godi and Shlomo

It was 1989. An Israeli Defense Force soldier named Godi Remon was shot by an Arab terrorist outside of the town of Ramallah. The Arab gunman assumed he was dead and moved on.

Shortly afterward, a young Israeli named Shlomo Bergman happened to be driving by and saw Godi bleeding on the ground. He brought him into his car and sped off to the nearest Israeli hospital. He underwent surgery and survived. Shlomo left the hospital minutes before the parents of the victim arrived.

Godi's mother was bothered by not being able to thank the mystery person who saved her son and tried unsuccessfully for a year to find out who he is. But to no avail.

Godi's parents put up a sign at their grocery store which they owned in the city of Ashdod, describing what happened. They reasoned that Israel is a small country and eventually they might find the person who saved their son.

Months passed with no response. Finally, one morning about a year later, Anat Bergman, Shlomo's mother, was visiting friends in Ashdod. She entered a grocery store and noticed the sign hanging by the door of the store. She asked the store owner who put up the sign. When Godi's mother said it was her, the two mothers embraced for a long time.

Then Shlomo's mother said, "Look at me -- you don't remember me?" "No", Godi's mother said, "I'm sorry. Did we meet before?"

"Yes," Shlomo's mother said. "Twenty years ago I used to live around here and I came all the time to buy basic groceries. One day you noticed that I looked really down and you asked me why I was down. I told you that I was going through a very difficult time and on top of that I was pregnant with my first child and planning on having an abortion because I could not with the mental and financial pressure. As soon as I said "abortion" you called your husband over and the two of you didn't seem to care about your own store but sat and patiently listened to my story and my challenges. I still remember what you said."

"You told me that it is true that I was going through a hard time, and that you understood how stressed out I was, but sometimes the greatest things in life come through the biggest difficulties. You spoke of the joy of being a mother and that the most beautiful word to hear in the Hebrew language is "Ima" (mother) when spoken by one's child... You

explained how all the challenges pale in comparison with the inner joy coming from raising a child, from embracing your little one, from cultivating a living miracle. You explained how with each child born, a new channel opens up in our lives, generating a greater consciousness, and more livelihood. You both spoke for a while with so much empathy, love, and sensitivity, until I was convinced that I should have this baby." Shlomo's mother continued, "I gave birth to the baby twenty years ago. My son Shlomo wouldn't have been alive if not for you. Two decades later, he was the one who saved your son, Godi's life."

You see, you saved my son's life; now he saved your son's life.

[1] Numbers 12: 1-16. [2] Rashi and others say that the Cushite woman was Tziporah, and Cushite, "black," is a euphemism for "beautiful." Miriam was criticizing Moshe for abstaining from physical relations with her. Daas Zekanim and Rashbam say that the Cushite was a second wife of Moshe, one that he had married during the forty years he was king of Kush, and she was criticizing him for marrying a Cushite woman, and not a Jewish one. (Ibn Ezra brings both explanations, and settles for Rashi's explanation.) Alshich suggests that Moses married a black woman, and Miriam felt he abstained because she was black. Miriam protested what seemed like a "racist" act. [3] Shabbos 97a – the opinion of Rabbi Akiva (Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseira argues with him.) [4] Numbers 12:13 [5] Sotah 8b and 9b. "With the measure one measures, he too is measured. Joseph the greatest among his brothers, personally took charge of his father Jacob's burial, and none other than Moses occupied himself with Joseph's burial. Moses personally took charge of the burial of Joseph, and none other than the Omnipresent occupied Himself with Moses' burial, as it is said, 'and He buried him in the valley.' [6] Exodus 2:4. [7] Deuteronomy 8:15. [8] This essay is based on Likkutei Sichos vol. 18 Behaalosecha. To study it inside with Rabbi Jacobson, and for the source sheets from which this essay is taken, please click here. [9] Rashi Exodus 2:7. [10] Exodus ibid.

## Separating Terumah and Maaser

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Shampooed Tevel

"I have been looking for a specialty shampoo that contains oat bran. Someone found it in a very expensive store, and it does exactly what I want. One day, after showering, I noticed the label says that it is made in Israel! Does this mean that it is prohibited as tevel (produce that did not have terumah or maaser separated)?"

Introduction:

The end of parshas Korach contains many references to various mitzvos that the Torah calls "terumah." In Modern Hebrew, any charitable donation is called a "terumah," but, in the Torah, this word means an "elevated portion" and can refer to numerous sanctified foods, including korbanos, challah, bikkurim, maaser, and what we usually call terumah and terumas maaser. The fact that the term "terumah" may refer to so many different things is one reason why a superficial reading of the end of parshas Korach can be confusing, unless you study it with Rashi or a different commentary (such as that of Rav Hirsch) that explains the parsha according to the Torah she'be'al peh.

The pesukim in parshas Korach that discuss what we call terumah read as follows: "And Hashem spoke to Aharon: Behold, I have hereby given you the guarding of my terumah... Of the best of the oil, of the best of the wine (tirosh) and grain, the first of what is given to Hashem I have given to you (Bamidbar 18, 1,12)."

Note that the Torah mentions terumah of oil, referring to the olive crop, of tirosh, usually understood to mean as yet unfermented wine (also known as unpasteurized grape juice), and of grain. This implies that the mitzvah min haTorah of separating terumah applies only to olive oil, wine and grain. Indeed, most authorities understand that, min haTorah, the requirement to separate terumos and maasros applies only to the five species of grain (wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats), grapes, olives, grape juice, wine and olive oil (see Sifra). The requirement to separate terumos and maasros on other fruits and vegetables is rabbinic.

In Chazal's terminology, the various gifts provided to the kohein and others are called matanos, gifts. These matanos have varying levels of sanctity:

- A. Very holy, that may be eaten only by male kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash and only when someone is completely tahor;
- B. Somewhat less holy, that min haTorah may be eaten anywhere by a kohein's immediate household, provided that they are completely tahor;
- C. Lesser sanctity that may be eaten by anyone, but only in Yerushalayim and when tahor;
- D. No sanctity at all, and, although required to be donated, may be eaten by anyone.

Seven of these "gift" agricultural mitzvos or matanos can be organized in the following way:

1. Bikkurim -- (sanctity level: B)

The first fruits of the seven species for which Eretz Yisrael is lauded, which are brought to the Beis Hamikdash. These are treated with the same level of sanctity as terumah, which we will explain shortly.

2. Terumah gedolah, usually called just "terumah" -- (sanctity level: B)

The separation from produce grown in Eretz Yisrael that the Torah requires we give to the kohein. There is a requirement miderabbanan to separate terumah and maasros also outside Eretz Yisrael, but, according to most authorities, only in lands that are adjacent to Eretz Yisrael. (Because of space considerations, we will not be discussing the vast halachic literature that debates whether there is a requirement to separate terumos and maasros today in countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, which border on Eretz Yisrael. For the same reason, we will not discuss where the borders of Eretz Yisrael are, germane to these mitzvos. We will also not discuss the question as to whether there is a mitzvah to separate terumos and maasros on produce grown by a non-Jew on a non-Jew's land, because the accepted practice, going back hundreds of years, is to be lenient.)

How much terumah?

Min haTorah, there is no minimal requirement how much terumah one must give to a kohein; to quote Chazal, one wheat kernel given as terumah exempts an entire silo. In the days when the kohein could become completely tahor and then eat the terumah, Chazal instituted a minimal percentage of the crop that should be designated as terumah (one part in sixty, or 1.67%), but preferred that an individual give more. They allowed the individual latitude to decide how much he wants to donate as terumah: one part in forty (2.5%), one part in fifty (2%), or the minimum I mentioned above, one part in sixty (1.67%).

Produce that has not yet had terumos and maasros separated is called tevel, and may not be eaten or used.

We should also note that, according to accepted halacha, the obligation of separating terumos and maasros today is only miderabbanan, even on grain, grapes, and olives, until such time that most Jews, again, live in Eretz Yisrael.

3. Maaser rishon -- (sanctity level: D, but only after the terumas maaser is separated)

The first tithe (one tenth), given to the levi.

4. Terumas maaser -- (sanctity level: B)

A tithe separated by the levi from the maaser rishon that he receives, which the levi then gives to a kohein. Since the levi receives ten percent of the crop after terumah has been separated, and he, in turn, is separating ten percent of what he receives, terumas maaser adds up to one hundredth, 1%, of the crop.

Terumah and terumas maaser have the same sanctity, which means that, min haTorah, both of them may be eaten anywhere, but only by a kohein and most of his family and household members and only when both they and the terumah are completely tahor.

The accepted halacha is that the remaining maaser rishon has no sanctity, and may be eaten by anyone, notwithstanding the fact that there is a dispute among tana'im concerning this issue. If the levi chooses to, he may sell the maaser or give it away to whomever he chooses. Furthermore, none of the restrictions we will discuss shortly regarding redemption or use applies to maaser rishon.

A kohein or levi who has his own produce must separate terumos and maasros, although he may then keep what he is entitled to as a kohein or levi (Rambam, Hilchos Maasros 1:13; for details of this law, see Mishpetei Aretz, Terumos Umaasros 13:9).

5. Maaser sheini -- (sanctity level: C)

A second tithe, separated in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the seven-year shemittah cycle, that the owner keeps with plans to eat in Yerushalayim when he is tahor. Alternatively, the owner may redeem the maaser sheini's kedusha onto coins. The coins are brought to Yerushalayim and used to purchase food that is eaten in Yerushalayim. Maaser sheini that is tahor may be eaten by anyone who is tahor and maaser sheini that is redeemed may be eaten by anyone and does not need to be kept tahor.

6. Maaser ani -- (sanctity level: D)

A different form of "second tithe," given in years when there is no maaser sheini (i.e., the third and sixth years of the shemittah cycle), that is given to the poor. Once separated, this maaser has no special sanctity and may be eaten by anyone, even by someone who is tamei, but it is property of the poor. The owner of the field decides to which poor person he gives the maaser ani.

Since shemittah produce is ownerless, there are, usually, no terumah and maasros separations that year. In the unusual instances where there are, which is a topic for a different time, there is extensive halachic discussion whether one separates maaser sheini or maaser ani.

7. Challah -- (sanctity level: B)

A portion given to the kohein separated from dough. This "gift" has the level of sanctity of terumah.

Separating and giving

In general, most of these matanos require two stages to fulfill the mitzvah. The first stage is the proper separation, usually preceded by a brocha, and the second stage is giving the matanah to the appropriate party. As I mentioned above, in the

case of maaser sheini, the owner keeps or redeems the produce (rather than giving it to someone). After redeeming maaser sheini, the fruit has no more sanctity.

There are several situations in which there is a mitzvah to separate terumos and maasros, but there is no mitzvah to give the matanah to a kohein, levi or poor person. The most common situation is when it is uncertain, a safek, whether there is a requirement to separate terumos and maasros. We will discuss shortly one such example. In these instances, you are not required to give away the terumos and maasros. They are yours to sell, or even to eat, if there is no sanctity involved, such as maaser rishon or maaser ani (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 371:1).

There is another practical halachic difference when it is uncertain if there is a requirement to separate terumos and maasros: no brocha is recited prior to separating the terumos and maasros.

Using terumah

In today's world, terumah has relatively little market value. Terumah tehorah may be eaten only by a kohein or his family members who are tehorim. Since we have no parah adumah, we cannot become fully tehorim today and therefore, no one can eat terumah tehorah.

Although terumah may not be eaten today, there are still two potential uses that may be made of terumah. Terumah olive oil may be kindled, but the light must be used by a kohein. If the terumah olive oil is tehorah, care must be taken not to make it tamei. Terumah temei'ah may be used by a kohein for kindling without this concern.

There is also the possibility of using terumah for feeding animals owned by a kohein, a topic that I will leave for a different time, because of space considerations.

The question now becomes what to do with terumah tehorah that has no practical use.

At the beginning of this article, I quoted the pasuk that Aharon was instructed regarding the guarding of my terumah. The term guarding, mishmeres, means that one is required to make sure the terumah is not actively destroyed or made tamei. Since no one is tahir today, terumah may not be eaten. If the terumah is itself tamei, it is destroyed, preferably by burning it. If the terumah is tehorah, we are neither permitted to eat it nor to destroy it because of the law of mishmeres. What does one do with it?

This is a dispute among halachic authorities, and one of the unusual situations in which Rav Moshe Feinstein disagreed with the opinion of rishonim, without finding a source in rishonim that agreed with him. According to the Sefer Haterumah and the Tur (Yoreh Deah, 331), the halacha requires that terumah tehorah be buried, so that no one mistakenly eats it. Rav Moshe rules that this is considered destroying terumah, since this causes the terumah to rot, which is prohibited. Instead, he requires placing the terumah tehorah in a place where it will be left undisturbed until it decays (Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:129). A bin or box set aside for this purpose is called a pach terumah, where the terumah tehorah remains until inedible. When it decomposes to this extent, one may dispose of the produce in the regular garbage.

Why is this true?

Once terumah or tevel can no longer be eaten, it loses its sanctity. Although the concept that decay eliminates sanctity seems unusual, this is only because we are unfamiliar with the mitzvot where this principle applies. Other mitzvot where this concept exists are shevi'is, terumah, challah, bikkurim, maaser sheini and reva'ie (Rambam, Hilchos Terumos Chapter 11; Hilchos Maaser Sheini 3:11; Hilchos Shevi'is 5:3). We burn the special challah portion after separating it only because it has become tamei. If the challah did not become tamei, one may not destroy it but must place it somewhere, until it decays on its own.

Shampooed tevel

At this point, we can discuss our opening question:

"I have been looking for a specialty shampoo that contains oat bran. Someone found it in a very expensive store, and it does exactly what I want. One day, after showering, I happened to look at the label and noticed that it says that it is made in Israel! Does this mean that it is prohibited as tevel?"

Indeed, our questioner may have surmised correctly that the oat bran might have once had the status of tevel. If the oats were grown for food, one would be required to separate from them terumos and maasros, and the oats would have a status of tevel until these are separated. However, if the oats were grown for animal feed, there would be no requirement terumos and maasros and no status of tevel, because oats are commonly grown as forage.

More germane to our discussion is that, even if the oats were grown for food, once mixed into the shampoo as an ingredient, they become inedible and lose their status as tevel. Whether they naturally decayed to a stage where they became inedible or were processed or mixed until that point, the kedusha of tevel, terumos and maasros is lost. So, our consumer may continue using the shampoo without any halachic concerns.

Other terumah rules

Cultivated food items, other than grain, grapes and olives, that grew in Eretz Yisrael are obligated in terumos and maasros midrabbanan. There are a few

interesting exceptions: for example, there is no obligation to separate terumos and maasros from mushrooms; since they are fungi, they are not considered as growing from the ground. This also affects their brocha, which is shehakol and not ha'adamah.

If I might digress, here is an interesting nifla'os haborei experiment that you can perform yourself. Take some raw vegetables and microwave them for two minutes, and then do the same with some raw mushrooms. When you microwave the mushrooms there will be a considerable amount of water, which does not happen when you microwave the veggies. The reason is that vegetables draw water from the earth through their root, and therefore have no need to store a lot of water in the plant itself. However, mushrooms have no means to draw nutrients, including water, from the soil, and therefore store the water that they need in their cells. When you microwave them, this water is now released.

Ownerless produce

There is no requirement to separate terumos or maasros from produce that is ownerless, such as wild-growing wheat. Similarly, that which grows during shemittah year and is treated as hefker is exempt from terumos and maasros.

Plants grown as fodder, borders, cloth, seed, dyes or anything other than food are exempt from terumos and maasros. If part of the plant is eaten, but the seeds are usually not, the seeds are exempt from terumos and maasros. Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach ruled that produce such as barley, oats and corn (maize), which are predominantly grown as fodder, are exempt from terumos and maasros, unless they were originally planted for human consumption. In his opinion, if they were planted for food, and the farmer subsequently changed his mind and decided to use them as fodder, they are still obligated in terumos and maasros, since they were originally planted for food (Maadanei Aretz, Terumos 2:7:2).

Herbs and spices

As a general rule, plants grown for use only as herbs, spices or tea are exempt from terumos and maasros. It is disputed whether plants whose product is sometimes eaten as a dip is exempt from terumos and maasros. Therefore, accepted practice is to separate terumos and maasros from them without reciting a brocha first, and the owner may then keep the terumos and maasros, as explained above.

What does this mean in practice? Plants such as aloe vera (usually not eaten, but even when consumed, only as an herb), cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg are all exempt from terumos and maasros. However, mustard, ginger and fenugreek should have terumos and maasros separated without a brocha. Although all three of these are used as spices, they also are made into dips or other foods, such as prepared mustard, candied ginger, or chilba, a popular Yemenite dip whose main ingredient is fenugreek.

Peels and shells of fruit that was not maasered are exempt from terumos and maasros if the peels and shells are usually not eaten. However, the peels of apples, pears and plums must be maasered, either as part of the entire fruit, or by themselves. In places where watermelon seeds are considered a snack food, as in Eretz Yisrael today, they are obligated in terumos and maasros. The Chazon Ish ruled that candied orange peel is exempt from terumos and maasros because oranges are not grown for the peel; it is a by-product that someone figured out how to make useful.

Many years ago, when I was involved in kashrus supervision in North America, a similar shaylah was raised. A company that I was overseeing produced, predominantly, various citrus and mint flavors and products, many of them extracted or distilled. Among the many raw materials that were used were oils extracted from the peels of various citrus fruits, which were then processed and used as flavors. Some of the oils were extracted from Israeli produce, and the question was whether there was a requirement to separate terumos and maasros from these peels. The poskim of the kashrus organization ruled that there was no requirement to do so, since peels of citrus fruits are not usually eaten.

Conclusion

Many generations had to be content with reading about Eretz Yisroel and imagining what it might be like to visit. We are fortunate to live in a time when visiting and living in Eretz Yisroel is a reality, and we should be filled with hakoras hatov that we can traverse the land that was promised to our forefathers. Inhabiting our native land includes many special laws that apply within its borders, and we should all be familiar with these special laws. Eretz Yisroel and its special mitzvot provide us with a direct relationship with Hashem, for which we should all strive.

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**Drasha**

**By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Parshas Korach

Job Placement

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.

Dedicated in Honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Yitzchok Youlus of Silver Spring Maryland Mazel Tov to the parents, Rivka and Menachem Youlus and the entire family.

Good Shabbos!

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### Rabbi 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 Hamikdash, 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 of 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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*The Wisdom of a Minhag*  
*Rabbi Hershel Schachter*

The Rambam's sefer halacha which is entitled Mishna Torah is usually referred to by its nickname, the Yad Hachazaka. The letters of the work Yad add up to fourteen in gematria, and there are fourteen different volumes in the Mishna Torah. One of those volumes, the Sefer Hafla'ah, deals with all of the halachos that take effect by a person making a declaration: neder, shvuah, nezirus, etc. Regarding all other matters of hafla'ah, speaking is required. This is established based on the possuk in Parshas Vayikra that speaks about a person accepting a shvuah "l'vateh b'sfosayim - to pronounce with one's lips." Even if one made up his mind to accept a neder or a shvuah, it is not binding until he pronounces it with his lips.

In Parshas Korach, the Torah records that hafrashas teruma is an exception to this rule. Commenting on the possuk, "v'nechshav lochem terumaschem" the Gemara teaches us that in addition to the correct simple reading of the possuk, the Torah sheb'al peh adds an additional level of interpretation, i.e. that terumah can take effect by the owner of the produce just thinking. There was a common practice in Europe that when the women would bake bread, cake, or cookies and would be mafrish challah, they would recite the beracha over the performance of the mitzvah but would not declare that the little bit of dough that they separated should become challah. Since we assume that challah has the exact same dinim as terumah, the kedushas challah takes effect even though the women never declared it as such, since they clearly had in mind that the little dough that they separated should become challah. Rabbi Akiva Eiger in his commentary on Yoreh Deah quotes from the She'iltos, who lived in Bavel and thus was only mafrish challas chutz la'aretz, that this is not the proper practice, and it would be more correct if after reciting the beracha over the mitzvah of hafrashas challah, women would state that this little bit of dough should become challah.

The Netziv, in his commentary on the She'iltos, develops a fascinating idea to defend the practice of women to bedafka not declare the piece of dough to be challah. The Gemara tells us that just as a nazir is not permitted to come in contact with a meis, so too a person who happens to be located in a cemetery should not accept upon himself a neder nezirus. Why does the Gemara say "just as...so too"? Why are these two things the same? Obviously the Gemara understood that the nature of the prohibition of the nazir coming in contact with the meis is that one is not permitted to bring about a situation where you will have a nazir tamei. Therefore, one who is in the cemetery and accepts upon himself a neder nezirus has brought into existence a situation of a nazir tamei. The Netziv suggests that maybe the same applies to teruma tamei'ah. The Gemara understands from the possuk, "Mishmeres terumosai" that one must be careful not to cause teruma to become tamei. Similarly, we ought to say that one who has dough which is tamei is not allowed to be mafrish challah from it because he is bringing into existence teruma tamei'ah. Today everyone is tamei and since flour is mixed with water to make dough, it was already huchshar l'kabeil tuma, so the dough will become tamei. This should lead us to say that we are not allowed to be mafrish challah, but that is not possible! Dough or bread that is tamei may not be eaten until you are mafrish challah from it! Therefore the mishna tells us explicitly that the mitzvah to be mafrish challah applies even in a situation where the whole dough is tamei.

The custom that women developed not to declare the kedushas challah is based on the assumption that if one has in mind that something should become teruma or challah it will only have a lower level of kedushas terumah. The full kedushas terumah will only take effect if one will make a declaration, "harei zeh teruma". Since for the purpose of removing the issur level it is sufficient to have in mind that this should become challah or teruma, it is really not permissible to declare that it should become challah because one would be unnecessarily adding an additional degree of kedusha to dough which is tamei. This was the Netziv's justification of the minhag of women for so many years to not declare the challah but rather to rely on the fact that they had in mind that it should become challah.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

**Dvar Torah Korach - Who has the most important role in our Synagogue services?**

29 June 2022

Who has the most important role in our synagogue services?

Right at the end of Parshat Korach, the Torah gives us details of 'maaser' – the tithe that was given to the Leviim, the Levites. The Torah informs us that the tithe was not to be considered holy:

*"ki sachar hu lachem chelef avodatchem b'ohel mo'ed." – "because it was to be a wage to the Levites in exchange for all that they did in the tent of meeting." (Bamidbar 18:31)*

One of the key roles that the Leviim had was to sing for the nation and lead them in prayer, and it is on this basis that many of our poskim, our decisors, tell us that a Cantor, a Chazzan, should receive a salary for what he's doing – because he takes on the role of the Levi in our synagogue services.

The Rashba goes one step further. Accepting that the Chazzan is like the Levi, the Rashba adds that on Yom Kippur the Chazzan in our synagogues is our Kohen Gadol – he is our modern day equivalent of the High Priest as he leads the nation in asking Hashem to atone for our sins.

It is here that we recognise how our tradition respects and treasures the importance of singing.

You know, if you want to find out how important something is, the best way is to do without it for some time and then you'll really appreciate it. We know, for example, how the absence of greeting on Tisha B'Av enables us to appreciate it all the more. Isn't this exactly what we discovered in the long periods during Covid when in Britain and elsewhere it was forbidden to sing in public? Then we recognised all the more how central and critically important shira, singing, is to us as we strive to come closer to the Almighty and raise our levels of spirituality.

Now that, Baruch Hashem, we are once again able to hold synagogue services as usual, let us never forget how critically important shira, singing, is for us, and how it is primarily through ruach, spirituality, that a synagogue service can transform our lives.

I therefore believe that the most important role that anybody can have in the synagogue service is to lead that service – to be the Chazzan – and thanks to our Chazzanim, all of us within the community are inspired to join in the service, to have incredible ruach, and thereby to be better people and to come closer to the Almighty.

*Shabbat shalom. Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.*

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**Korach - Treacherous Prominence**

Ben-Tzion Spitz

*Rust consumes iron and envy consumes itself. - Danish proverb*

Korach, Moses' first cousin, also from the tribe of Levi, was a great man in his own right. He was an elder, a knowledgeable sage, a gifted orator, wealthy beyond measure, touched by prophecy and a natural leader of men.

So, the question is, why did honored and prominent Korach unite with veteran troublemakers Datan and Aviram, raise a conspiracy of 250

other leaders of Israel and incite a doomed rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron?

The Chidushei HaRim on [Numbers 16:1](#) deepens the question by referencing a Midrash that states that God intended for Korach to be the titular leader of the Levites, in parallel to Aaron's leadership of the Kohens. Indeed, there was nobody else at Korach's level from amongst the other Levites for such a prominent position. Korach himself was cognizant of his exalted level, which may have been the beginning of his downfall.

According to the Chidushei HaRim, Korach's ruin came about from two related emotions: envy and arrogance. He became envious of another prominent cousin, Elizafan son of Uziel who had been given an important honor. That little seed of jealousy grew and corrupted the previously righteous sage until he was blinded by it. He was so blinded that it inflated his arrogance to a level that he started to throw baseless accusations against Moses. His envy, his arrogance and the resulting blindness were so complete, that he couldn't appreciate that he was attacking the man who was directly and expressly chosen by God to lead the nation, the man whom God declared was the humblest of all men. God's reaction is severe and immediate, and Korach's ruin is complete and permanent.

The 250 leaders who supported Korach are consumed by a heavenly fire when they recreate part of the Tabernacle service. Korach's allies, Datan and Aviram, all their household and possessions are swallowed up by a miraculously opened earth. It's not clear from the verses, which of the two dooms falls upon Korach personally. Some commentaries explain that both immolation by divine fire and getting swallowed by the earth occurred to Korach simultaneously for a particularly dramatic death for a formally great man.

While the cliché "the greater they are, the harder they fall," could very well be associated with Korach, his story is also a warning to all, no matter how low or high, of the dangers of the twin emotions of self-destruction: envy and arrogance. May we steer clear of both.

*Dedication - To the memory of Rabbanit Tova Rhein z"l.*

*Shabbat Shalom*

*Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.*

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**Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

**Parashat Korach – 5782 - Rebellion, Justice, and Mercy**

In Parashat Korach, we read about the rebellion led by Korach, a respected member of the nation, against Moses and Aaron. Among those in the opposition he led were also Datan and Aviram, two known troublemakers even back in Egypt, as well as two-hundred and fifty other respected leaders. It was a jumble of interests – Korach wanted authority in place of Moses or Aaron, the two-hundred and fifty leaders wanted to merit the priesthood and proximity to all sacred, whereas Datan and Aviram detested the tiring journey in the desert and wanted to go back to Egypt.

After Moses tried to calm the riot, turning to each of these groups, he and Aaron merited a Divine revelation in which G-d proposed ending the story the hard way:

*The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, "Dissociate yourselves from this congregation, and I will consume them in an instant.*

G-d was suggesting a solution that was unambiguous. He instructed Moses and Aaron to separate from the congregation and He, G-d, would end the story in an instant. But Moses and Aaron chose not to accept this suggestion:

*They fell on their faces and said, "O G-d, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, shall You be angry with the whole congregation?" (Numbers 16, 20-22)*

Note the special moniker Moses and Aaron used in addressing G-d: "the G-d of the spirits of all flesh." Rashi, the great biblical commentator, explained this in the following manner:

*O G-d, the G-d of the spirits: [G-d Who] knows the thoughts [of every man]. Your attributes are not like those of earthly beings. A mortal king against whom part of his country transgresses does not know who the*

sinner is, and, therefore, when he is angry, he metes out punishment upon them all. But as for You, all thoughts are revealed before You, and You know who the sinner is.

Moses and Aaron, facing a rebellion against them, suddenly became the nation's defense attorneys. Instead of accepting G-d's suggestion to destroy the nation in an instant, they claim that path to be faulty. Whoever sinned should be punished, but many members of the nation did not, so why should they be punished? Indeed, G-d accepts their argument and punishes only Korach and his men rather than the entire nation.

This isn't the first time we find this kind of conversation between G-d and Moses. Also after the nation sinned with the Golden Calf, crying out "These are your gods, O Israel," G-d said to Moses, "Now leave Me alone, and My anger will be kindled against them so that I will annihilate them, and I will make you into a great nation." There, too, Moses responded with words of placation and appeasement, "Why, O Lord, should Your anger be kindled against Your people...?"; and again, after the nation sinned with the spies and badmouthed the Promised Land, G-d proposed the same difficult solution and Moses asked, "Please forgive the iniquity of this nation in accordance with your abounding kindness."

What we are revealing here is a pattern. G-d proposes punishing the nation severely and Moses positions himself in their defense and appeases G-d's anger. Actually, Moses is behaving as expected. G-d's difficult suggestion acts as an invitation to Moses to present the softer side of reality, the conciliatory and pacifying stance.

In kabbalistic language, what we see here is the appearance of the attribute of justice and the attribute of mercy. Justice demands complete, rigid retribution; punishment for sinners. However, mercy fosters loving-kindness, compassion, and a way toward repair. When G-d tells Moses that He is interested in destroying the nation, this is the attribute of justice. And when Moses is conciliatory and asks for clemency for the nation, the attribute of mercy overcomes the attribute of justice.

The attribute of mercy must come from the direction of Moses. As a leader, a spiritual teacher, a representative of the public, Moses is repeatedly required to develop in himself the attribute of mercy. Even when the nation sins again and again, and even when the rebellion is against him personally, Moses does not accept the attribute of justice he hears from G-d. It is the default option, in an extreme way, so that Moses will take on the role of leader and impose the attribute of mercy over that of justice.

*The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

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#### **Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

#### **Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Korach**

#### **Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

**פרשת קרח תשפ"ב**

**ויקה קרח**

#### **Korach separated himself. (16:1)**

The literal translation of *va'yikach* is "and he took," which, in this case, is translated as Korach separating himself. *Rashi* explains *Lakach es atzmo liheyos nechelak mitoch ha'eidah*; "He took himself to one side to be separate from the assembly." *Rashi's* exposition is based upon the premise that *lokach* is a transitive verb, which means that he must have taken something. What was that something? Thus, *Rashi* teaches that he took himself by separating himself from the community. Perhaps we might add to this. By his very nature, a Jew wants to observe Torah and *mitzvos*. Those who do not have fallen prey to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*. Therefore, the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Geirushin* (Perek 2) writes concerning one who defies *halachah* and refuses to give his wife a get, divorce, the *bais din* is permitted to compel him to do so – even if it involves corporeal punishment. The reason for this is: Every Jew wants to do the right thing; every Jew wants to follow *halachah*. Under certain circumstances, some have fallen subject to the *yetzer hora*. The punishment will "release" the *yetzer hora's* hold on the person and allow for the "real Jew" to emerge. Likewise, Korach was born and raised along the proper lines of adherence to the Torah dictate. He was now

acting as an adversary to Torah because he took himself out. He forcibly removed himself from the community.

I came across the *Mishmor HaLeviim* in which *Horav Moshe Mordechai Schlesinger, zl*, cites the *Igeres Teiman*. The *Igeres Teiman*, in turn, cites the *Rambam* concerning the importance of permeating our psyche with *zichron Maamad Har Sinai*, remembering the Revelation at Mount Sinai. Furthermore, one must inculcate this verity into the minds and hearts of his offspring, as this will ensure that Torah will never be forgotten. This is the foundation of our *emunah*, faith, in Hashem. The Revelation at *Har Sinai* was unprecedented and stands as the greatest, most prodigious illuminating Revelation to be experienced by an entire nation together. It will never be repeated that an entire nation would see and hear G-d. The *Rambam* concludes with his famous epistle: "The Creator, may He be blessed, has assured much like one who is a guarantor for his friend, that anyone who stood at *Har Sinai* believes in the prophesy of Moshe *Rabbeinu*... he and his children and all future generations... Therefore, you should know that anyone who has turned away from the law that was given at *Har Sinai* is not among those who stood at *Har Sinai*." In other words, a Jew who apostatizes himself – who is an *apikores*, who denies *Torah min ha'Shomayim* and the veracity of Moshe's *nevuah* – does not descend from anyone who experienced the Revelation.

*Rav Schlesinger* asks the question that is on everyone's mind when he learns *Parashas Korach*. This man denied *Torah min Ha'Shomayim* and *nevuas Moshe*. He certainly stood at *Har Sinai* and received the Torah like everybody else. What happened? According to the *Rambam*, it is impossible for someone who experienced *maamad Har Sinai* to become an *apikores*. Korach seems to disprove this hypothesis.

The *Steipler Gaon, zl*, explains that the *Rambam's* statement holds true on condition that no circumstances or reasons undermine one's *emunah*. One who falls prey to his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, whose desire for the prohibited, unclean and impure is too much with which to grapple; one who is overwhelmed with *middos ra'os*, evil character traits – will override his innate *emunah* to the point that he will sink deeper and deeper into the muck of sin, such that he will have difficulty extricating himself. A classic example is Korach, who became insulted and angry at being passed over for the *nesius*, leadership, of his tribe. As a result of his unabashed arrogance, he lost control of his senses and lashed out at Moshe and forthwith followed up with his heretical diatribe against Hashem and His Torah. Korach stood at the base of *Har Sinai* and heard Hashem's declaration, *Anochi Hashem*. What happened? His *middos/yetzer hora* happened.

*Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, posits that regardless of the Heavenly assurance that one who stood at *Sinai* will retain his belief in Hashem, and this will be transmitted through the generations, it does not sidestep one's *bechirah*, free-will. Furthermore, we cannot forget that the greater one is – the more overpowering is his *yetzer hora*. Yes, it should all be guaranteed – until the advent of *Moshiach* – that a Jew will always be a believer. Free-will, however, is part of the dynamics of Judaism. We make our choices. One who chooses the path of evil will have to live with the consequences of his decision.

**ויקה קרח**

#### **Korach separated himself. (16:1)**

Korach earned the infamous nomenclature of *baal machlokes*, the paradigmatic quarrelsome person. This is in addition to *Chazal* labeling him an *apikores*, heretic. He earned these ignominious titles by virtue of his mutiny against Moshe and Hashem. When we sit back and analyze what took place, we wonder what Korach requested that was inappropriate. He complained to Moshe that he had been passed over for a distinguished leadership position. He said, "My father's brother had four sons. Amram was the oldest. His two sons, Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen*, both took the top positions of leadership. Who then should be next in line, if not I, Yitzhar's son? (Yitzhar was the brother of Amram.) Instead, Moshe chose Elitzfan *ben Uziel*, a younger cousin of Korach, who was Kehas *ben Yitzhar's* eldest son. Korach's first mistake was intimating that this was Moshe's decision. Moshe did not make his own decisions. Hashem did. Korach essentially argued with G-d. We

can ask a similar question concerning Korach's dispute of the law of *Tzitzis*, which requires every garment to have *Tzitzis*, fringes. Korach questioned: if one strand of *techeiles*, purple wool, exempts the *tallis*, so, surely, a garment made completely of *techeiles* should be exempt. On the surface, his question had basis. Once again, he missed the most important principle: Everything comes from Hashem: every decision; every leadership choice; every *halachah*. Hashem declared that a garment of *techeiles* requires *Tzitzis*. It is what it is, and we accept Hashem's assertion. We do not question Hashem.

*Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl*, quotes Rabbi Meir, who declared (*Eiruvim* 13b) that he could render one hundred and fifty logical reasons for purifying a *sheretz*, creepy creature/insect, which is deemed *tamei*, ritually impure. The question is asked: If Rabbi Meir was so certain that his logic was solid, why did he not purify the *sheretz*? *Rav Neiman* quotes the *Alter, zl, m'Kelm*, who derives from here that one does not rely (basic *halachah*) on his own *seichel*, cognitive analysis. If the Torah states that a *sheretz* is *tamei*, we must believe that not a single one of Rabbi Meir's logical deductions are correct. We follow the Torah; we follow Hashem; we do not question.

Throughout the generations, some have thought that by their brilliant deductions, they could find loopholes in *halachah* through which they could alter tradition. We see what has resulted from their brand of *halachic* analysis. Korach had reasons to question, to dispute, but he forgot that we do not contravene Hashem. The Torah need not conform to our line of thinking. We must adjust our thought process to understand the Torah. Korach did not get it.

**רב לכם כי כל העדה כלם קדשים ובתוכם ד' ומדוע תתנשאו על קה ד'**

**It is too much for you! For the entire assembly – all of them are holy and Hashem is among them. Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem? (16:3)**

Nothing is as audaciously offensive as a despot who makes use of his Torah knowledge to undermine Torah leadership and mutiny against Hashem. Korach confronted Moshe *Rabbeinu* with a *halachic* query. He and all of his henchmen came dressed in garments fashioned completely of *techeiles*, turquoise wool. He asked derisively, "Does a *tallis* made completely of *techeiles* require one strand of *techeiles* thread in the *Tzitzis*?" Moshe replied, "Yes." The fact that a garment is made of *techeiles* does not exempt it from the *techeiles* requirement of *Tzitzis*. This is what Korach was waiting for. He pounced back, "If a single thread is sufficient to exempt an entire garment, does it not stand to reason that an entire garment of *techeiles* should not require one more strand?" Then Korach went on to compare the nation to a garment that is completely made of *techeiles*, since all of the people are holy and Hashem resides among them.

Unquestionably, Korach rewrote the book on demagoguery. His despotism had sunk to a nadir never expected of a person of his distinction. Even the lowest of the low, however, require some basis upon which to build their foundation of evil. What possessed Korach to think that he could dispute Moshe? As Hashem's chosen leader of *Klal Yisrael*, Moshe led *Klal Yisrael* out of Egypt and initiated Hashem's splitting of the Red Sea, followed by the descending of the *manna*, and climaxing in bringing down the *Luchos* and the Giving of the Torah. Was Korach so insane as to question Moshe's leadership? Never have we had a leader of Moshe's distinction. Yet, Korach questioned and undermined his leadership. On what basis?

*Horav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer, zl*, explains that Korach and his followers contended that Moshe's successful leadership was due to the fact that Hashem was a part of the Jewish congregation. Hashem walked/traveled with them. Is it any wonder that all of Moshe's exploits achieved extraordinary success? A nation that heard Hashem's voice and experienced the greatest Revelation known to mankind certainly did not require Moshe to be their leader. The people were all holy because Hashem was among them. This is what Korach intimated with *Rav lachem*, "It is too much to you! For the entire assembly – all of them are holy and (because) Hashem is among them." What right do Moshe and Aharon have to lord over the nation, when, in fact, it is all Hashem's doing?

*Rav Yosef Nechemiah* posits that their complaint was based in the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis*. The Torah instructs us *U're'isem oso u'zechartem es kol mitzvos Hashem*; "You shall see it (the *Tzitzis/techeiles* strand) and (as a result) remember all of the *mitzvos* of Hashem." How does this happen? *Chazal (Tanchuma Shelach)* explain that looking at the turquoise color of the *techeiles* brings to mind the color of the sea. This, in turn, inspires one to consider the heavens (similar color), which will compel him to contemplate the Heavenly Throne. Thus, *Tzitzis* launch a sort of domino effect, whereby one thinks of and comes closer to Hashem. Korach contended that if a strand of turquoise wool can bring one to think of Hashem, surely, if Hashem is in the camp, they had all of their bases covered. This is why *Chazal* attribute Korach's insurrection to his misunderstanding of the *mitzvah* of *Tzitzis*.

**וידבר אל קרח ואל כל עדתו**

**He (Moshe Rabbeinu) spoke to Korach and to his entire assembly. (16:5)**

Either debated, dissenting opinions or the fire of controversy can characterize disagreements based in Torah. *Chazal (Pirkei Avos 5:17)* label the controversy of Korach *v'adaso*, and his congregation, as a *machlokes she'lo l'shem Shomayim*, controversy not for the sake of Heaven. It is a disagreement which undermines the very underpinnings of Torah Judaism. Korach *v'adaso* stand in contrast with the two classic debaters of the *Mishnah*, Hillel and Shammai, who debated *l'shem Shomayim*. Interestingly, concerning Hillel and Shammai, both disputants are named, while in the controversy that surrounded Korach and Moshe, it is called the *machlokes* of Korach *v'adaso* – no Moshe – just Korach and his assembly.

*Horav Aharon Walkin, zl (Pinsker Rav)*, explains that *Chazal* are alluding to the cause of the widespread controversy that enveloped so many. It was *adaso* – his assembly. Had Korach himself met with Moshe *Rabbeinu* and stated his critique, they would have worked it out. We find differing opinions between Torah leaders throughout the generations. When the fire of *machlokes* reaches the periphery, however, the congregation who has nothing to do with their lives other than fan the flames of dissention until they reach conflagration status – causes the debate to lose its amicability and become ugly. The members of the congregation lose respect for one another. This is what occurred in the Korach controversy. It was the *adas Korach* who turned the variance of opinion into a raging inferno of discord. They were unlike Hillel and Shammai whose respect and love for one another never waned. Their exchange of views was for the purpose of clarifying *halachah*. It was all for the sake of glorifying Heaven. They might have disagreed – but it never became personal.

**וידעתם כי נאצו האנשים האלה את ד'**

**Then you shall know that these men provoked Hashem. (16:30)**

The best way to extricate oneself from *machlokes* is to circumvent it. When a person suffers an indignity, or when someone whom we respect and love suffers an indignity or is slandered, our knee-jerk reaction is to put the other fellow in his place. We want to teach him a lesson, so that he would never again be cavalier with another's emotions. That, in and of itself, is the beginning of *machlokes*. The best way to stop a *machlokes* is to prevent it from starting. The following two stories are about individuals, both holy, both whom I had the *z'chus* of knowing. Both of them did anything within their power to maintain peace and harmony, not only in their own community, but within all *Klal Yisrael*.

Shortly after the *Bobover Rebbe, Horav Shlomo, zl*, arrived in America, a local American rabbi slandered this wellspring of sensitivity and love for all Jews. It was the typical case in which one person thought that someone was infringing on his turf. What is a better way to deal with this issue than a preemptive slanderous strike against the incursor? It may be hard to believe that a Torah leader, a respected *Rav* and teacher, would stoop to such acrimonious, loathful activity, but that is the nature of fear generated by envy. This rabbi thought that he would lose everything that he had achieved. He thought slander was the effective way to combat this alleged threat. The fact that his slander consisted of conjecture and lies did not matter to this flawed person. He was not about to share his turf with anyone.

The *Rebbe* was an individual of impeccable character. His sterling *middos*, character traits, were among his greatest attributes. The rabbi's vilifying remark, however, became downright humiliating, to the point that the *Rebbe* could no longer ignore this man's diatribe. The *Rebbe* summoned all his *chassidim* to convene in the large *shul*. He was planning to address the entire assemblage. This was it. Finally, they would have the *Rebbe's* response to the unfounded insults that had been hurled at him. Everyone was in a fighting mood. They were in for a surprise.

The *Bobover Rebbe* entered the main sanctuary and ascended to the lectern that stood right in front of the *Aron HaKodesh* which housed the Torah scrolls. He scanned the assembly and began to speak, "I am declaring to everyone assembled in this *bais hamedrash*, as I stand in front of the holy Ark, that I absolutely forbid anyone from fighting on my behalf! My honor is my honor, and it will remain my honor, but only if everyone acts appropriately and does not take sides. Whoever does not obey me has no place in this *bais hamedrash*!"

The *Rebbe* had spoken for about fifteen seconds, but it was a speech that impacted everyone in that room and was remembered for generations. The night was not yet over. The *Rebbe* was not finished with his preemptive circumvention. He asked his *gabbai*, attendant, to take him to the home of the rabbi who had spread the rumors about him. He knocked on the door, and the rabbi greeted him. When he realized who stood before him, his face became ashen. The *Rebbe* understood that words were not necessary. Indeed, they would have had a negative effect. It was action that was needed to dispel the *machlokes*. The *Bobover* embraced the rabbi and kissed him on the cheek!

He then spoke, "Dear rabbi, you may go to any one of my *chassidim*, and they will attest that I harbor no ill will against you. Just as we were once friends, we will continue to be so." End of story. It takes two people to create a *machlokes*. The *Bobover Rebbe* was not taking the bait. He would never be a party to *machlokes*.

The next story involves the *Bobover Rebbe's* son and successor, *Horav Naftali Tzvi*, *zl*. It was the night of *Pesach*, and the first *Seder* would soon begin. We take it for granted that every home is filled with joy and good cheer. Some are not, due to prevailing illness, family issues, financial problems, and – strife. When parents are constantly at one another's throats – they suffer, as do their children. *Pesach Seder* is an important family time. If the strife can be circumvented, it is quite possible for the family celebration of the *Seder* to minimize the discord fomenting between the parents. When people see how happy they could be, it often serves as a springboard for reconciliation and hope.

*Rav Naftali* was one of the last people to leave the *Bobover bais hamedrash*. He purposely left alone and waited for one of his close *talmidim*, students, to meet him a few blocks away. He was carrying a small package which he directed his student to drop off at a certain home, and give it to the father. The *bachur* was used to carrying out various "errands" for his *Rebbe*. He never asked – just did as he was told. This night, however, was different. The house that he went to was not one of *Bobover chassidim*, and he had never gone on a *shlichus*, errand, on *Pesach* night – specifically coordinated to arrive right before the *Seder*. He gathered up the courage to query the *Rebbe*. Why? What? Who? *Rav Naftali* explained that while they were not *Bobover chassidim*, he had heard from someone that marital bliss did not reign in their home. For whatever reason, the parents were always arguing with one another, and the innocent children suffered immeasurably. *Pesach* was a night especially dedicated to *chinuch*, educating children. If he could somehow quell whatever ill will existed between the parents, so that the *Seder* will be conducted as it should be, with both parents and children involved as a family – he will have resolved a significant problem. He had ordered a beautiful leather-bound *Haggadah* with the name of the wife engraved on it. The student was to give it to the husband as his gift to his wife. Why did *Rav Naftali* insist that it take place shortly before the *Seder* and not earlier? He feared that if too much time had elapsed, the gift would not be acknowledged. It had to be just right at the right time. It is not sufficient to simply perform a *chesed*. One must know when and how, so that it will be most effective.

## Va'ani Tefillah

יגעתי באנחותי אשה בכל לילה מטתי בדמעתי ערשי אמסה – *Yagati b'anchasi, aschech b'chol Laylah mitasi, b'dimasi arsi amseh*. I am weakened by my sigh; every night I drench my bed; with my tears, I soak my couch.

David *Hamelech* feared death, but not for the same reason that we fear death. We fear the unknown, the loss of opportunity in this physical world. David feared his inability to continue growing spiritually. The fear of having his spiritual ascendancy cut short rendered him weary with fear. The body can tolerate just so much. His emotions were frayed, his weeping so intense that his tears soaked his bed. *Eschech b'chol laylah*, *Horav Shimshon Pincus*, *zl*, explains that, "every night I drench my bed," is derived from *la'suach*, to swim. David claimed that he was able to swim in his tears. In order for one to swim in a pool, the pool must contain sufficient water to cover his body. When one goes into the water, he becomes completely enveloped by it, to the point that he becomes one with the water. The *Kabbalists* explain that when one immerses himself in a *mikvah*, he becomes suffused with the pure water. Thus, when he emerges, he is like a new person. David *Hamelech* was one with his tears. He became a part of them.

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שמעון בן גדליה ורייזל בת אליעזר

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Clarification of the strict opinion on Conversion

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The first mention of cancellation in case of non-observance of mitzvot appears in the 'Beit Yitzchak' responsa about a hundred years ago.

In previous columns, I did not go into the strict and lenient opinions on conversion, I just refuted the common mistake as if "all the rabbis" think that without a commitment to keep all the mitzvot, conversion is null and void. I also brought evidence from the de facto practice of eminent rabbis, who encouraged the conversion of members of Jewish families who intended to lead a traditional, rather than religious, lifestyle.

Since the issue is important and crucial, and all those who study it have an influence on its decision, I will continue to delve deeper into the opinions.

I will start with the strict opinions.

The strict (*machmir*) opinion was first clarified by Rabbi Yitzchak Shmelkes (1827- 1905) in the 'Beit Yitzchak' responsa (Vol.2, 100). Rabbi Yitzchak Shmelkes was one of the great poskim of his generation. He served as a rabbi in a number of congregations, and in 1894 was appointed Rabbi of Lvov, the capital of Galicia. In his responses, he also referred to new problems, such as electricity on Shabbat, and his position that electricity without a filament is forbidden *de'Rababan* (rabbinical) due to *shvut* (rabbinic prohibition) was accepted by many. He supported the Chovavei Tzion and objected to the Zionist movement, although his students and family members were active in 'Mizrahi', and he did not come out against them.

His response regarding conversion was written in 1876, and was printed in 1895. A few years later, his words had already begun to be quoted. Twenty years later, there were *Gedolim* (eminent rabbis) who actually followed his method with their own additions, such as Rabbi Grodzensky, author of the *Achiezer Responsa*. The *Haredi* public as a whole has fully adopted it, so much so that in quite a few books the method of most of the poskim before and during his days, was not mentioned. In the last generation, the fact that most of the rabbis who preceded him thought otherwise has almost been forgotten.

The Method of the 'Beit Yitzchak'

The question arose significantly in modern times, when many Jews stopped keeping mitzvot, and some even married non-Jews, but sought to preserve their Jewish identity and convert their male or female spouses.

Until 'Beit Yitzchak', the question was whether it was permissible to convert a non-Jewish female or male for the sake of marriage, and whether they were allowed to marry after the conversion, from the law of *natan al ha'nochr* (someone suspected of having had intimate relations with a non-Jewish woman), in which case *le-chatchila* (ideally), one should not marry the convert, but *bedi'avad* (after the fact), if one married her, he did not have to divorce her (*Yevamot* 24b). They also discussed the question of whether it is a non-Jew's right to convert, even though he will not keep the mitzvot, and will be punished for any sin he commits. However, they did not claim that without a sincere commitment to keep all the mitzvot – the conversion is invalid.

The 'Beit Yitzchak' (Vol.2, 100) as well, does not begin his responsum with this. For most of his response, he discusses the previous questions. In section 9,



however, for the first time he throws into the fray the opinion that if a ger (convert) did not sincerely intend to keep all the mitzvot, his conversion is null and void. At first, he is undecided, but in the end, he is decisive that this is the case. And so he wrote: "According to this, the gerim today, who due to our many iniquities, converted in the Ashkenazi country (Germany), and we know that even after that (conversion), they intend to have relations with a menstruating woman, profane the Sabbath, and eat non-kosher food ...are not considered a ger."

#### The Source

His reasoning was: just as Am Yisrael became a people by the covenant God made with them at Mount Sinai, and they agreed to receive the entire Torah by saying "na'aseh ve'nishma," ('we will do, and we will obey'), so too a ger enters into a covenant with God and the people of Israel by receiving all the mitzvot. And if he did not accept that – his conversion is void. He learned this from what our Sages said (Bechorot 30 b): "In the case of a gentile who comes to convert and takes upon himself to accept the words of Torah except for one matter, he is not accepted as a convert. Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Yehuda, says: Even if he refuses to accept one detail of rabbinic law, he is not accepted." (The common explanation for the Gemara is that it is a principled acceptance of all the mitzvot without denying one of them, but without a personal commitment to fulfill them).

#### The Answers to Questions about the Strict Opinion

His method was questioned, for we learn in the Gemara (Shabbat 68 a-b) about gerim who did not know about the prohibition of Avodah Zara (idol worship) and Shabbat, and therefore desecrated many Shabbats and worshipped idols, and the question of how many sin offerings they had to sacrifice. And if the conversion is void without a sincere intention to keep the mitzvot – then their conversion is void, and they do not have to bring sin offerings!

They respond, that these gerim agreed to keep all the mitzvot, but did not know them, since the halakha is that before conversion a ger is taught only a few mitzvot, so that he will not be deterred and turn away, because even a righteous ger cannot learn and keep all the mitzvot at once (SA 268:2). However, he is taught that we have 613 mitzvot, and in accepting the mitzvot, he undertakes to continue studying until he has fulfilled them all (Yevamot 47b). This indeed was their intention, except various things happened, and they did not have time to teach him, and so he continued to worship idols and desecrate Shabbat.

They also asked about Hillel, who converted a ger who did not intend to observe the Oral Torah, and a ger who wanted to observe only what he would be taught while standing on one foot, and a ger whose purpose of conversion was to serve as a High Priest, contrary to the Torah (Shabbat 31a). They explained according to what Tosefot clarified (Yevamot 109b, פ"ד 'ra'ah'): "Hillel knew that in the end they would be complete gerim."

#### The Conversion is Invalid if there is No Intention of Keeping all the Mitzvot

The 'Beit Yitzchak' further added that even if a ger said at the time of immersing in the mikveh that he intended to keep all the mitzvot, if in his heart he did not mean it, his conversion is invalid, because the intention of the heart is what determines conversion. Indeed, in matters of negotiation between a man and his fellow man, there is a rule that follows what a man has said verbally, and heart's intentions are not applicable, otherwise no commitment between a man and his friend would oblige, because one can always claim he meant in his heart something else; conversion, however, is a matter between man and God, the One who examines our inner selves and hearts, and if the non-Jew has not sincerely undertaken to keep all the mitzvot, he is not a ger. Not only that, but even if the ger claims he seriously intended to keep the mitzvot – as long as it can be deduced from his living conditions that he will probably not keep all the mitzvot ("umdena de'muchakh", or a "proven estimation"), or that in practice, after the conversion, he does not keep the mitzvot – his conversion is void.

#### The Questions on Accepting "All the Mitzvot"

The opinion of the poskim who rule strictly need clarification. How can a ger sincerely commit to keeping all the mitzvot? Is he able to commit honestly that he will never offend his friends, will never speak loshon ha'ra (slander), will never be tempted to cheat or evade taxes, will never cause bitul Torah, and when able, always help a friend?

True, one can answer that he undertakes to strive to keep all the mitzvot. Yet, one can still ask, what is the meaning of striving (in Hebrew, hishtadlut)? Because clearly, if he strives with all his might, he will succeed in keeping more mitzvot, and if he strives less – he will sin more. The question is how much of an effort he has to commit to in order for the conversion to apply.

#### The Time of Commitment

Another important question – we have learned that not all the mitzvot are taught to the ger before conversion, that it says only "teach him a few of the lighter mitzvot and a few of the more stringent mitzvot... Don't say too much about this, and don't get too specific either" (SA, YD, 268:2). In other words, there is no possibility that immediately after the conversion he will keep the mitzvot, because he still does not know how to keep them. For example, without thoroughly studying the laws of Shabbat, he probably will sin in the desecration of Shabbat, and it is agreed that he should not be taught all the details of Shabbat laws before conversion.

According to the strict opinion, the ger undertakes to study all the mitzvot after the conversion and to observe them. The question, however, is in how much time must he learn all the mitzvot and observe them? If at maximum speed – then the Beit Din (court) should determine a course of study tailored to each ger's talents, and if the ger does not undertake to do it honestly, the conversion is void. However, since there are no time limits, is the conversion valid even when the ger intends to progress for a hundred years until all the mitzvot are observed, and until then, many mitzvot will not be observed?

#### The Mitzvot that Different Groups Do Not Keep

In addition, there are mitzvot in which entire groups of Jews are negligent: there are groups that are negligent in the mitzvot of yishuv ha'aretz (settling the Land) and serving in the army, which are mitzvot that are equal in weight to the entire Torah. And there are groups that are negligent in setting times for Torah study and prayers in a minyan, and keeping the rabbinical laws of modesty. And there are groups that tend to sin by causing controversies and baseless hatred.

If, in the strict opinion, one must undertake to keep all the mitzvot in practice, it turns out that every convert who joins one of these groups, and behaves as is customary with them, according to members of other groups – his conversion is invalid.

#### We Must Explain that the Intention is to Lead a Religious Way of Life

Therefore, it must be explained that according to the opinion of the machmirim (strict poskim), the ger needs to undertake to lead a religious lifestyle as is customary in one of the religious or haredi circles, with the mitzvot most characteristic of the religious lifestyle being: Shabbat, kashrut, family purity, prayer and blessings, wearing a kippah for men, and clothing customarily worn by religious women. And although at first a ger will not be able to keep these and other mitzvot in all their details, since he sincerely undertook to lead a religious lifestyle – his conversion is valid.

#### The Logic of the Strict Opinion

Although the strict opinion does not have a solid basis in the Gemara and in the tradition of halakhic ruling, it makes a lot of sense. In the past, a person's religious identity was greatly defined. There was a huge difference between a Jew and a Gentile, and although there were Jews who committed many sins – as long as they did not convert to another religion, it was clear that they were Jews. This was reflected in their legal status, place of residence, dress and language, and of course their religious customs.

In modern times, following the granting of legal rights to every person, and in the wake of huge waves of immigration, national identity has been blurred, to the point where it is difficult to say that by accepting upon oneself to be a Jew and committing himself to the mitzvot, he does change his identity. For if he does not actually keep the mitzvot, he remains as he was, without any change.

Thus, "acceptance of the mitzvot," which in the past meant a principled acceptance of the Jewish religion, was interpreted as a complete commitment to keep all the mitzvot. And thanks to the logic of this position, many rabbis accepted it. In addition, there were those who added (Achiezer 3:26) that even if the ger thinks during the conversion to violate a certain mitzvah, even desecration of Shabbat for the purpose of earning a living – as long as he generally undertakes to lead a religious lifestyle, his conversion is valid.

In my next article, I will present the position of the lenient poskim, and attempt to delve deeper into explaining their position.

This article appears in the 'Besheva' newspaper and was translated from Hebrew.

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[CS - Came out late, so adding it]

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Jun 30, 2022, 6:46 PM

subject: **Rav Frand - A Tale of Two Wives**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1209 – The Chasam Sofer's Battle Against the Reform Movement. Good Shabbos!

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 110a) contrasts two wives – Korach's wife and the wife of Ohn ben Peles. The wife of Ohn ben Peles is associated with the beginning of the pasuk in Mishlei (14:1) "The wisdom of women builds the house..." while Korach's wife is associated with the end of that same pasuk – "...and the foolish one, in her hands she will destroy it."

There are different Midrashim which all say the same idea in different contexts regarding these two women. One Midrash states that Korach came home from the inauguration of the Leviim. The purification process by which the Leviim were dedicated to Service in the Mishkan involved their being shaved from head to toe. Furthermore, Moshe Rabbeinu made a tenufah with each of them (i.e., he lifted each of the Leviim and waved them back and forth).

Korach came home all shaven and his shocked wife asked him, "What happened to you?" Korach told her that Moshe did this to all the Leviim, and not only that but he picked them up and waved them around. Korach then described to his wife that Moshe dressed up his brother Aharon like a beautiful bride. Korach's wife mocked him: "What are you – an animal? You let Moshe shave you like a sheep?" She then asked, "What did Moshe tell you?" Korach answered, "He told

us the parsha of Tzitzis.” She said, “Moshe is making fun of you. First, he shaves you and picks you up like an animal. Then he tells you these ridiculous laws about Tzitzis. I will show you how ridiculous it is.” She took a garment that was totally made of techeles (dyed blue wool) and told her husband to inquire of Moshe whether such a garment also needed Tzitzis. Korach came back and told his wife that Moshe responded that such a garment indeed needed Tzitzis. She mocked this ruling: If a single strand of techeles on each corner of a white garment exempts the garment from further techeles, why does a garment that is entirely techeles need any additional blue threads?

This is what motivated Korach to start up with Moshe. His wife told him that he was a fool for meekly going along with whatever Moshe told him to do. This is what one woman did to her husband.

On the other hand, Ohn ben Peles’ wife was a woman “whose wisdom built her house.” She saved her husband. When Korach was trying to recruit him to be part of the rebellion, his wife convinced him that he had nothing to gain from it. “What difference does it make to you whether you are the lowly subordinate of Moshe Rabbeinu or the lowly subordinate of Korach?” Ohn ben Peles told his wife that her argument was persuasive, but he had already promised Korach that he would join his rebellion confronting Moshe and Aharon, and that Korach was on the way now to pick him up.

Mrs. Ben Peles came up with a plan to save her husband. She got him drunk and he fell asleep on his bed in the back of his tent. She sat at the door of the tent and removed her hair covering. Korach’s representatives saw her on the doorstep with her hair uncovered and they ran away so as not to gaze upon a woman dressed immodestly. In the meantime, they went to the Moshe-Korach confrontation without him, and they were subsequently swallowed up by the earth, but Ohn ben Peles was saved by his wife.

The Gemara here emphasizes the power of a wife, for good or for bad. A wife can goad her husband on to foolishly start up with a superior – which was the downfall of Korach, who otherwise was a pikeach (very clever person). On the other hand, a wife can be the salvation of her husband, sparing him embarrassment and tragedy, as was the case with Mrs. Ben Peles, who saved her husband.

I saw two very interesting comments on this Gemara and these Medrashim.

The first observation is that these were people who were willing to start up with Moshe Rabbeinu. Chazal say “Whoever disputes his Rabbi is like one who disputes the Divine Presence” (Sanhedrin 110a). Are these pious individuals or impious individuals? Yet these same people, who are willing to start a machlokes with Moshe Rabbeinu, run the other way as soon as they see a woman with her hair uncovered. This is incongruous. We would assume that such people are not observant of Torah and mitzvos at all. No! Their reaction to seeing a woman with her hair uncovered is “That is our red line. We refuse to cross that line!” The great irony is that they are willing to rebel against their Torah Master, but run from the sin of gazing at a married woman’s natural hair.

The other observation I saw here is that these people were holy Jews. Chas V’Shalom! They would never look at a woman with her hair uncovered. Nevertheless, they were drawn into a machlokes against their Torah authority. How can a person be so holy and so religious and so meticulous in Mitzvah observance and yet show such disregard for fundamental principles regarding Kavod Torah and Kavod HaRav?

The truth of the matter is that we see this happening all the time. A person can demonstrate all the outward signs of frumkeit and piety, but still not think twice about making a machlokes in the community or making a machlokes with a Rav. A person can consider himself a man of great religiosity and integrity, but show a lack of basic respect and Derech Eretz for his fellow man and teachers. This problem goes all the way back to the time of Korach! Unfortunately, people who will not look at the uncovered hair of a woman will still make a machlokes at the drop of a hat. Making a machlokes is also a negative prohibition!

I heard a story from a prison chaplain about a Jew who was sitting in prison, for not the best of reasons. The chaplain brought him a Lulav and Esrog for Succos. The prisoner told the chaplain “I am makpid on using an Esrog with a pitum!” He did not want the Esrog because he is makpid on a pitum, and yet he is in jail for very justified reasons! This is so incongruous. A person can feel himself so holy – and yet start a machlokes! It is all a matter of priorities.

Disagreeing Without Becoming Disagreeable

The Mishna (Avos 5:17) cites the arguments between Hillel and Shammai as the paradigm of an argument for the sake of Heaven. Similarly, the Mishna cites the arguments of Korach and his followers as the paradigm of an argument which is not for the sake of Heaven.

There is a lesson which we have still not learned since the times of Korach: how to have disagreements without being disagreeable. Someone can have profound differences with people and hold that they are terribly wrong and misguided. But that does not need to lead to personal animosity. It does not need to lead to Lashon HaRah and all the things that go along with machlokes.

Rav Volbe once said in a schmooze that in Slabodka there were two Yeshivas. There was Knesses Beis Yitzchak, founded by Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, which on principle did not study Mussar. The Alter of Slabodka broke away from Knesses Beis Yitzchak and founded the Slabodka Yeshiva, known as Knesses Beis Yisrael, which was a mussar Yeshiva. So, in the same small geographic area (one was in Kovna and one was in neighboring Slabodka), there were two Yeshivas with diametrically opposite pedagogic philosophies. And yet, Rav Baruch Ber took a student from the Slabodka Yeshiva as his son-in-law! They had a philosophical dispute – should mussar be taught as part of a Yeshiva curriculum or should it not be taught. But that did not prevent them from being the best of friends, even to the extent of almost becoming like mechtananim!

There is a well-known incident which took place at the funeral of the Rebbeztin of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt”l. Normally, there is a custom that people ask forgiveness (mechilla) from the deceased, prior to taking final leave of them, before the body is lowered into the ground. At that moment, Rav Shlomo Zalman announced that he does not need to ask mechilla from his deceased Rebbeztin because he never did anything in all his years of marriage to her for which he needs to ask mechilla.

Sometime thereafter, Rav Shlomo Zalman met a talmid of his who had recently gotten married. Rav Shlomo Zalman asked the talmid “Nu, how is it going?” The talmid responded, “It is going great! My wife and I never argue!” Rav Shlomo Zalman said, “You and your wife never argue? Is your wife sick?” The student repeated that he had a wonderful relationship with his newlywed wife, and that they never argued. Rav Shlomo Zalman told him, “Listen, it is impossible for two people to live together in the same house and never argue about something. It is inevitable that there will be arguments. What do you mean you never argue?”

The talmid then questioned Rav Shlomo Zalman: “But Rebbe, you yourself said at the Rebbitzen’s funeral that you had nothing to ask mechilla for from your wife, despite your decades of marriage to her. So, you can have a house with no arguments.” Rav Shlomo Zalman told his student: “I never said that we never had arguments. We had disagreements. There were issues. But there is nothing that I had to ask forgiveness for because we came to an understanding. Shalom does not mean that everyone sees things the same way and looks at things the same way and never has any disagreements. Shalom is the ability for people to have disagreements, to have issues, and to have different ways of looking at things, and yet come to Shalom.”

We say about the Almighty that He is “Oseh Shalom b’Meromav” – He makes Peace on High between Fire and Water. Fire and Water are opposites and yet they can coexist in the universe. Shalom does not mean the lack of difference of opinion, or even argument. Shalom means that people – even people who have strong differences of opinion – have the ability to coexist in an atmosphere of mutual respect, admiration and even love.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com  
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org  
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לע"ו

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה  
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה



# 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'khorot (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 l'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 \*Elo-hei haRuchot l'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 \*Pash'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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**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 korbant. 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 korbant 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 korbant - 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 quarreling 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?]

## **Devar Torah -- Parshat Korach: A Talit of Pure Techelet: "טלית שכולה תכלית"**

by Rav Eitan Mayer

Parashat Korah 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'uvin 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'uvin, as the parasha notes at the outset, and Re'uvin had every right to assume that he would take up political leadership. That this has not materialized must leave some of the Re'uvinites 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'uvin 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'uvin 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